

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

SEPTEMBER 2008

MARX BROTHERS IN TEXAS

MEDITERRANEAN COOKING

HIT THE ROAD

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

5

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8 5 Great Getaways: Texas Trips for Every Taste

By *Texas Co-op Power* staff

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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News Flash....

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POWER TALK



WHERE TO TAKE YOUR CFLs

Good news on the environmental front! The Home Depot will accept unbroken consumer compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs) at all locations. The service is free and the first such offering made so widely available in this country, according to the retail chain.

Customers can simply hand over any expired, unbroken CFLs to the clerk behind the returns desk. The bulbs will go to an environmental management company responsible for coordinating CFL packaging, transportation and recycling to maximize safety and ensure environmental compliance.

According to the EPA's Energy Star program, if every American swapped one incandescent bulb for a CFL, it would save enough energy to light more than 3 million homes for a year, save more than \$600 million in annual energy costs and prevent greenhouse gases equivalent to the emissions from 800,000 cars.

CFLs contain small amounts of mercury, a toxic substance. But according to the chief health officer at Environmental Defense, a conservation advocacy group, the amount of mercury in a CFL is very small, only 4 to 5 milligrams. This is almost 1,000 times less than what is in mercury thermometers.

letters

PHOOEY ON HEAT PUMPS

RE: Letter from John D. Bennett in the July 2008 issue. There is no heat from heat pumps. I built a house three years ago and did everything possible to make it energy efficient. The only mistake was installing a heat pump. In the winter all it does is blow cool air and what little heat comes from the small heating coil in my system. The compressor runs and ices up in cold weather. So now I switch to the emergency heat setting, which bypasses my compressor in winter. I have also purchased a small room electric heater so I can take off the winter coat I have to wear inside. We keep our upstairs bedroom at 58 degrees and downstairs at around 70 degrees. If you need heat don't buy a heat pump. You will be sorry you did when it really gets cold out.

O.R. JORDAN

United Cooperative Services



BOO FOR HEAT PUMPS

I had the misfortune of owning a house in North Carolina with a high-efficiency heat pump and was sadly disappointed with its wintertime performance. The air coming from the vents was only a few degrees warmer than the ambient air in the house. With

a thermostat set at 68, the return air was about 72 degrees—at its warmest. It was drafty and uncomfortable, and the house was always cold. The only time the air was warm was if the auxiliary or emergency heat was operating, and the electric meter on the side of my house spun like crazy. Whenever we had freezing precipitation it would melt down into the fan and compressor and impair its already poor performance.

John D. Bennett's recommendation (July letter) that Congress mandate their use is an insult to our freedom of choice.

MARSHALL VALENTINO

Comanche Electric Cooperative

HOW COULD YOU OMIT THE KING'S INN?

Oh, my goodness! How could Camille Wheeler, in the June 2008 edition, take the trip from Corpus Christi to the King Ranch without stopping at the best restaurant ever—the King's Inn at Baffin Bay? I wouldn't consider a trip to Corpus without stopping there for dinner!

ANN-MARIE HOLLE

United Cooperative Services

BOUQUET FROM NEW READER

Just wanted to throw you a bouquet. After reading your magazine for the first time (May issue) at a friend's house, I was delighted: Not only an article about Willie Nelson, but a wonderful recipe for strawberries in balsamic vinegar syrup. It doesn't get any better than this! Good for you, and please keep up the good work.

JANICE MUNDY

We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, *Texas Co-op Power*, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, e-mail us at letters@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.texascooppower.com. Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and are printed as space allows. Read additional letters at www.texascooppower.com.

H A P P E N I N G S

Come celebrate more than 150 years of Central Texas Wendish heritage at the 20th annual **WENDISH FEST** on September 28 in Serbin.

Event organizers expect more than 1,500 people to attend the fest in this tiny town 7 miles southwest of Giddings.

The festival honors the immigrants who sailed from Lusatia, in eastern Germany, to Galveston in 1854. Seeking religious liberty and the right to speak in their native Wendish tongue, the immigrants settled in what is now Lee County.

The event will feature worship services in English and German in St. Paul Lutheran Church, which has been in continuous use since 1867. Demonstrations and activities on tap include noodle- and sauerkraut-making, sausage stuffing, blacksmithing, and washer pitching and cross-cut sawing con-

tests. Kornelia Thor of Leipzig, Germany, will demonstrate how to decorate Wendish Easter eggs, many of which will be for sale. Children's contests include the *klettern pfosten*, in which children try to climb a greased pole.

For more information, call (979) 366-2441.



WHO KNEW?



The cost and supply of transportation fuels and natural gas get the headlines, but there's another kind of gas in really short supply. The world's largest reserve of helium, outside Amarillo, likely will be depleted within the next decade, according to Washington University in St. Louis.

This is not only bad for blimps and balloons but also for a broad array of scientific applications. In this case, recycling is the only solution, because a ready supply of additional helium isn't available—on Earth, anyway. It's estimated that the moon's surface holds a huge supply of the gas.

A TOUCH OF HIGH CLASS IN DALLAS

For years, the Adolphus Hotel had the distinction of being Dallas' tallest building. Today, the ornate building on Commerce and Akard streets downtown is dwarfed by neighboring steel-and-glass towers. But the nearly century-old edifice is still among the city's most beautiful.

Including additions tacked on over the years, the Adolphus, built in beaux-arts style by Adolphus Busch of the famous brewing family, stretches for a block. The original 19-story building, finished in 1912 at a cost of \$1.8 million, features bronze details in French Renaissance and baroque styles. The Adolphus also boasts one of the country's most impressive hotel-owned collections of art and antiques.



—From *Historic Hotels of Texas: A Traveler's Guide*, Texas A&M University Press, first edition, 2007

FUTURE TALK

ORGANIC LEDS HOLD PROMISE OF EFFICIENT LIGHTING

Organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) could outshine incandescent and CFL bulbs in the not-too-distant future. The OLEDs have a promise of 10 times greater efficiency than old-fashioned incandescent bulbs.

Experimental OLEDs are made by layering glass or plastic sheets with organic compounds that luminesce when electrified. They can produce 102 lumens of light per watt, according to Universal Display Corporation, a New Jersey company.

By comparison, incandescent lights, which turn most of their

energy into heat, clock in at 13 lumens per watt. Fluorescent tubes, the most efficient and widely available lighting technology, produce 50 to 90 lumens per watt. Compact fluorescent lighting lands somewhere between fluorescent tubes and incandescents.

Conventional LED bulbs currently on the market are not as efficient as their experimental counterparts and are costly when compared to other options.


The U.S. Department of Energy has set a goal for OLED systems, which are also being developed by General Electric, to produce 150 lumens per watt and be available in 2015.

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 **Texas Electric Cooperatives**
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5 GREAT GETAWAYS

TEXAS TRIPS FOR EVERY TASTE

Gas prices may be high, but it's still hard to rein in the old wanderlust. Want to get away for just a weekend or maybe for a full week? Saddle up for one of our destinations scattered about the state, just like our readers are. There's something to suit virtually any taste from a baseball game, the seashore, a shopping mecca and a working ranch to a world-acclaimed ecological crossroads.



NORTH TEXAS GETAWAY

THIS TRIP'S A BIG HIT

RANGERS BASEBALL & SIX FLAGS, ARLINGTON

From the baseball diamond to full-service hotel treatment, this vacation has all the bases covered.



EVERY KID NEEDS THE BASEBALL EXPERIENCE.

For a fun and easy weekend getaway with kids, sometimes you need to look at the obvious. That's what my family ended up doing five years ago, and now it's a summer tradition for my siblings and me and all our children. Our annual summer trip to Arlington includes a Texas Rangers baseball game—complete with fireworks—and a nonstop day at Six Flags Over Texas. Combine those treats with the ease of staying at a full-service hotel, and the whole family has a weekend to look forward to as soon as the school year ends.

Part of the excitement of this trip for my children is sleeping in a hotel. Whether staying on a Texas beach or in the middle of the Metroplex surrounded by pavement, each child has unique traveling habits. The oldest picks an area in the room and designates it off-limits to everyone else, neatly arranging her clothes, iPod and any other travel accoutrements. My middle one appropriates one available drawer for clothes and immediately dons a bathing suit, anxious to jump in the pool. The third and youngest stares out the window scan-

COURTESY: TEXAS RANGERS/BRAD NEWTON



COURTESY SIX FLAGS

COOL OFF AT A SIX FLAGS SHOW.

ning the new view. The higher up we are, the longer he stares.

As frequent visitors to the area, we

have tried several of the hotels, but we keep returning to the Sheraton Arlington Hotel (formerly the Wyndham) because of its proximity to all the activities that we schedule. Once you pull into the hotel's parking lot, you can forget about driving and depend instead on shuttles. The hotel also has a pool for kids, with most of the water only a few feet deep. Hotel employees are poolside to deliver food so parents can keep a watchful eye on their swimmers. And outdoor movies often are shown on the side of the pool house after the sun sets. Book rooms early, because the most popular weekends fill up fast.

The Rangers Ballpark in Arlington is within walking distance. We usually purchase a row of about 15 tickets in the "cheap seats" so we and others in our extended family can get the best view of the fireworks display that follows a weekend game. If you need to stretch your

legs, walking around inside the stadium will provide you and your kids with a multitude of activities and food choices.

Of course, we carve out one full day for Six Flags. The park has rides and entertainment for all ages. An occasional indoor show will cool you off long enough to re-energize you for the next big ride. And bragging rights will go to anyone brave enough to endure the newest thrill ride!

TIP: *Bring sunscreen.*

FYI: *For a complete schedule and list of activities at the Rangers Ballpark, visit texas.rangers.mlb.com. Check out www.arlington.org for package deals and coupons.*

WHERE: *On I-30, 20 miles west of Dallas, 15 miles east of Fort Worth*

COST: *Tickets starting at \$6*

MARTIN BEVINS
sales director

PANHANDLE GETAWAY

COWBOYS MAKE WORK PLAY

BAR H DUDE RANCH, CLARENDON

The Western ethos endures on the Rolling Plains.

Around the first of June, when sunflowers blanket the prairies and the grass is still green, ranchers on the Rolling Plains round up their cattle as they have done for more than 100 years.

Since 1992, the Bar H Dude (and it ain't the traditional definition of "dude") Ranch in Clarendon, about 60 miles southeast of Amarillo, has been inviting guests to help with its spring cattle drive. As Caroline McIlvenna, a blood analyst from England who has been coming to the roundup for 16 years, says, "This is a proper working ranch." No placid, nose-to-tail trail rides here.

And just who in the heck is attracted to a vacation of action, adventure and hard, hot, dusty work in the Panhandle? Spring roundup 2008 enticed two Brits, two Germans, two retired New Jersey policemen, a carpenter from Georgia and a group of nine longtime friends from Delaware and

Maryland, including a pathologist, an architect and an international environmental consultant, who call themselves the Segunda Vida (second life). The entire group—all men except for McIlvenna—was composed of smart, successful people who were ready to kick over the traces of sedentary life and saddle up for adventure. Guests come to the Bar H from around the world, Thailand to Switzerland and everywhere in between.

The guest cowboy or cowgirl should be up for an exhilarating challenge. No pampering here. The desire and ability to ride a horse for several hours a day figures in, too, as does a love of the outdoors and Western heritage.

I gotta admit that I am a city slicker and usually ride on one of those English-style, postage-stamp saddles. But I loved Princess, my ranch horse du jour, who took me everywhere safely while still watching out for her 4-year-old son, Whiskers, who was also work-



JENNIFER NICHOLS

EVERYBODY'S A COWBOY AT BAR H.

ing the roundup. Did I say Princess was also expecting? Sweet, sweet girl. When it came to the hard, hot work, I practiced my excellent observation skills by happily sitting on the fence and watching the branding.

At the Bar H Dude Ranch, everyone who is game gets in on the action. That includes chasing breakaway cattle,

herding cattle over rough terrain and branding. A German dental surgeon practicing in Britain helped vaccinate calves. Robert Hyberg, a retired informational technologist who worked for IBM, had never ridden a horse prior to taking lessons in February but proved to be a great hand flanking calves. Flanking calves—bringing a squirming, resistant, 200-pound calf to the ground by hand for branding—takes strength, timing and coordination. It's all in a day's work.

While seated on the corral fence watching the young cowboys, ages 11 to 15, wrestle calves during branding, I said to Bill Wilson, a working cowboy who's been cowboying for 40-plus years, "Those young guys make work play."

Then, just like in TV Westerns, the lean and leathery Wilson slowly turned around and softly said, "All cowboys make work play."

That sense of joy and the love of the work bonds the working cowboys and the guest cowboys. Both take pride in a job well done. Both enjoy testing their skills. Both are modest about what they do. All true hands take pride in the work, the gear and the horses. And, no matter his skills, no real cowboy brags. He lets his work speak for him.

Roping is an art. I watched one cowboy after another efficiently and smoothly select a calf from a group of two dozen milling around in a small pen and then rope the chosen one. No fuss, no muss. A good roper must strive for the economy of motion that would make a Zen master proud. Old-timers prided themselves on a simple toss of



GUEST WRANGLERS COME FROM GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN AND THROUGHOUT THE U.S.

the rope and never throwing a rope "without catch" (missing). Once the calf was roped, a team of working and guest cowboys laid it down for quick branding, vaccinating, ear tagging and castrating. The idea is to be smooth, fast and efficient so that the calf is up and back with the others ASAP. The calves are the ranch's inventory, and harsh methods are not good for the ranch's investment.

Of course, no working cowboy starts the day without a cowboy breakfast. Sausage from the ranch's own pigs, biscuits baked over an open fire in a Dutch oven, and gravy and eggs cooked in skillets the size of wagon wheels start the day. All food is consumed with lightning speed as the sun rises.

And what's for dinner? Masses of fire-cooked food. The steaks are hand-cut from the ranch's own beef. Tender and crisp calf fries—yes, they're what you think they are—start the meal. They are simply the best I've ever had thanks to a sauce with horseradish, Tabasco and ketchup made by Doc Bryant, father of rancher Dee Dee Hommel. Baked potatoes cook over the open fire so that the skins are deliciously hot and crunchy. Homemade peach cobbler finishes the feast.

If you are game for eating a cowboy breakfast at 5:30 a.m., being saddled up for the roundup by 6:30 a.m., and working until time for a late lunch, siesta and quiet time for practicing roping skills and telling stories, you, too, can learn the art of making work play. Shoot, even if all we do is herd our computer mice and round up e-mails, we, too, can learn this lesson from the cowboy culture.

The Bar H Dude Ranch also offers nature tours, bird-watching, including for the lesser prairie-chicken, horseback rides through beautiful country and hunts for game including wild turkey, quail, pheasant, wild hog, deer and bison.

TIP: *If you plan on horseback riding, spend some time in the saddle before your trip.*

FYI: *Frank and Dee Dee Hommel, owners, Bar H Dude Ranch, Box 1191, Clarendon, TX; 1-800-627-9871; www.barhduderanch.com; buffalo@barhduderanch.com*

WHERE: *Clarendon, 60 miles southeast of Amarillo*

COST: *\$85-95 daily, \$540-630 weekly*

SUZI SANDS
art director



HUNGRY HANDS NEED LOTS OF PROTEIN.

A SHORE THING

PORT ARANSAS

From fishing and bird-watching to playing in the waves, visitors are hooked on this hot vacation spot.

When my car tires bump over the metal plank and onto one of the ferries that transport visitors from Aransas Pass to Port Aransas, I am exhilarated by the tang of the salt air and the sight of dolphins playing in the ferry's wake. Five minutes later I am on Mustang Island.

I've seen prettier places and more dramatic coasts, but for enjoyment and convenience, Port A is right for this Central Texan. It's accessible, has relatively reasonable food and accommodation costs and grows just enough each year to keep the visit fresh. When I was on a tighter budget and had

friends who sailed, the historic Tarpon Inn was just the ticket. Within a block of the harbor, the two-story Tarpon Inn has been catering to people who love the sea since 1886. Franklin Delano Roosevelt stayed here on a fishing trip in 1937.

Under new owners, the Tarpon Inn has been spiffed up with fancy bed linens. No in-room telephones or TVs, however. The best recreation is rocking in the shade of the first- or second-floor veranda or walking over to the harbor to see the boats come and go.

In recent years, friends and I have rented a condo unit or two at Gulf

Shores Resort Condominiums for special occasions such as the Fourth of July, Christmas or New Year's. Usually I'm not a fan of multistory condo buildings. But the redeeming quality of Gulf Shores and dozens of other nearby condos is immediate access to the beach. (Of course, this being Texas, you don't have to rent a room to go to the beach. Just park right on it, by golly, and stay for a day.)

It's fun watching people fishing, flying kites, running their dogs, throwing Frisbees, picnicking and tanning. Walking on the beach in winter and lying in a big king-size bed, looking



THE BEACH AT PORT ARANSAS IS ENDLESSLY FASCINATING FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES.

out at the Gulf of Mexico through the wall-to-wall window of a tastefully appointed sixth-floor condo unit, are my favorite vacation pastimes. Meanwhile, others in my party are playing Scrabble, visiting the shops, supervising children on the beach, seriously fishing and scouting the fish market for a great dinner in case the fishers come back empty-handed.

At dawn or twilight, bird-watching is great at several sites. I like the wooden walkway and elevated viewing area next to the water treatment plant. You're likely to see pelicans, marsh hawks, American bittern, roseate spoonbills and lots of ducks. Port Aransas is on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail with 350 species of resident and migratory birds. There's

usually an alligator on view at my favorite lagoon, as well as nutria, which make a chilling mewling sound like an abandoned baby in the reeds.

You can sign up for a half-day boat ride north to view whooping cranes at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge when the giant, endangered birds are in winter residence. Or you can drive about 10 miles south to the Padre Island National Seashore, where there are spring and summer season releases of newly hatched Kemp's ridleys, the most endangered of all sea turtles.

On the mainland to the north are the charming artists' enclaves of Rockport/Fulton and to the south is Corpus Christi, the "Sparkling City by the Sea." But these other cities are for other vis-

its. There's more than enough to do poking around Port Aransas.

TIP: *Try not to return via ferry on the Sunday afternoon of a holiday weekend. Long lines are no fun.*

FYI: *Make a point to dine at the exquisite Venetian Hot Plate, (361) 749-7617, where you have to reserve a helping of lasagna on Saturday nights because the dish is so popular. For a full listing of food, lodging and fun, go to www.portaransas.org.*

WHERE: *Central Texas Gulf Coast, 30 miles northeast of Corpus Christi*
COST: *The beach is free just like a state road.*

KAYE NORTHCOTT
editor

CENTRAL TEXAS GETAWAY

FOLLOW THE CROWD

FREDERICKSBURG

In Fredericksburg, you learn to walk sideways on the weekends.



FOR SHOPPING AND GERMAN AMBIENCE, FREDERICKSBURG IS THE PLACE.

STEVE BAWLS

That observation by a downtown business owner applies to anyone trying to navigate through the throngs of visitors who descend on this Hill Country town on the weekends, where there is such an array of things to do and see, one could easily feel overwhelmed.

For decades, fans of history, nature, food, shopping or simple leisure have found fulfillment in this community founded by German immigrants in 1846. Approaching Fredericksburg from Johnson City brings you past the LBJ Ranch and through Stonewall, home of peach orchards and vineyards, with roadside fruit stands and wineries worthy of a stop.

Both the Becker Vineyards and Torre di Pietra wineries, just off U.S. Highway 290, offer product samples, but that's not all. Torre di Pietra regularly features live music, and Becker sports a bed-and-breakfast and a lavender farm. In town, several shops offer tastes of locally produced wine, and one new vintner, D'Vine Wine, makes small batches of young wine, low in sulfites, in the back of the store. Try the

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PUREBRED IN TEXAS



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Along Highway 290 east of town, swappers and bargain hunters alike gather on the third weekend of the month for the Fredericksburg Trade Days, a huge market featuring hundreds of vendors and acres of antiques, flea market bargains and more. Across the highway is another shoppers' haven—Wildseed Farms, which claims to be the largest working wildflower farm in the country. Besides seed from more than 90 varieties of wildflowers, you can find decorations and implements to suit even the most well-provisioned gardener.

As you drive into town, one of the first things that catches your eye is the distinctive facade that rises over the former Nimitz Hotel, now a part of the National Museum of the Pacific War. The museum, formerly named after native son and World War II Fleet Admiral Chester A. Nimitz, is a treasure trove of artifacts and information from the battle for the Pacific. On some weekends, historical re-enactors at the museum's Pacific Combat Zone offer visitors a taste of what an island invasion might have been like with live demonstrations of weapons and tactics. Machine gun fire and explosions can be heard for blocks—but don't be alarmed, they're just blanks.

Lining both sides of Main Street west of the museum is what is known locally as the "golden blocks," a collection of galleries, boutiques, gift shops, restaurants and watering holes sure to keep browsers busy and well fed. Park the car and join the crowds filling the sidewalks and ducking into candy shops and bakeries for a quick snack or cold drink. Venture west of the golden blocks to check out The Patio Shoppe, an acre crammed with pottery, ironwork, gifts, trinkets, furniture and one-of-a-kind items, where you can see something different around every corner.

Some of the newest kids on the scene are a symbiotic pair: a vintner, Water into Wine, which allows you to taste, then create your own custom vintage, next to a cheese shop, Fromage du Monde. One can purchase a hunk of cheese and go next door to find a complementary vintage—or start with the wine and pair it with a cheese.

If you want to hike away from people and off the sidewalks, a few miles north of town is Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, home to a 425-foot, 640-acre granite dome that beckons rock climbers. It's surrounded by more than 1,000 acres of Hill Country scrubland on Big Sandy Creek, where campers and hikers can play. Making it to the summit of the billion-year-old dome is more challenging than it seems from the ground. A little closer to town is the Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park, which has acres of green space and a popular golf course.

After the sun sets, a hearty German meal at Friedhelm's Bavarian Inn or the Aülander Restaurant & Biergarten or a pint at the Fredericksburg Brewing Company, which features a variety of fresh, site-made brews on tap and some tasty pub food, could be your next move.

When you've satisfied your appetite, amble over to the Rockbox Theater, where a troupe of talented singers and comedians puts on a different production every week. The family-friendly show, heavy on classic rock 'n' roll and country tunes, always features a tribute to the men and women of the armed forces.

Retreat for the night at one of the

more than 100 bed-and-breakfasts and hotels in and around the city. They range from budget-minded cabins with kitchens to make your own meals to luxurious spa retreats with full breakfast service.

If, after a good night's rest, it's time to leave, head west down Main Street to see a message long delivered by residents to visitors in the first letters of the cross streets: Crockett, Orange, Milam, Edison, Bowie, Acorn, Cherry, Kay (COME BACK).

TIP: *If you're planning to stay the weekend at an area bed-and-breakfast, consider making an advance reservation. Also, many area B&Bs require a two-night stay on festival weekends.*

FYI: *For more information, or a free packet of visitor information, e-mail the Chamber of Commerce at covadmin@fredericksburg-texas.com or call (830) 997-6523 or 1-888-997-3600. Write to the Fredericksburg Convention & Visitor Bureau at 302 East Austin St., Fredericksburg, TX 78624, or visit its website, www.fredericksburg-texas.com.*

WHERE: *Texas Hill Country, 70 miles northwest of San Antonio*

KEVIN HARGIS
food editor



FAMED FREDERICKSBURG PEACHES ARE REASON ENOUGH FOR A VISIT.

RODDY WELCH

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TEXAS STYLE

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IN THE THICK OF IT

BIG THICKET NATIONAL PRESERVE

The canoeing and viewing come easy in this national preserve of biological wonder.

I thought it might be hard to find a Big Thicket getaway for people like me who prefer not to hike long distances and don't have camping equipment. But it turns out one can easily have a wonderful Big Thicket experience, including wheelchair-accessible trails, without working up a sweat—unless, of course, you go during the oppressive heat of summer. I traveled to deep Southeast Texas for three days in the glorious month of April. I spent all three nights at the Ethridge Farm Log Cabin Bed & Breakfast, a genteel blueberry farm outside Kountze, 20 miles north of Beaumont. Kountze is just south of the Big Thicket and 45 miles northwest of Orange, where I wanted to visit the recently reopened Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center.

Without any sense of hurry, I enjoyed a four-hour canoe trip down cypress-and tupelo-lined Village Creek, walked in four different units of the Big Thicket, ate beaucoup seafood and had a day in Orange at the Botanical Gardens and the Stark Museum of Art.

The Big Thicket National Preserve is one of the country's best-kept secrets, says U.S. Rep. Kevin Brady, who recently introduced a bill to add as many as 100,000 acres to the present

97,000. That's a worthy effort, because many forested areas that abut the preserve are being sold for development.

The Big Thicket's complex biological diversity is a thing of wonder, whether you approach it intellectually through the excellent dioramas at the Preserve Visitor Center or just start walking or navigating one of the Thicket's nine land units and six water corridors. The Thicket is a biological crossroads of international repute, with many different pristine environments coexisting cheek by jowl. Just naming them evokes the mystery and wonder of the area. Pine forest slopes and arid sand hills transition to sloughs and bogs and baygalls and black-water swamps. There are 300 bird species, 85 tree species, more than 60 shrubs and nearly 1,000 other flowering plants, including 26 ferns and 20 orchids.

My first priority was to glide in a canoe down Village Creek and soak up the birdcalls, the scents and the languid pace of the clear water. Three years after Hurricane Rita, which downed millions of trees here, you can see more sky than usual. My guide joked that the area could be called the Thin Thicket, but soon nature will come bounding back to make for a Thicker Thicket.

I had not expected to see white sand beaches on Village Creek, but they are finer than most saltwater beaches in Texas—great for picnicking, camping or just stretching one's legs. The creek is mostly shallow, but there are many pools deep enough for swimming.

My second priority was to see carnivorous plants. The Big Thicket National Preserve has four of North America's five species, but only two, the pitcher plant and the sundew, have trails dedicated to them. According to botanists, these plants grow in muddy bogs too poor in nutrition or too acidic for most plants. The carnivores need insects for sustenance. The sweet-smelling pitcher plant lures in its prey so deeply that the hapless creature falls into its sticky maw and is dissolved by enzymes. Mixed in with the tubular pitcher plants was another pitcher plant variety, the Texas trumpet, yellow and orchid-like on a spindly stalk with petals that serve as a bucket for catching seeds.

The Big Thicket sundew, about the size of a 50-cent piece, flat with many rosettes, could easily be overlooked. I wish I had taken a magnifying glass, because it is gorgeous up close. The pinkish-brown petals have hair-like



THE CARNIVOROUS PITCHER PLANT

STEPHAN MYERS



BOBCATS ROAM THE BIG THICKET

BIG STOCK PHOTO



THE CARNIVOROUS SUNDEW

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



STEPHAN MYERS

CANOEING PLACID VILLAGE CREEK WITH ITS CYPRESS TREES AND SANDY BEACHES IS BLISSFUL.

tentacles with little sticky globs that sparkle like jewels in the sunlight. The creatures these wondrous flowers digest are microscopic.

Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center complemented the Big Thicket tour with an exceptionally beautiful bird blind looking out over a tranquil lagoon that serves as a rookery for cranes, egrets, herons and other water birds. High-grade binoculars are supplied, and there are even two video cameras providing close-up views of nests. Poor Shangri La has been through tough times. Timber baron Lutchter Stark set aside the 252 acres in the middle of Orange for the botanic specimens he imported from all over the world. In 1958, a freak snowstorm damaged his tropical paradise and, heartbroken, he let it revert to its natural state. In 2002, his foundation began

revamping the formal gardens. Then Hurricane Rita struck three years ago, toppling native trees, wreaking havoc on the grounds and postponing the reopening until March of this year. Fortunately, rescued hardwoods and submerged bald cypress were used as building materials. The structures, designed by Lake/Flato Architects and Jeffrey Carbo Associates, are magnificently modern and earned the top rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Stark also founded the impressive Stark Museum of Art, which has fine Western art and Audubon prints, including five of the master's double-elephant portfolios.

TIP: Take a daypack for water, sunscreen, bug repellent, guides and maps on your expeditions.

FYI: For more information, call the Big Thicket National Preserve Visitor Center at (409) 951-6725 or go to www.nps.gov/bith. For more information about Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, call (409) 670-9113 or go to www.shangrilagardens.org. For canoeing, go to www.fun365days.com/canoeing.php.

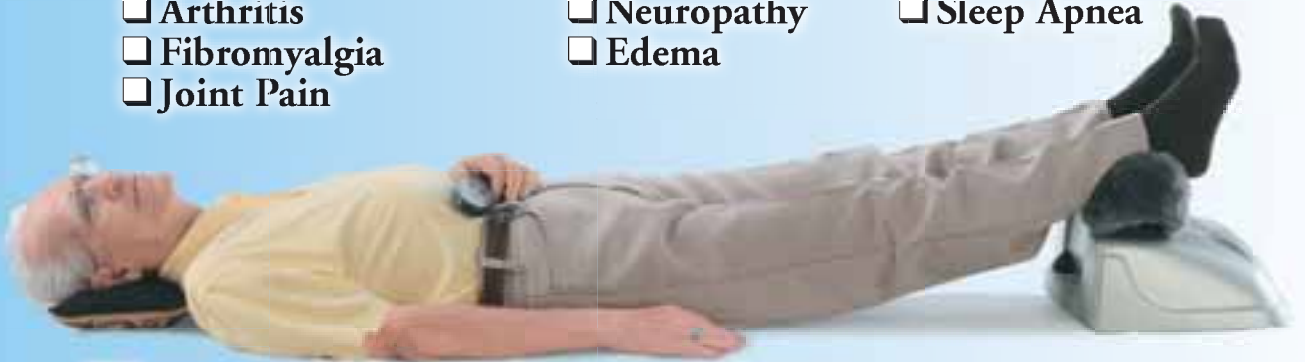
Interesting lodging is limited near the Big Thicket, although camping is available at the preserve and at Village Creek State Park. Try to get a reservation for Ethridge Farm Log Cabin B&B (The Cabin on Blueberry Hill is my favorite accommodation), (409) 246-3978, www.ethridgefarm.com, or Pelt Farm Bed & Breakfast, (409) 287-2279, both in Kountze.

WHERE: 85 miles east of Houston

KAYE NORTHCOTT
editor

If you suffer from

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- High Blood Pressure
- Arthritis
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- Neuropathy
- Edema
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What people are saying about the Exerciser 2000 Elite™

After using the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ twice a day for one week the swelling in my ankles went away. It has also helped my breathing, as I can get out and walk without having to stop and catch my breath! Thank you. —*Shirley H., Florida*

As a Chiropractor, I would like to say that the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ enables people to benefit themselves at home. It is a valuable asset in moving lymph fluid, oxygenating the blood, increasing immune system function, maintaining mobility in the spine, and additionally freeing up a spine that has become stiff and arthritic. —*Garry Gorsuch, D.C.*

The ad I saw almost sounded “too good to be true”. With your no risk money back guarantee I figured I had nothing to lose so I purchased the machine... and boy, am I glad I did! I am 75 years old and suffer from sciatica, which makes my back and legs tighten up and causes numbness. I was taking 8-10 Aleve™ every day. After using the machine for only 4 minutes, I noticed my lower back loosening up. Since I have been using the machine I haven't taken any pain pills and have been pain free. My sciatica is not giving me problems anymore and my body stays loosened up. I have also had a snoring problem for quite some time, however, since using the machine my snoring has subsided. My wife is so excited! I cannot tell you how much this machine has turned my life around. —*C. Cummings*

After having a stroke, I could no longer exercise the way I used to. As a result, I developed edema. A friend of mine introduced me to the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. I loved it and I purchased one for myself. After using the machine daily for a few weeks, my symptoms of edema were completely gone. I now use the machine twice a day for 16 minutes each time on speed 3. What a wonderful way to exercise.—*Robert M.*

I love using the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ after my morning workout. It is an excellent way to cool down and it helps to start my day off right.—*Deanna C., Kansas*

My husband and I have been into natural products all of our lives but nothing has ever affected us like the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. My husband is 72 and delivers flowers. He carries 5 gallon buckets of water. Since using the machine, his back hasn't hurt him at all. My hips would hurt if I stood too long and I would get weak and have to sit down. Now I can walk and sit as long as I want. I don't take pain medication anymore. In the morning, when I get out of bed I'm not stiff anymore. At 65, wow, this is great! Thank you for offering such a great machine. We are going to tell everyone we know about it. —*Cheryl J.*

I have had constipation problems for over 25 years. Since I have been using the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ I have been regular every day and have begun to lose weight. This is truly a blessing and is so easy to use. —*Jeannie*

I had suffered with sleep apnea for many years and had been taking drugs for it. I was told I would have to use a breathing apparatus. In the meantime, I was introduced to the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ and decided to purchase one. Within two weeks, I was sleeping more deeply and restfully than ever before. —*David B.*

I am in my late 80's and have diabetes. The first thing I noticed when I started using my machine was that my feet were warm when I went to bed. They were always ice cold before. Because one of my problems is poor circulation, I use the machine three times a day for 10 minutes each; in the morning, late afternoon and just before bed. I almost forgot to mention that I have not been able to lift my arms above my head. Now I can do it. You think that's no big deal until you can't do it anymore. —*Ralph K.*

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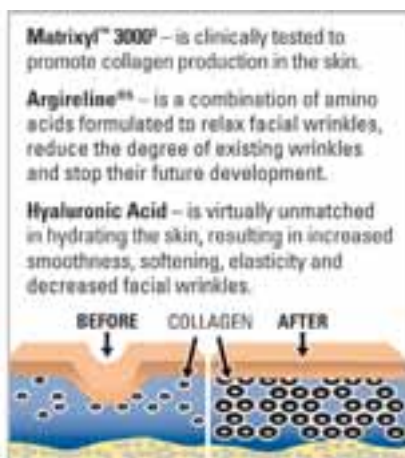
"Within two weeks of using Hydroxatone®, I was getting compliments on my skin from friends and co-workers. My skin not only feels great, but it looks great too! You've made me a Hydroxatone® believer!"

Results not typical

— Robin B., Los Angeles

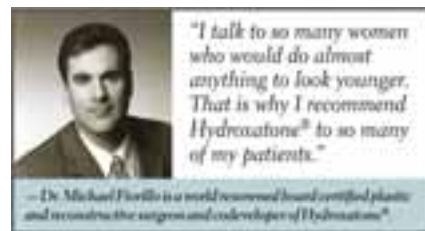
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—Rose P.

Results not typical

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Engraved on the
reverse with,
"My Daughter,
You are my
Shining Star"



Drafty Doors Require Thoughtful Replacement

DEAR JAMES: We have an old sliding patio door. It is chilly near it during winter and hot during summer. It is often drafty, and outdoor noise comes through. What type of door should I replace it with?

—Ron A.

DEAR RON: The discomfort and inefficiency problems you describe are typical with an old sliding glass patio door. In a home of average efficiency, that one old sliding glass door can waste more energy year-round than all the walls in that room combined.

The discomfort you feel when sitting near the door results in a double energy loss. First, the old door wastes energy. Second, this inefficiency often makes you set the central thermostat higher during winter or lower during summer just to stay comfortable.

There have been tremendous improvements in energy efficiency, security and styling of replacement patio doors. Some of the new high-tech glass in these doors has an insulation value as high as R-10 in the center of the glass. It has special coatings on the glass surface that reduce heat transfer and block the majority of the sun's fading ultraviolet rays. In addition, resilient weatherstripping greatly reduces air leakage, and multipane glass—with a heavy, inert gas between the panes—blocks sound transmission.

Any type of efficient door can be installed in place of the old patio door, but a sliding door or French doors are most common. The costs are not significantly different, and the installation time is similar.

Hinged French doors are more stylish and are particularly popular today. Hinged doors close on a compression weatherstripping seal, often making French doors more airtight. Sliding doors rely on noncompression types of weatherstripping. Even



When it's time to replace your patio doors, you'll find many energy-efficient options.

though it is not as airtight as a compression seal, it will be better than your existing patio door.

French doors are easy to swing open, but they require a fairly large open area for swinging clearance. A sliding door requires no open clearance area. Sliding doors also provide a more unobstructed view of the outdoors.

The best type of glass for your home depends upon factors such as climate and orientation to the sun. In general, the minimum efficiency level you should select is double-pane glass with a low-emissivity coating and argon gas between the panes.

The frame material is also important for efficiency and smooth operation. A pultruded fiberglass frame is very strong and stable. Vinyl door frames reinforced with internal steel supports are good insulators, maintenance-free and reasonably priced. Solid wood frames are attractive and strong, but they require regular maintenance. Choosing one with exterior vinyl or aluminum cladding minimizes this maintenance.

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LABOR SAFELY THIS LABOR DAY

For many people, Labor Day is a day of rest. For others, it's a day to catch up on outdoor home projects before the season changes. Faulty extension cords are often a source of injury when working outside, as are metal ladders coming into contact with an electrical source. By following the tips below, you can "labor" safely on Labor Day.

Extension Cords and Power Tools

- Check power tools and electrical cords to make sure they are in good condition.
- Extension cords should be designed for outdoor use. Those are thicker, more durable and have features for preventing moisture damage.
- Use three-wire extension cords with three-pronged plugs. Never remove the third prong from a plug.
- Look for the amperage rating of the extension cord to make sure it will meet the power demand of the tool.
- Do not plug one extension cord into another. Use the proper length for the job.
- Never leave an extension cord plugged into an outlet when it is not in use. Unplug the cord when you are finished.

Ladders

- Use fiberglass or wooden ladders when working around electrical sources. Metal ladders conduct electricity and can deliver a fatal shock.
- Lower the ladder when carrying it or moving it.
- Never work on a windy day, as a gust of wind could shift the ladder into an overhead wire.
- When placing the ladder on the ground, make sure the distance to the nearest overhead wire is at least twice the length of the ladder.
- Make sure the ladder is placed on solid, level ground to prevent sliding.

—Christine Grammes

Remodeling Your Kitchen?

Be Sure To Keep Safety in Mind

Flooring, countertops, sinks and stoves come to mind first when it's time to remodel your kitchen. But lighting and electricity are just as important.

Keep safety in mind when designing or remodeling your family's favorite room. Some tips:

- Proper lighting can prevent injuries in the kitchen. Don't stop with overhead lights; add task lighting to your favorite work spaces.

- Keep electrical switches, plugs and lighting fixtures far away from water sources. Install them in areas where you are unlikely to touch them with wet hands.

- Add additional outlets if needed to avoid use of extension cords.

- Protect every electrical receptacle with a ground-fault circuit interrupter, which will shut off the electric current if it senses a power surge or if moisture is present.

- Keep a fire extinguisher near a



When remodeling, be sure to put as much thought into electrical safety as paint color.

room exit and away from cooking equipment.

- Choose faucets with anti-scald devices to prevent burning, or lower your water heater's temperature to 120 degrees. Heating water to a lower, safer temperature also saves energy.

- Install smoke alarms.

- The cooktop or cooking surfaces should not be located near windows. Curtains and other window coverings could easily catch fire from a grease splatter.

NO-COST WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY

- Turn off everything not in use: lights, TVs, computers, etc.

- Check the air-conditioner filter each month and clean or replace it as needed. Dirty filters block air flow through your heating and cooling systems, increasing your energy bill and shortening the equipment's life.

- During hot months, keep window coverings closed on the south, east and west windows. In winter, let the sun in.

- Glass fireplace doors help stop heat from being lost up the chimney. Also, close the fireplace damper when

not burning a fire.

- Activate "sleep" features on computers and office equipment that power down when not in use for a while.

- Turn off equipment during longer periods of non-use to cut energy costs and improve longevity.

- Dress appropriately for the weather, and set your thermostat to the lowest possible comfortable setting in winter and the highest comfortable setting in summer.

- On winter nights, put an extra blanket on the bed and turn down your thermostat more.

- In summer, use fans whenever possible to reduce AC usage. Inexpensive fans allow you to raise the thermostat temperature and still remain comfortable.

- To save hot water, take five-minute showers instead of baths.

FALL IS TIME TO PLANT FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Well-planned landscaping can purify the air, add beauty and value to your home, block out noise and, most importantly, save you money on your energy bill.

By shading your home from the sun, trees and shrubs can keep your home cooler in the summer and protect it from harsh weather in the winter. In fact, landscaping for energy efficiency could reduce your air-conditioning costs by as much as 15 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The best time to plant trees is in the fall, giving roots enough time to take hold before the winter cold.

When deciding which trees to plant, consider what purpose you most want them to serve. Deciduous trees will block sun in the summer but allow the winter sun to shine through. Evergreens, though, will offer protection from harsh weather yearround.

Plant trees on the east, south and west sides of the home for optimal shade from summer sun.

Plan for the mature size of the tree when choosing the tree variety. Tall-growing trees may eventually end up shading too much of the yard. They also pose a hazard if they grow into power lines. No matter the size of the tree, always check with your electric cooperative to identify any underground power lines before digging to plant them.

Trees aren't the only plants that offer energy savings. Planting shrubs, bushes and vines close to the home creates a layer of insulation to lock in heat or provides summer shade.

Tangled Up in Bliss

*I can't remember
doing anything quite
so methodical as
mothering.*

BY WINTER D. PROSAPIO

It takes a full 20 minutes to comb through her curls. I sedate the riot of hair with handfuls of slick conditioner and sit just outside the tub on her yellow footstool, combing through the long, black strands that spring back into ringlets after every pull.

I never imagined I'd have the patience for this before I had children. When I think back to my life before my daughters arrived, I can't remember doing anything quite so methodical as mothering. Nothing has ever been as demanding of skills I didn't possess. I'd never faced so many moments when I was at the end of my rope, where I was driven to shouting at another human being, at my own child, only to apologize later, much too late, much too little.

The comb catches in a thick nest of twists and turns, and I pull her hair slightly. She rarely protests when this happens. Genetics must tie the curly haired gene with the tough scalp one. This genetic combination did not include the gene that extends graciousness to curious strangers, however. Her naturally curly hair draws compliments everywhere she goes; strangers come up to her with hands extended, trying to touch the spirals framing her tiny face and black eyes. Only a few get away with it—most times she warns them off with a staunch “no touch!”, her arms crisscrossing her head in a protective shield. Still, strangers reach for the curls in restaurants, on sidewalks, in doctors' offices. I'm lucky. I can touch them every day.

We sit in the quiet bathroom. She's focused on her floating toys, I on untangling, smoothing. I've become such a different person since I had children. I've become quieter, more careful, more aware of small moments. I'm acutely aware of the chasm between my friends who don't have children and my friends who do. I've leaped the canyon, never sensing the moment my feet were in the air, only a few of the closest friends jumping with us as honorary aunts and uncles. Now I understand why I never saw people once they had their children, why they stopped calling, how they disappeared into thin air. I recognize the way the strange, wild space between us grew with every step their children took, toward solids, toward school, toward adolescence, toward leaving, toward never really being gone. Across the vast chasm I see my childless friends moving on quickly as I sit here, still sit here, time turning in on itself so I can see both ends of it, beginnings and endings, all wrapping around my fingers.

I risk a higher starting point on her head, thinking I've worked out most of the

knot. But it's no good. I'm back to the thick tangle, prying the teeth of the comb within it. She turns looking for something; the cloth has slipped back into the tub. I hand it to her wordlessly; she takes it without a glance and returns to her cups that need filling.

My father, a veteran of many marriages, always said he would never marry a woman who hadn't had children. "They are too selfish," he said. And I wondered, as a single woman in those days, how selfish I was. When he married a woman with three young daughters, my stepsisters, I wondered whether he would be able to share her with them.

I lean back for a moment, feeling the dull burn in my back and clean the comb out. The fine black hair, slick with the conditioner but still twisting, coats my fingers as I brush it off onto a paper towel. Stretched out, a single curl is long enough to reach her waist, yet it will bound back to her shoulder when it's dry. I've never had her hair cut, nervous that the metal will somehow break the bonds of this miracle flowing from her crown.

Before mine were born, I had never really noticed children before. Now, when I meet them as I'm out without my own—in the office when someone brings her son, in the store when a 4-year-old bounds into my path—I stop purposefully. I kneel before them, look into their eyes and say hello. They smile, usually, recognizing some universal quality I've gained. Or maybe I just look silly, crouching like a frog.

All the tangles are out, and I take great pleasure running the comb through her hair again and again, separating strands into perfect spirals. She looks up at me.

"All done?"

No. Never. "Yes, baby. All done."

Winter D. Prosapio has written several essays for Texas Co-op Power.



GARDEN VALLEY

Mercy Ships' Heart in Texas

A landlocked Texas town is headquarters for overseas medical missions.

by Thomas Korosec



With its medical system in tatters after 14 years of civil war, Monrovia, Liberia, greeted the arrival of the 500-foot hospital ship Africa Mercy with dancing on the quay and a massive health screening held in a stadium.

Instead of bombed-out hospitals, unsterile operating rooms, sporadic electricity and a national medical staff numbering in the mere dozens, the May 2007 docking of the Africa Mercy—which sails for a global charity called Mercy Ships—meant the sudden appearance of a sterling 78-bed ship with six modern operating rooms and a full medical staff included in its 450-member-plus crew.

Those in the screening lines were testament to the West African nation's staggering poverty: men disfigured by massive facial tumors; children limping on club feet or with war wounds; young women suffering from childbirth injuries rendering them incontinent and outcast from their homes and villages.

"In a country with 85 percent unemployment, there are a lot of needs," Mercy Ships CEO Samuel Smith said. "You will go to an orphanage with 250, 300 kids, and they are standing there with two shoes that don't fit, tattered T-shirt and shorts, and that is all they have."

People from more than 30 countries volunteer to work for Mercy Ships, which has been sailing hospital ships to the world's neediest corners for 30 years, delivering free world-class health care and community development services to the forgotten poor. Mercy Ships recently retired two smaller ships as the Africa Mercy came on line, leaving it as the only ship in active service. The Africa Mercy, the world's largest charity hospital ship, doubles Mercy Ships' former capacity.

Since 1989, when the faith-based Mercy Ships charity moved its headquarters from expensive California to modest Garden Valley, a tiny hamlet on Wood County Electric Cooperative lines northwest of Tyler, it has taken on more of a Texas twang, with Texans heavily represented among its volunteers and supporters.

Dr. Glenn Strauss, a 53-year-old Port Arthur native, is among the most thoroughly committed Lone Star volunteers, having closed his long-established ophthalmology practice in Tyler at the end of 2004 to work full time for Mercy Ships, along with his wife, Kim.

"Some of the earliest medical mission trips I went on were mostly well-wishing," Glenn Strauss recalled. "You made a representation that you cared, but as an eye surgeon you can't accomplish much without the proper facilities."

Mercy Ships' strategy of bringing the hospital to the patients, complete with a staff that does not need to worry about finding safe food or adequate shelter in parts of the world where both are rare, meant that he could make the most of his time with patients, Strauss said.

In 1997, Strauss started making short-duration trips on ships, working in sub-Saharan Africa and Central America. After their children were grown, the couple made the leap to join the organization full time.

“While we in this country suffer from diseases of excess, like heart disease, they suffer from diseases of lack of access,” Strauss said of West Africa. “What this means is that minor problems become horrendous problems. A small facial tumor might eventually suffocate someone. A cataract here that makes it maybe a little frustrating to drive at night, you get it taken care of. There, they grow so thick and dense and they can’t see light. They go blind.”

In African tribal societies, people with deformities such as cleft palates or lingering maladies are seen as cursed and often banished from their families and villages.

“The blind are a burden to their families and the whole community,” Strauss said. “The way they look at it, this is fate. They need to be put out. So when we restore someone’s sight, we restore them to their community. That is the basic strategy for the types of cases we do and why we do it.”

On the Africa Mercy’s initial trip to Monrovia, Strauss performed the first eye surgery in one of the ship’s two operating rooms dedicated strictly to eye care. His patient, Suah Paye, a woman in her 90s from a small village called Oil Town, had gone blind with cataracts three years earlier. Although neighbors scared her with stories about how she would most likely die on the operating table—or have her eyes removed and washed with soap—more sophisticated family members living in the capital city guided her to the ship. Her sight restored by Strauss before she left the operating table, she danced through the operating suite singing and praising God.

The largest nongovernmental hospital ship in the world, the Africa Mercy is capable of performing 7,000 surgeries annually, with an emphasis on cataract removals, cleft lip and palate reconstruction, orthopedics, tumor removal and repair of birth injuries that afflict more than 80,000 African women each year.

Like most Mercy Ships volunteers, from doctors to captains, the Strausses pay their own way to serve. So far, contributions from former patients, neighbors, relatives and medical colleagues going back to when Strauss taught at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston have kept the couple in the field.

“Every volunteer will tell you the same story: It’s a labor of love,” Smith said. “Everybody is here for no other reason than to help people in need.”

For more information, go to www.mercyships.org.

Thomas Korosec is a freelance writer living in Dallas.

Dr. Glenn Strauss screens possible eye patients in Liberia, West Africa, during a 2005 visit.

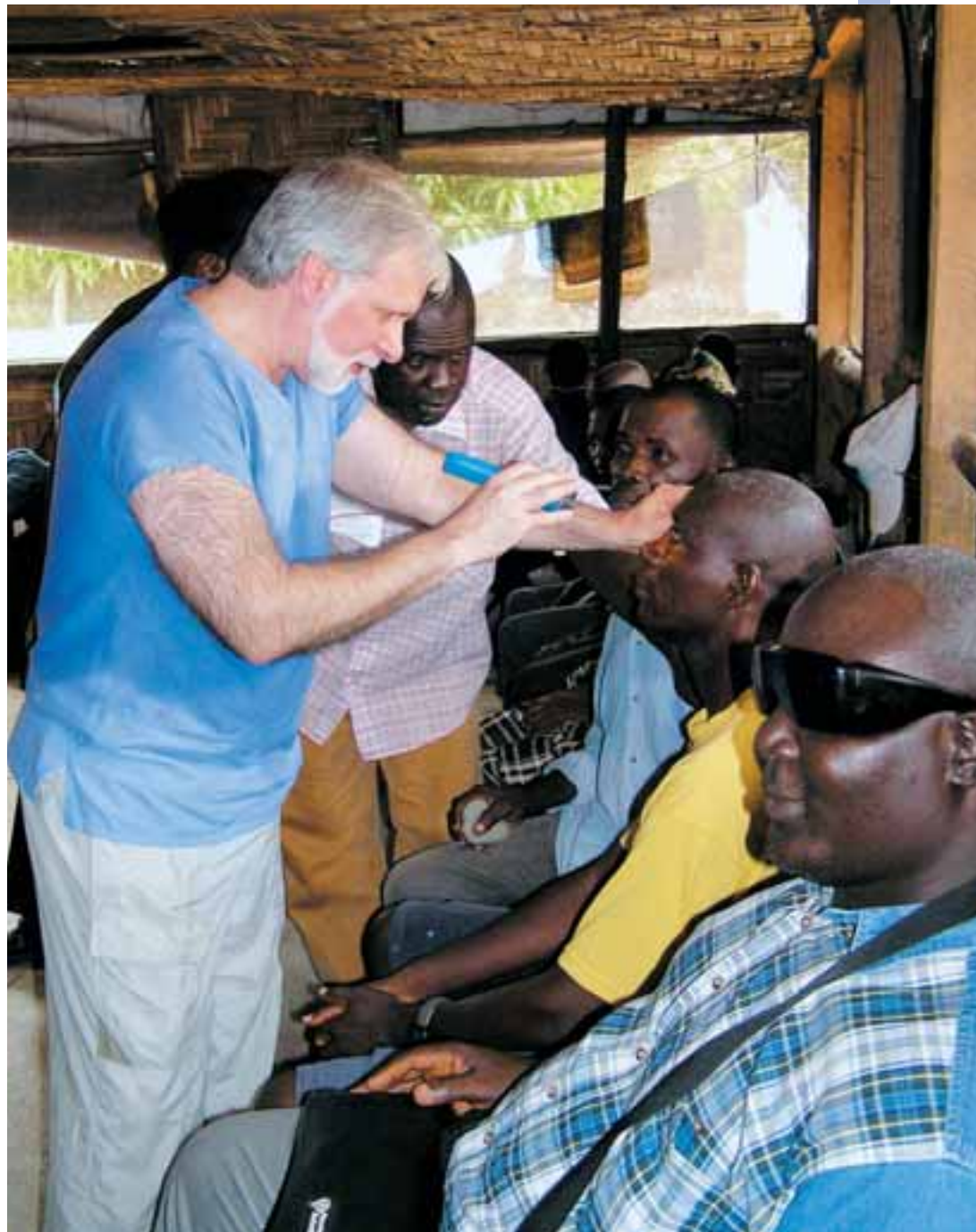


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Texas Marx the Spot

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

Not long ago in these pages, we extolled the mule's essential but underrated role in early Texas life and history.

To further strengthen the case, we suggest that mules—specifically Texas mules—were responsible for perhaps the funniest comedy troupe of all time, those zany Marx Brothers. And to the many Texas boasts we humbly submit another: The Marx Brothers weren't funny at all until they came to Texas.

They weren't known as the Marx Brothers when they toured Texas in 1912 as part of a vaudeville act. Some sources say they were known at the time as the Four Nightingales and that the group consisted of Groucho, Harpo, an older brother named Gummo and a female singer billed as Miss Janie O'Riley. Or they may have added the brothers' mother and aunt by that time and were performing as the Six Mascots. Either way, all sources agree that they took to the stage at the Opera House in Nacogdoches one summer night as serious singers, musicians and actors. Thespians, as it were.

The Nacogdoches audience was less than enthused with the act's classical music and dramatic readings. That was made clear when someone on East Main Street hollered "Runaway! Runaway!" This must have seemed preferable to the entertainment on stage, because the theater emptied when everybody went to see some runaway mules. Really, who wouldn't want to see them, other than the obvious exception of the person who might be standing in their path?

Some modern accounts have it that just one mule was on the loose in Nacogdoches that night, not a whole team. The old-timers, like former District Attorney Bob Murphey, always said it was a team of runaway mules that caused the commotion.

The mule or mules were eventually caught and the patrons returned to the theater, but it was a hard act to follow, these runaway mules, none with even a smidgen of classical training.

The appalled thespians, especially Groucho, were none too pleased with an audience so fickle and inattentive that it could be lured away from a performance of high art by a bunch of mules, or even one mule. Groucho made up a little impromptu verse to express his feelings:

"The City of Nacogdoches is full of cockroaches ..."

Groucho called the audience "(expletive) Yankees" and opined that "the jackass is the state flower of Texas."

If there is one thing Texans can generally appreciate, it is somebody who is ticked off and doesn't mind letting you



know about it. Groucho did just that, and the Nacogdoches audience loved it.

"Probably the Marxes didn't realize it then, but they were working a true vein of Texas humor," Dallas columnist Frank X. Tolbert wrote of the incident many years later. "Other Texas theater managers heard of the hit the Marx Brothers made as impudent comedians, and the troupe got a raise to \$75 a week as they moved on to Denison and Clarksville on the Red River."

So while we're not claiming the Marx Brothers as Texans, we don't mind taking credit for setting them straight and helping them find their true calling as comedians. And let's not forget to give those mules (or that mule) some credit, too.

Along with a good-natured Texas audience, they just may have given the Marx Brothers their start in comedy.

Clay Coppedge frequently writes odd bits of Texas history for Texas Co-op Power.

Crossroads of Flavor and Health

BY KEVIN HARGIS Eating healthily and enjoying rich flavors don't have to be mutually exclusive. Take, for example, the cuisine from the area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea.

The sizable body of water covers about 950,000 square miles (the size of 3½ Texas) and for centuries has been a crossroads of exchange among many cultures. This trade brought foodstuffs from different regions to the people living along its coast.

From grains and spices found on the northern rim of Africa, Middle Eastern dishes loaded with garlic and cooled by yogurt sauces, or classics from European chefs, the food of the region exhibits a wide variety and a mix of influences.

And because of the wide use of heart-healthy olive oil, fresh produce and whole grains, the Mediterranean diet is considered one of the most beneficial around.

You can find a generous sampling of recipes from all areas of the Mediterranean in Martha Rose Shulman's *Mediterranean Harvest: Vegetarian Recipes from the World's Healthiest Cuisine* (Rodale, 2007). In it, she writes that the heart of Mediterranean cooking "is produce, with bread and grains as backbone. ... Used in small quantities, meat adds flavor to many dishes, particularly sauces, soups and stews. But the day-to-day diets of the Mediterranean have always been sparing of meat."

The book touches on the many regional cooking styles and talks about the benefits of the food, citing several studies that prove the point.

"In July 2006, Spanish researchers found that people following a Mediterranean diet that included a relatively high amount of fat from olive oil and nuts, and also a certain amount of saturated fat from cheese and whole milk yogurt, had lower cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar than those following a low fat diet," Shulman writes.

"The widespread use of olive oil is only one of a number of characteristics that links the Mediterranean diet with longevity. Just as significant is the fact that this is a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables."

Besides health benefits, Shulman's book delves into cooking techniques, explains how to use herbs and spices and make blends, and shares some stories of the culture surrounding food.

Here is one of several versions of ratatouille, or eggplant stew, offered in the book:



- 1 large eggplant, cut in half lengthwise, then sliced
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 medium onions, sliced
- 4 large cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds, lightly crushed
- 2 green bell peppers, sliced
- 2 medium zucchini, sliced
- 4 ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded and sliced
- 2 bay leaves
- ½ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus additional for serving
- ¼ cup chopped fresh mint, plus additional for serving
- ¼ pound green beans, trimmed (optional)
- ¼ pound small okra, trimmed (optional)

Stir together tomato paste, water, vinegar, sugar, cinnamon and paprika. Set aside. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and oil a deep earthenware baking dish.

Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add eggplant slices in one layer and cook each side until lightly browned. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to baking dish.

Reduce heat to medium, heat remaining oil, add onions and cook until tender, about 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in garlic and coriander. Cook, stirring, until garlic is fragrant, about 1 minute. Add green peppers and zucchini. Continue to cook, stirring often, until vegetables are limp and zucchini is just beginning to color, about 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and scrape into baking dish.

Add tomato paste mixture to skillet, bring to boil and scrape with wooden spoon to deglaze. Add to baking dish along with tomatoes, bay leaves, parsley, mint, and, if using, green beans and okra. Season generously with salt and pepper, cover and bake until vegetables are very soft, about 1½ hours, stirring occasionally. Taste and adjust seasonings. Discard bay leaves before serving.

Cool slightly before serving with yogurt and additional chopped fresh herbs. Serves 6.

Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 222 calories, 6.6 g protein, 10 g fat, 33 g carbohydrates, 420 mg sodium, trace cholesterol

TURKISH RATATOUILLE (TÜRLÜ)

- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 ¼ cups water
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon sweet paprika
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil (divided)

1st **CAROL BARCLAY** *Nueces Electric Co-op*
 Prize-winning recipe: **Aegean Shrimp Nueces**

The recipes you all sent in for the Mediterranean Food contest were universally delicious. But this garlicky, cheesy concoction featuring shrimp and balancing the rich flavor of feta cheese with the sharpness of tomato rose above them all.

“This is a family favorite and it uses the bountiful harvest of our beautiful Gulf of Mexico,” wrote Barclay of Portland, across Nueces Bay from Corpus Christi. “My husband retired from the Marine Corps, and we have lived here for 30 years and have enjoyed this recipe immensely.”

AEGEAN SHRIMP NUECES

- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/2 cup extra light olive oil
- 3/4 pound tomatoes, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/4 cup parsley, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon hot sesame oil
- Salt, to taste
- Pepper, to taste
- 1 pound shrimp, shelled
- 1/2 pound feta cheese, crumbled
- 8 black olives
- 1/2 lemon

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. In a large skillet or wok, sauté onion in olive oil over medium-high heat until soft. Add tomatoes, garlic, bay leaf, basil, oregano,

parsley, sesame oil, salt and pepper. Cook 4-5 minutes. Remove from heat and mix in uncooked shrimp. Put in 12-by-7 1/2-by-2-inch baking pan. Crumble feta over top. Arrange olives on top of feta and squeeze lemon over all. Place in oven for 15 minutes. Serve over rice.

Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 448 calories, 26.2 g protein, 32.6 g fat, 10.7 g carbohydrates, 2.4 g fiber, 708 mg sodium, 178 mg cholesterol

TZATZIKI PITA PIZZA

- 2 pita bread rounds
- 2 cucumbers, sliced thin
- 1 tablespoon oregano
- Black olives

Toast pita, spread Tzatziki Dip (see page 40) on it as if you were making pizza, garnish with cucumber, sprinkle with oregano and add black olives.



PHOTO BY RICK PATRICK





DOES MEAL PLANNING DRIVE YOU NUTS?

Think pecans. A cool salad is the perfect antidote to a hot Texas afternoon. Add crunch to this Mandarin Spinach Salad with roasted pecans.

DID YOU KNOW?

ONE OUNCE OF PECANS HAS ABOUT THE SAME AMOUNT OF FIBER AS A MEDIUM-SIZED APPLE AND PROVIDES 10 PERCENT OF AN ADULT'S DAILY NEEDS.

MANDARIN-PECAN SPINACH SALAD

- 1 pound fresh baby spinach
- 1 can (15 ounces) mandarin oranges in light syrup
- Pecan-Orange Dressing
- 1 cup roasted pecans, chopped
- 1/2 cup red onion, chopped (optional)

Wash spinach and pat dry. Drain oranges, reserving 2 tablespoons of juice. Toss spinach and orange slices together in large bowl with Pecan-Orange Dressing. Top with roasted pecans and, if desired, chopped onion. To roast pecans, heat oven to 250 degrees and put pecans in roasting pan with 2 tablespoons butter. Check and stir every 10 minutes. Remove when done to your taste.

PECAN-ORANGE DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons mandarin orange juice
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 2 tablespoons pecan oil (can substitute olive oil)

Place in container with tight lid. Shake.



FOR MORE TEXAS PECAN RECIPES, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE: TEXASPECANS.ORG

TZATZIKI DIP

- 2 cups Greek yogurt
- 5 cloves garlic
- 1 pinch salt
- 5 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 3 tablespoons olive oil

Combine ingredients and mix well.

Serving size: 1 1/2 pita. Per serving: 276 calories, 8.2 g protein, 14 g fat, 27.7 g carbohydrates, 2.3 g fiber, 293 mg sodium, 15 mg cholesterol.

GINA ISABEL FENTIMAN

South Plains Electric Cooperative

Coat the bottom of a large Crock-Pot with 1 tablespoon oil. Add meat and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Snip herbs over top of meat. Pour lemon juice, wine, water and remaining oil over top. Cook over low heat 6 hours or until meat falls off the bone. Debone and transfer to serving plate. Strain gravy into serving bowl.

Serve over rice with bowls of feta cheese, chopped red onion and chopped red and green olives on the side.

Serving size: 1 1/2 cups. Per serving: 425 calories, 62.7 g protein, 12.8 g fat, 5.4 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 1,026 mg sodium, 172 mg cholesterol

JOAN E. OSTH
Mid-South Synergy

Cook's Tip: Use shoulders, hindquarters and loin of very young goat for best results.

HERBED MEDITERRANEAN KID GOAT

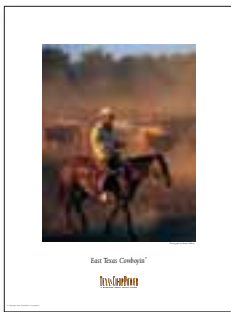
- 3 tablespoons olive oil (divided)
- 4 pounds goat, cut into pieces
- 2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 5 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 3 sprigs fresh oregano
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 1/3 cup water

RECIPE CONTEST

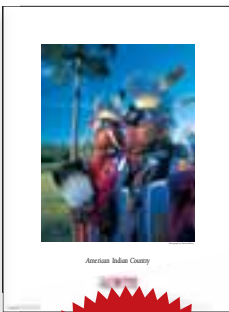
January's recipe contest topic is **HEALTHY TAILGATING**. When football season enters its championship phase, millions will gather together to watch the big games. Is there a better way to get fueled up for gridiron action than with deep-frying and cheese? The deadline is **September 10**.

Send recipes to Home Cooking, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704. You may also fax them to (512) 486-6254, e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.texascoopower.com. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. The top winner will receive a copy of *60 Years of Home Cooking* and a Texas-shaped trivet. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

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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. 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 or send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the address above.

PERFECT PETS

Bowwow, readers, thanks for all the fantastic photos—we pored through more than 300 submissions to come up with our winners. Normally, we select five photos in our monthly contest. But so many of your pet pictures were, well, just so perfect, that we’ve got a treat for you this time around: nine winners.

—CAMILLE WHEELER



▲ It’s a bird, it’s a plane, it’s ... **Alex** the beagle! Alex leaps over the couch in his Hill Country living room. “He just got a little riled up,” explained Alex’s owner, **Katy Ruzicka**, who watched Alex repeatedly sprint and jump over the couch. Ruzicka is served by Pedernales Electric Cooperative.



► Olé! **Maggie** the cowdog shows a young bull who’s boss. **Ken** and **Judith Glover**, who submitted the photo, said that Maggie, a miniature dachshund, had already trained all the cattle on their Whitesboro Ranch and needed a new challenge at a friend’s ranch in Palestine. The Glovers are served by Cooke County and Magic Valley electric cooperatives.



▲ Kids will be kids: Five-year-old **Hannah Stapleton** laughs with delight as one of her bottle-fed pet Boer goat kids, **Sandy**, nibbles her neck. Hannah is the daughter of **Lisa Stapleton**, a Central Texas Electric Cooperative member who took the photo at the family’s home in Fredericksburg.

► “And another thing ...” **Roger**, a 27-year-old double yellow-headed Amazon parrot, tells **Buddy**, a Labrador mix, all about it on the Flying Arrow Ranch in Mountain Home. **Jim Whitty**, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member, submitted the photo.





◀ “Rubber duckie, you’re the one ...” **Noodle** the cat navigates a float while stalking some menacing prey in his backyard pool. Noodle, a good swimmer, is sticking to pool toys after tangling with a rattlesnake that bit him three times and scarred his front left leg. **Tom and Nancy Penick**, Pedernales Electric Cooperative members, submitted the picture. Nancy took the photo.

► Best buds: Five-year-old **Reese** and **Buddy**, a Jack Russell terrier, enjoy dreamland together. The photo was submitted by Reese’s parents, **Jeff and Heather Williams**, who belong to CoServ Electric.



▲ “I was supposed to save you some?” After licking all the left-overs out of the pot, innocent-eyed **Chipper** the Chihuahua finds a home on the range. Greenbelt Electric Cooperative members **Darrell and April Lister** submitted the photo. April took the picture.

► “What, me worry?” Even though **Kramer** the bullmastiff looks as if he needs ironing, he’s not too concerned about things. “He really isn’t too worried about the price of gas or much of anything else,” said Kramer’s owner, **Joyce DeLuca**, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member who submitted the photo.



► Between a rock and a soft place: **Lucy**, a Jack Russell terrier/beagle mix, prefers **Boomer** the beagle to a hard rock island in the Frio River. The photo was submitted by **Charles and Kathy Carlson**, who belong to Bandera Electric Cooperative. Charles took the photo.



Upcoming in **Focus on Texas**

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Nov	Signs	Sep 10
Dec	Costumes	Oct 10
Jan	Odd Farm Equipment	Nov 10
Feb	Silly Poses	Dec 10
Mar	Caught in the Act	Jan 10
Apr	Bridges	Feb 10

SIGNS is the topic for our **NOVEMBER 2008** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Signs, Focus on Texas, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704**, before **September 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, or submit them on our website at www.texascoopower.com.

AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

SEPTEMBER

04 LUBBOCK [4-7]
National Cowboy
Symposium & Celebration,
(806) 798-7825,
www.cowboy.org



LUBBOCK
National Cowboy Symposium
& Celebration

4

06 FAYETTEVILLE
National Register
Dedication Celebration,
(979) 378-2019

11 COLUMBUS [11-14]
Colorado County Fair &
Rodeo, (979) 732-9266,
www.coloradocountyfair.org

12 GORDON [12-13]
Antique Tractor Show,
(254) 693-5676

LUCKENBACH [12-14]
TexAmericana Fandango,
1-888-311-8990,
www.luckenbachtexas.com

13 CALDWELL Kolache
Festival, (979) 567-0000

CLEBURNE
Dachshund Days Festival,
(817) 645-8274,
www.campfireusatesuya
council.org

CRANFILLS GAP
Septemberfest & Wild
Game Cook-Off,
(254) 597-2756,
www.cranfillsgaptexas.com

DRIFTWOOD
Dripping with Taste Wine
& Food Festival,
(512) 858-4740,
www.drippingwithtaste.org

MULESHOE
Mule Days Parade & Play
Day, (806) 272-4248

**13 LITTLE RIVER-
ACADEMY**
World Championship Bean
& Barbecue Cook-Off,
(254) 718-6047

PROSPER
Arts & Music Festival,
(972) 342-8420,
www.prosperartsand
musicfestival.com

IDALOU [13-14]
Apple Butter Festival,
(806) 892-2961,
www.applecountry
orchards.com



13

CLEBURNE
Dachshund Days Festival

14 KINGSLAND
Ole Timers Country Fair,
(325) 388-9222

17 BRENHAM [17-20]
Washington County Fair,
(979) 836-4112,
www.washingtoncofair.com

19 KARNES CITY [19-20]
Lonesome Dove Fest,
(210) 315-0222,
www.lonesomedovefest.com

UVALDE [19-21]
Nature Quest—Fall
Session, (830) 591-1074,
www.thcrr.com

20 BARTLETT
Friendship Fest,
(254) 527-4141,
www.bartlettchamberof
commerce.org

BIGFOOT
Barbecue Fundraiser
& Arts/Crafts Show,
(210) 275-3748,
www.bigfoottx.com

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Will Rogers Equestrian Center
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Hardy Murphy Coliseum
Annual Wild Horse & Burro Expo
Show - Adoption - More

October 30-November 1
Odessa, Texas
Ector County Coliseum

888-4MUSTANGS U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Wild Horse and Burro Program

AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS



OCTOBER

3 FREDERICKSBURG [3-5]
Oktoberfest,
(830) 997-8515

Events are listed according to space available; see the full listing at www.texascooppower.com.

Event information can be mailed to **Around Texas**, 2550 S. IH-35, Austin, TX 78704, faxed to (512) 486-6254, e-mailed to aroundtx@texas-ec.org, or submitted on our website at www.texascooppower.com. Please submit events for November by September 10.

20 BRONTE
Butterfield Celebration,
(325) 743-2555

JOHNSON CITY
Sesquicentennial Then
& Now Quilt Show,
(512) 293-9927

LA GRANGE
Texas Heroes Day,
(979) 968-5658

LAGO VISTA
Hill Country Dayz Festival,
(512) 267-7952, www.hillcountrydayz.org

NEWCASTLE
Centennial Birthday,
(940) 846-3294

SHERMAN
Arts Festival,
1-888-893-1188,
www.shermantx.org

25 LITTLE ELM [25-28]
Autumn Fest & Carnival,
(214) 975-0400,
www.littleelmtx.org

26 GEORGETOWN [26-27]
Up the Chisholm Trail
Cattle Drive,
(512) 943-1670,
www.upthechisholmtrail.org

POST OAK [26-27]
Busy Bee Quilt Show,
(940) 567-2771

MAGNOLIA [26-28]
Music Festival & Barbecue
Cook-Off, (281) 356-2266

27 CRAWFORD
Octoberfest—Heart O'
Texas German Society,
(254) 486-9279

DUMAS
Museum Day,
(806) 935-3113

EDEN
Fall Fest & World Class
Bull Ride, (325) 869-2211,
www.edentexas.com

HALLETTSVILLE
Kolache Fest,
(361) 798-2662,
www.hallettsville.com

27 LAKEHILLS
Medina Lake Cajun
Festival & Great Gumbo
Cook-Off, (830) 751-3130,
www.cajunfestival-medina-lake.com

LEVELLAND
Texas' Last Frontier
Ranch Heritage Tour,
(806) 229-2741

SAN MARCOS
Pet Fest, (512) 754-7257

BURTON [9/27-10/4]
LaBahia Antique Show,
(979) 289-2684,
www.labahiaantiques.com

COMANCHE [27-28]
Comanche County Pow-
Wow, (325) 356-3233,
www.comanchechamber.org

HILLSBORO [9/27-28, 10/4-5]
Middlefaire Renaissance
Festival, (254) 548-6238,
www.middlefest.com

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www.discoverdenton.com

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- Ag Education & Heritage Center- Rural Heritage Activities
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- Tour de Pecan Bike Ride
- Pecan Bake Contest
- "Hats Off to Juan Seguin" Street Dance
- Hoity Toity Hat Parade
- Polka Mass
- Skat & 42 Tournament

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I read original Civil War letters and saw the last known original of a Gen. Robert E. Lee photo that carries his double signature. I stood mere feet from alligators. I strolled the grounds of a glorious green, 100-acre arboretum, inhaling the perfume-sweet smell of gardenias.

And I learned something very important about myself on this tour through Northeast Texas: I do like fruitcake, now that I've sampled one from the world-famous Collin Street Bakery.

Our journey starts in Corsicana, home of Navarro County Electric Cooperative, heading northeast on State Highway 31 and then northwest on State Highway 198 for about a 35-mile drive to Gun Barrel City. From there, it's about 20 miles to Athens, traveling east on State Highway 334 and then southeast on U.S. Highway 175.

CORSICANA

Navarro College is home to the **PEARCE COLLECTIONS**, composed of a Civil War museum and a Western art museum that occupy the Cook Center.

I visually devoured the Pearce Western Art Museum and was especially drawn to a Howard Terpning Native American painting called "Grandfather Speaks." But the real payoff came in the Pearce Civil War Museum, which boasts more than 15,000 original items.

The collection includes a letter from President Lincoln to his sister and ones written by Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson and Ulysses S. Grant.

More 1800s history is found at **PIONEER VILLAGE**, a collection of original Navarro County log structures that were disassembled and rebuilt on site.

Now about that fruitcake. I couldn't leave town without seeing—or tasting—what all the fuss is about at **COLLIN STREET BAKERY** on West Seventh Ave-

CORSICANA to ATHENS

From Civil War artifacts to a world-famous bakery, there's much to digest.

BY CAMILLE WHEELER



nue, in its third location since originally opening in 1896 on Collin Street. The bakery has a second store nearby at Interstate 45 and U.S. 287. I sampled the moist apricot fruitcake and wondered why I'd ever feared this confection.

Corsicana Chamber of Commerce, (903) 874-4731, www.corsicana.org

The Pearce Collections, 1-800-988-5317, www.pearcecollections.us

Collin Street Bakery, 1-800-292-7400, www.collinstreet.com

GUN BARREL CITY

Nope, there's no dramatic Western history behind this name. Rather, Gun Barrel City, a growing town of 6,000-plus, gets its name from Gun Barrel Lane, a road that connected Mabank and Seven Points. Gun Barrel Lane, now State Highway 198, merely refers to the straightness of the road, and the town's motto is "We shoot straight with you."

Still, Gun Barrel City is such a cool name that a restaurant in Jackson, Wyoming, the Gun Barrel Steak & Game House, took its name from the town.

Gun Barrel City is bordered on the

south and west by **CEDAR CREEK RESERVOIR** and banks its tourism efforts on this lake that measures about 220 miles from point to point.

Gun Barrel City Hall, (903) 887-1087, www.gunbarrelcity.net

ATHENS

Never fished before? That's all right. They'll show you how and even furnish the fishing pole and bait at the **TEXAS FRESHWATER FISHERIES CENTER** operated by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Kids and adults fish for trout, catfish, bass and sunfish. It's catch and release, except for special times of the year.

In addition to a production fish hatchery, the center has glass-enclosed ponds and aquariums that

depict life in Texas' rivers, streams and reservoirs.

Protected by thick glass, you can stand near a pair of alligators sunning themselves beside a pond. But the image that stuck with me is that of 20-pound blue and channel catfish slamming themselves against a chest-high glass wall, their mouths above water and open wide as buckets, as they fought for food flung out by visitors.

I'm also carrying images of scarlet-red, pink, blue, magenta, violet, yellow and orange flowers in my mind after visiting the **EAST TEXAS ARBORETUM AND BOTANICAL SOCIETY**. Flowers, trees and shrubs blanket the ample grounds that include two miles of trails.

Athens Chamber of Commerce, (903) 675-5181, www.athenscc.org

Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, (903) 676-2277, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/visitorcenters/tffc

East Texas Arboretum, (903) 675-5630, www.eastexasarboretum.org

Camille Wheeler is the staff writer for Texas Co-op Power.

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