

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

APRIL 2009

THE OTHER BIG BEND

O. HENRY IN TEXAS

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FEATURES

8 Y'all Come Back Now: Tourist Towns That Treat You Right

By Melissa Gaskill

In a state as big and varied as Texas, finding a weekend getaway is as easy as opening the map. Small and big towns offer reasonable prices, friendly folks and many one-of-a-kind attractions. Here are five places that would love to have you for a visit: Bandera, Corpus Christi, Round Top, Amarillo and Jefferson.

18 The Other Big Bend

By Dan Oko

Come explore the wild wonders of Texas' largest state park.

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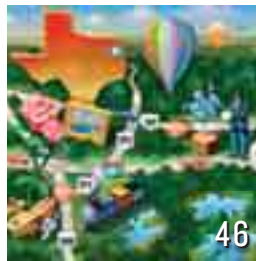
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

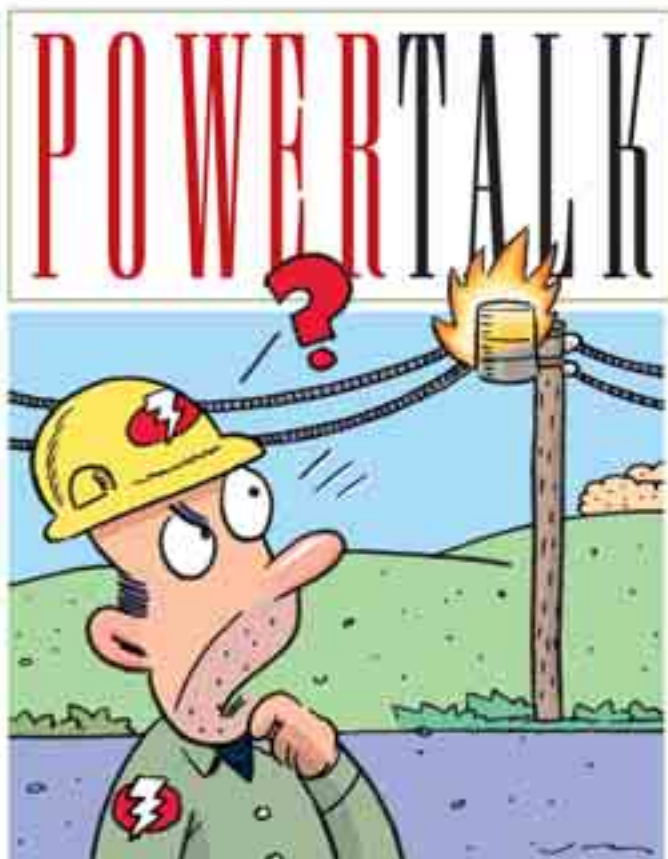
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BLAME IT ON THE GRIME

While some Texas electric cooperatives were dealing with ice on their power lines during winter, others were coping with pole fires that started during an ongoing drought. The culprit? Believe it or not, it's moist dust, or grime.

The problem stems from the lack of rain in many areas, leaving dust to collect on lines and insulators, explained Will Holford, manager of public affairs for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

When moist, misty weather comes along—in lieu of rain—the dirt isn't washed away by rain but instead becomes grime that sticks to poles and components. “The grime causes the insulators to become less effective,” Holford said. “I'd venture to guess that nearly every utility has this type of issue.”

Occupancy Sensors Make Sense

Install energy-saving occupancy sensors in bathrooms, utility closets and other less-used spaces so lights will automatically turn on and off in response to movement. Occupancy sensors, which may also be suitable for spaces such as offices that are not regularly staffed, can save energy wherever they are installed: According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, energy savings can range from 40 to 46 percent in classrooms, 13 to 50 percent in private offices, 30 to 90 percent in restrooms, 22 to 65 percent in conference rooms, 30 to 80 percent in corridors and 45 to 80 percent in storage areas.



letters

'SILVER DOLLAR' JIM SERVES UP BIG TIP

In reference to the February 2009 article on “Silver Dollar Jim” West Jr.:

My friend worked for Jim West in the '40s and says that one night after a hard day's work at one of his ranches, the crew of about eight, including Jim, went to a restaurant for dinner. They ordered the works, and Jim kept giving the waitress a hard time.

As they were finishing their meal, Jim told one of the hands to get a sack (of silver dollars) from the truck. They each formed a ring of silver dollars on the rim of the dinner plate. Then they went outside and watched through the window.

The waitress looked all over the table, and there was no tip. You can imagine her disgust. She started cleaning the table. As she picked up the first dinner plate, silver dollars rolled away from it. On the next plate were more silver dollars. She was overjoyed with her tip, and Jim West laughed at the good joke.

CHARLES R. BROWN
Cedar Park

DOLLARS FOR VOTES?

One item you left out of your article on “Silver Dollar Jim” was his reported use of his silver dollars in elections. When

the poll tax was in use, certain voters would appear and pay the tax with silver dollars. And, they were expected to vote as Jim wanted them to. Thankfully, that dark time in our history is over.

BETTY A. MORRIS

Pedernales Electric Cooperative
Canyon Lake

'NEAT LITTLE MAGAZINE'

What a neat little magazine you have. A friend shared it with me, and there are several articles that drew my interest. Even at age 87, I still like to maintain interest in current events. The (February 2009) article on the Kilgore Rangerettes was outstanding. I believe my 13-year-old great-granddaughter might be interested. The “Baking Up a Breakfast” recipes were great. How I wish I could try those apple turnovers. Thank you so much.

DORIS M. WALKER
Bedias

Correction: *The children in the 1980 photo that accompanies “Living in Feather Heaven” (which appeared in some February 2009 issues) are Tommy Seely and Amy Seely English. They are the grandchildren of Bill Carpenter, co-founder of the now-defunct Brownwood Feather Factory.*

We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, *Texas Co-op Power*, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, e-mail us at letters@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.texascoopower.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.texascoopower.com.

ENERGY FACT

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that two-thirds of all homes in the United States have air conditioners, which consume about 5 percent of all electricity generated in the U.S., at a cost of more than \$11 billion.

If homeowners upgraded to more efficient air conditioners in addition to running fans, caulking and weatherstripping, and planting cover trees or shrubs around their outdoor units, they could save 20 to 50 percent of that figure.

H A P P E N I N G S



Quick: Name the state flower of Texas. That's right—the bluebonnet. Now name the city that holds the **OFFICIAL BLUEBONNET FESTIVAL OF TEXAS** each year.

Give up? It's Chappell Hill, a quaint, historic town just east of Brenham that finds itself surrounded by the ravishing flowers each spring. This year's festival, designated the state's official bluebonnet event by the Texas Legislature in 1997, is set for April 18-19.

Lavish fields of bluebonnets blanket the landscape just outside Chappell Hill, where the festival features more than 250 booths—including home décor, gardening, art and crafts, jewelry, and clothing—and food and live entertainment. Children's attractions include a Ferris wheel, train and pony rides, and a petting zoo.

Adopted as the state flower in 1901, the bluebonnet is so named because of its resemblance to a sunbonnet. Bluebonnets also have been called buffalo clover, wolf flower and, in Spanish, *el conejo*, which means "the rabbit."

For more information about the festival, call (979) 836-6033 or go to www.chappellhillmuseum.org/festivals.htm.

WHO KNEW?



After Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna and his troops were decisively beaten at the Battle of San Jacinto, leaving Texans free to establish a Republic, Santa Anna went to U.S. President Andrew Jackson and offered to sell his lost territory at a discount. Jackson declined the offer.

ROBERT MCCORMACK



A PARK FOR THE EONS

Franklin Mountains State Park may be a long way the wrong way for many Texans. But on the outskirts of El Paso, it's a great amenity for local residents and visitors alike. At 24,247 acres, it's the largest urban park in the nation, covering some 37 square miles within the El Paso city limits. North Mount Franklin reaches an elevation of 7,192 feet, more than 3,000 feet above the city. One hiking trail is accessible off

Loop 375/ Trans-Mountain Road, and work is under way for a trail network that ultimately will cover a 100-mile system. The park is virtually pristine—much like the way Native Americans, Spanish conquistadors and other visitors have found the area for thousands of years. Rangers conduct public tours the first and third weekends of the month by reservation only. For more information, call (915) 566-6441 or go to www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

I HAVE NO RANCH

Have you ever wanted to hang out where the artists and writers go? **RANCHO NO TENGO** might be right up your alley. Literally translated as "I have no ranch," this compound near Lake Buchanan was hand-built over the past dozen years by musician and artist Joe "King" Carrasco. He conceived the place as a creative retreat. But he spends most of his time now in Puerto Vallarta. Rates for the basic but highly creative accommodations are \$35 to



\$40 a night or \$500 to \$600 a month. For more information, e-mail sbrammer@austin.rr.com

CHECK IT OUT

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No Lightweight

Energy-stingy LEDs pack a powerful punch.

By Kaye Northcott



Consumers might just be getting used to compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), but the lighting industry is hard at work perfecting the next greatest thing—lighting composed of light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Don't worry about having to throw out your CFLs any time soon, however. There are still a lot of kinks to work out before an entire home can be illuminated cost-effectively with LEDs.

Within a decade, or perhaps sooner, LEDs will be the predominant lighting product. They are 50 to 60 percent more energy efficient than incandescent lighting and 25 to 30 percent more energy efficient than CFLs. The most efficient already operate 50,000 to 100,000 hours or 10 to 12 years longer than CFL lighting, according to the industry. The solid-state diodes are already in use for landscaping, flashlights, holiday lights and traffic signals, to name a few applications.

Experts at the Cooperative Research Network (CRN), a national co-op organization testing LEDs, say that electricity savings from computer-chip-driven LEDs will be one of the most important factors in reaching govern-

ment-mandated energy-efficiency standards by 2020. LEDs could account for up to 30 percent of the savings.

In 2003, Austin replaced incandescent bulbs with LED bulbs in all city traffic signals. The city reports it has reduced energy usage by 7.25 million kilowatt-hours and saved the city \$1.4 million on traffic signals. Houston is doing the same and estimates the new bulbs will eventually save taxpayers \$10,000 a day. Fast-food chains and other businesses that stay open 18 to 24 hours a day are also reaping savings. However, the high cost of LEDs for home lighting that is used for only a few hours a day would be hard to justify as of yet.

A Boerne-based company, GreenStar, is making street and commercial lighting with great promise. A new owner moved administrative headquarters from Mexico to the Hill Country, but LEDs are still being manufactured south of the border. Because the lighting is already being distributed in countries such as Mexico and Honduras, it is manufactured to operate on various voltages without changing the fixtures. Bandera Electric Cooperative has purchased

GreenStar fixtures and is measuring their efficiency.

LED claims are exciting, but the nation's cooperatives want to test them independently. "We are fortunate that through cooperation, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association can fund sophisticated, independent research such as that done by CRN," said Mike Williams, president/CEO of Texas Electric Cooperatives, the statewide association.

In late December, CRN hosted a "webinar" for cooperative leaders interested in monitoring research on LEDs. Cooperatives are looking first to use LEDs to replace outdoor mercury vapor, metal halide or low-pressure sodium lighting. Those who fired up their computers and dialed in to the briefing learned that LEDs are still in the experimental phase but are rapidly improving. Martha J. Carney of Outsourced Innovations told those participating in the seminar that LEDs have many advantages, come in a variety of fixtures and are hard to damage. The U.S. Department of Energy expects LEDs to parallel CFLs in performance within five years.

These are some of the other points CRN emphasized in the web conference:

- LEDs perform well in frigid climates, but research must be done in the desert.
- They operate cooler to the touch than other forms of lighting.
- The quality of current products varies widely, so don't believe everything vendors tell you. Many products on the market today are not delivering as promised.
- Light shifting or dimming can be a problem—for example, white light shifting toward blue. Look at the variety of colors in current LED auto headlights.
- The semiconductor chips in LEDs must be protected from the fixture's heat source. Heat's proximity to the chip reduces efficiency.
- Retrofitting with LEDs is not as simple as changing bulbs.
- It currently takes eight to 12 months for LED chips to be manufactured.

The bottom line: Be encouraged but cautious.

Kaye Northcott is editor of Texas Co-op Power.

Texas Co-op Power will report periodically on CRN product research.

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Y'ALL COME BACK, Now

Tourist towns that treat you right

BY MELISSA GASKILL

WHEN BUDGETS GET TIGHT, LUXURY VACATIONS TO EXOTIC DESTINATIONS BECOME HARDER TO SWING. BUT IN A STATE AS BIG AND VARIED AS TEXAS, FINDING A WEEKEND GETAWAY IS AS EASY AS OPENING THE MAP. SMALL AND BIG TOWNS OFFER REASONABLE PRICES, FRIENDLY FOLKS AND MANY ONE-OF-A-KIND ATTRACTIONS. JUST IN TIME FOR WARMER WEATHER, HERE ARE FIVE PLACES THAT WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU FOR A VISIT.



BANDERA

Fun in the saddle and off the trail

ANY TOWN THAT BILLS ITSELF AS THE Cowboy Capital of the World darn well better have cowboys and horses around, and Bandera doesn't disappoint. Pickups and folks in jeans and muddy boots populate Main Street, local restaurants serve steak and barbecue, and shops stock cowboy duds and décor. Best of all, dude ranches crowd the south side of town like hungry livestock around a hay bale, and would-be cowpokes can choose from a variety of price ranges and amenities.

My family once took a foreign exchange student to Flying L Guest Ranch for a real taste of the West, in style. The villas, designed by an associate of Frank Lloyd Wright, feature separate living and sleeping quarters, fireplaces and Western décor. Ranch meals highlight Hill Country cuisine, and creek-side barbecue dinners come complete with sunsets and entertainment such as singing and roping demonstrations. Our horseback ride along a pretty creek ended with rodeo games that included retrieving ribbons from the horns of mighty quick little goats. A swimming pool and water park, petting zoo and 18-hole golf course helped keep everyone busy. The only amenities that aren't

After you hit the trail at one of the dude ranches outside Bandera, the self-billed Cowboy Capital of the World, take a cool plunge in the Medina River.

included in lodging are horseback riding, golf and lunch.

The smaller, quieter Running-R Ranch abuts the Hill Country State Natural Area, 5,000 acres of rocky hills, grassland, creeks and oak groves. A former working ranch donated to the state on the condition that it be left as natural as possible, the park offers some of the best hikes in the state, in my humble opinion—from a steep climb to the top of Twin Peaks, 1,760 feet high with a panoramic 360-degree view, to a six-mile loop through varied landscapes and past a tranquil pond, and a short jaunt along scenic West Verde Creek to a genuine swimming hole.

Equestrians from across the state come for the trails, bunking in group camping areas equipped with stalls or the old ranch house and barn. The rest of us can stay at the Running-R, where horses are provided, along with wranglers to lead rides to the natural area. These fellers also joke, sing and answer questions about the ranch, the horses and the countryside. A night's stay at one of 14 oak-shaded cabins includes a two-hour ride as well as swimming, campfires, hayrides, table tennis, horseshoes and mountain biking. We watched the sun set from our porch before hitting the hay in handmade cedar-post beds. Breakfast and lunch are also included with lodging. For dinner, guests can fire up one of the ranch grills, but we opted to chow down in town at the OST Restaurant and Busbee's BBQ, with a little pre-prandial shopping to boot.



Bandera's other signature feature is the cool, green Medina River. Cottages at the River Front Motel face the river and are a short walk from Main Street. An afternoon spent tubing the cypress-shaded Medina is just the ticket for soothing a saddle-sore body. Several operators rent tubes and kayaks and provide shuttle service for floats of various lengths (and even provide pickup and dropoff at some dude ranches). When water levels drop too low for tubing, a dammed area in Bandera's City Park remains deep enough for floating, and pedal boats can be rented there. The park has picnic tables and grills as well.

Running-R Ranch: (830) 796-3984, www.rrranch.com

Flying L Guest Ranch: 1-800-292-5134, www.flyingl.com

River Front Motel: 1-800-870-5671, www.riverfrontmotel.com

Bandera Convention and Visitors Bureau: 1-800-364-3833, www.banderacowboycapital.com



CORPUS CHRISTI

*Find more than sand at
this beach city*

FOR A BEACH DESTINATION, CORPUS Christi provides excellent options as well as a convenient, mid-coast location.

Corpus Christi Beach, north of downtown and on the west side of the bay, feels like a small beach town and is great for a quick sandy fix loaded with extras. We opt for one of the beachside hotels; ground-floor rooms at the Quality Inn & Suites lead right onto the beach, and the pool at the Radisson overlooks the action on the sand and the USS Lexington Museum on the Bay, just a short stroll away. Five self-guided tour routes of this World War II-era aircraft carrier cover roughly 20 percent of her 16 decks and include shows at the MEGA large-format theater. The ship offers a flight simulator, café and store, too.

Corpus Christi, the 'Sparkling City by the Sea,' offers a rare opportunity to sail with a backdrop of downtown high-rises. The Texas State Aquarium is just one of the city's many attractions onshore. And Padre Island National Seashore is just across the bridge.

Also within easy walking distance, the Texas State Aquarium showcases more than 300 species, mostly from the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Highlights include an offshore rig and Flower Gardens exhibits, jellyfish tanks, dolphin shows (with a viewing area for watching the action underwater), sea otters, rescued sea turtles and the Hawn Wild Flight Theater, where owls, hawks, falcons and other impressive birds strut their stuff. Between the aquarium and hotels lie several blocks of seafood restaurants and shops. After a hearty meal of Gulf shrimp followed by an ice cream cone, we fell asleep to the sound of waves and the glow of the Lexington's neon lights.

For a bigger serving of sand and surf, head to Mustang Island State Park, south of Corpus Christi Bay across the Intracoastal Waterway. The park's stretch of beach ends at a jetty popular for fishing. On a recent visit, we clambered over the giant granite

blocks to the end, where small sea turtles and schools of fish swim in the green water, and watched a skilled angler land a string of nice trout. The sheltered area is nice for swimming, and showers at the park bathhouse meant we could clean up afterward and stop at our favorite seafood restaurant, Snoopy's Pier. It sits right on the water under the causeway to the island, making for great boat, bird and dolphin watching.

Padre Island National Seashore is the Thanksgiving feast of beach fixes: It's more than anyone could possibly consume, but it's a heck of a lot of fun to try. Its 70 miles constitute the longest stretch of undeveloped barrier island in the world. The Malaquite Visitors Center includes exhibits and touch displays, a bathhouse, park store, water fountains and covered picnic tables. Follow the boardwalk to Malaquite Beach; campsites here include 24-hour access to showers and toilets.





ROUND TOP

Small town packs a big cultural punch

Primitive camping is allowed anywhere along the rest of the island (permits required, available at the visitor center). The beach between mile posts 0 and 5 is maintained for driving, but after that, it's strictly four-wheel-drive. My oldest daughter and I once borrowed an FJ Cruiser and went as far as mile 40. Except for the occasional hard-core angler and mile markers every five miles, we saw nothing but deep sand, seashells, tall dunes, deer tracks and, on our way back, a Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

These sea turtles enjoy quite a bit of fame at the National Seashore, where researchers collect eggs from nests along 80 miles of beach, incubate them in a lab and release hatchlings. The public is invited to many of these summer releases, and one of my all-time favorite things remains the sight of dozens of palm-sized hatchlings scrambling over sand hills and seaweed mountains into the waiting surf. Call the hatchling hotline, (361) 949-7163, for release dates.

USS Lexington Museum on the Bay: (361) 888-4873, www.usslexington.com

Texas State Aquarium: (361) 881-1200, www.texasstateaquarium.org

Mustang Island State Park: (361) 749-5246, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/mustangisland

Padre Island National Seashore: (361) 949-8068, www.nps.gov/pais

Corpus Christi Convention and Visitors Bureau: 1-800-766-2322, www.corpuschristi-cvb.com

THE TINY TOWN OF ROUND TOP ENJOYS widespread renown for, of all things, performing arts. How did this happen? Distinguished pianist James Dick, dreaming of a summer place where young musicians could receive intensive training and put on performances, founded The International Festival Institute at Round Top in 1971. He acquired 6 acres occupied by an abandoned school building in 1973 and began to populate the land with historic buildings, one by one. Early orchestra performances were held on an outdoor stage. Construction of a spectacular, 1,100-seat concert hall proceeded on a pay-as-you-go basis, with concerts held inside the walls before the building had a roof, floor or seats. Now complete at last, the acoustically and aesthetically beautiful hall forms the centerpiece of the institute, grown to 210 acres with artists' residences, practice rooms and dining facilities. Extensive landscaping, including herb and rose gardens, invites lingering, and beautiful stone walls, towers, walks and other surprises encourage wandering the grounds.

"It is all open to the public. You can come and take a tour or just walk around," says Alain Declert, program director. Events happen year-round and include a Theatre Forum and Choral Festival

in November, the Nutcracker Ballet in December, guitar festivals, poetry readings, symphony performances and forums, culminating in the Institute's raison d'être, a six-week-long summer music festival. The 39th season coming this summer promises works by Tchaikovsky, Strauss, Brahms, Beethoven and others, performed by an orchestra of 85 musicians chosen by auditions across the country back in January and February. Tickets can be purchased for the entire festival or individual performances, even by spur-of-the-moment visitors, says Declert: "We always have tickets at the door."

Round Top's population barely breaks 80, and its location on State Highway 237 miles from a major thoroughfare keeps traffic light. So most businesses in town open only on weekends and for the area's spectacular twice-a-year antique events. Time it right, though, and enjoy shopping that runs the gamut from European linens to cigars, wine, art, soap and jewelry. Royer's Round Top Café on the square is known for its pies, and Klump's

The concert hall at Round Top's International Festival Institute was built with old-world craftsmanship, providing the perfect setting for classical performances. After visitors get their fill of music, theater, fine arts and antiques in Round Top, it's time for a pie break at Royer's Round Top Café.





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Restaurant, across from the tiny Chamber of Commerce office, bucks the weekend-only policy, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Popular with locals, thanks to a folksy charm and hearty food, Klump's dishes up barbecue at noon on Saturday, catfish on Friday night and specials every Sunday.

Across the square, Henkel Square Museum Village re-creates 19th-century Texas German pioneer life and architecture. Thursday through Sunday, enter through the apothecary building for self-guided tours of the eight restored homes, barn, schoolhouse and church, encircling a large open space where reenactments and other events often take place. The town's name, incidentally, comes from an early stagecoach stop, a house with a round top.

A few miles down the road, structures from the 1800s constitute Winedale village, a division of the Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin. A German community cultivated grapes here in the late 1800s. Houston philanthropist Ima Hogg purchased the land, part of Stephen F. Austin's original colony, and donated it to the university in 1965. Each July and August, the site hosts Shakespeare at Winedale, plays presented by university students in a 19th-century barn converted to an Elizabethan theater. Other programs go on year-round, and the visitor center is open weekdays, with docent-led tours available by prior arrangement. Otherwise, visitors may stroll the grounds without entering the half-dozen historical structures and enjoy the small lake and picnic area.

If the small-town charm and high-falutin activities make it hard to leave, no problem. The rolling hills around Round Top harbor dozens of bed-and-breakfast establishments. Examples include Anderson's Round Top Inn, with rooms in five different settings just off the square, and historic Knittel Homestead Inn in nearby Burton, which includes a parlor to relax in and hot breakfast each morning.

The International Festival Institute at Round Top: (979) 249-3086, www.festivalhill.org
Henkel Square Museum Village: (979) 249-

3308, www.texaspioneerarts.org
Winedale: (979) 278-3530, www.cah.utexas.edu/museums/winedale.php
Anderson's Round Top Inn: 1-877-738-6746, www.andersonsroundtopinn.com
Knittel Homestead Inn: (979) 289-5102, www.knittelhomestead.com
Round Top Chamber of Commerce: (979) 249-4042, www.roundtop.org



AMARILLO

On the plains, art and history collide

"IT JUST CREPT INTO MY HANDS, HONEST," reads a diamond-shaped sign in a yard on 10th Street. "The world is full of shipping clerks who have read the Harvard classics," reads another, next to a barbershop just north of downtown. These and dozens more enigmatic postings, scattered randomly across Amarillo, sprang from the mind of artist and philanthropist Stanley Marsh 3. During a five- or 10-year period—he didn't really keep track—Marsh provided the signs to anyone willing to have one. That included, apparently, residents of high- and low-brow neighborhoods alike, as well as a variety of businesses.

Marsh says his inspiration came from bits of country-western songs, poems, pithy quotes and other phrases, rearranged as he saw necessary to fit within the diamond and be readable from the road. Looking for the signs while navigating the town is something of a treasure hunt; Marsh won't say how many there are, and listing locations would spoil the fun.

Easier to spot is the most famous Marsh installment, Cadillac Ranch, 10 of said cars buried nose down in a pasture on the eastbound side of Interstate 40. Bring your own spray paint or grab one of the cans usually lying around and add to the layers of graffiti covering each chassis, incontrovertible evidence of the deep human desire to leave a mark.

For much older evidence of that desire, head to Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument, part of the Lake Meredith National Recreation Area about a half hour north of Amarillo. On free tours of the quarries offered daily between Memorial and Labor days (by reservation only), explore the high-quality flint prized by ancient residents for toolmaking and trade and view some petroglyphs, a sophisticated sort of early graffiti. The Lake Meredith Aquatic and Wildlife Museum in Fritch includes displays on the flint and people who used it, along with two aquariums and dioramas of area wildlife, from bobcats to owls and eagles.

A new exhibit at the Don Harrington Discovery Center, Hunters of the Sky, focuses on some of the raptors seen wild in the area. The center also offers exhibits on bodies and space, a series of aquaria, a planetarium, temporary displays and a monument to helium, one of Amarillo's significant natural resources. At the Botanical

Get a lesson on raptors or planets at the Don Harrington Discovery Center in Amarillo. And there's no better place to learn about the state's favorite cow horse than at the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum.



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Top: The Route 66 Historic District celebrates the famous highway's heyday.

Bottom: Eccentric artist and philanthropist Stanley Marsh 3 tips his hat to all fashion of whimsy with randomly placed messages that could pass for traffic signs.

Gardens next door, visit a tropical conservatory and gardens.

More conventional than Marsh's signs, but also fun to search for, more than 90 fiberglass, life-sized horses decorated by local artists grace locations around town. Called Hoofprints of the American Quarter Horse, the project was sponsored by Center City of Amarillo and the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum. That facility takes a comprehensive look at this most Texan of breeds through interactive exhibits and historic and educational displays.

Historic Route 66 staggers across Amarillo, most of it unrecognizable as a former major route across the continent's western half. But a smattering of retro motels remains, and the city dubbed roughly 12 blocks on the west side of town as the Route 66 Historic District, something worth wandering. A handful of antique shops, quilt

shops and art galleries alternate with cafés, lounges, bars and diners, some looking much as they did in the famous highway's heyday. Nettez House of Desserts serves breakfast along with quiche, sandwiches and the like, and, of course, homemade cakes and pies, with meringue that would make Grandma proud.

The Panhandle Plains Historical Museum, a half hour south on the campus of West Texas A&M University in Canyon, claims to be the largest history museum in Texas. It houses more than 3 million artifacts, from fossils to working windmills, cars, blankets, guns and paintings. The People of the Plains exhibit shows how humans have survived in this area for 14,000 years, and Pioneer Town recreates turn-of-the century life and includes what may be the oldest building in Texas. Bet it never had a Stanley Marsh sign, though.

Lake Meredith National Recreation Area/Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument: (806) 857-3151, www.nps.gov/lamr; www.nps.gov/alfl

Lake Meredith Aquatic and Wildlife Museum: (806) 857-2458

Don Harrington Discovery Center: (806) 355-9547, www.dhdc.org

American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum: (806) 376-5181, www.aqhhalloffame.com

Panhandle Plains Historical Museum: (806) 651-2244, www.panhandleplains.org

Amarillo Convention and Visitors Council: 1-800-692-1338, www.visitamarillotx.com

★★★★★ JEFFERSON

Release your inner beau and belle

IF ONLY THE TOURISTS WOULD PLAY along and dress in period styles ... shorts and T-shirts scream "wrong century," but fortunately, town boosters welcome visitors in almost any attire.

Jefferson's heyday was the 1840s when Big Cypress Creek was cleared for navigation and it became the state's leading inland port, with paddleboats plying cotton and other goods downstream and returning with supplies to build grand mansions. The coming of the railroad to nearby Marshall in the 1870s signaled

the end of Jefferson's grand era. But the mansions are still there. So are two hotels dating from the 1850s, the Excelsior House and the Historic Jefferson Hotel. Both are said to be haunted, as are many other bed-and-breakfasts in the area. On a recent trip we encountered a couple who had stayed at a bed-and-breakfast where doors mysteriously opened and closed and lights came on by themselves. On Saturday nights, a human-guided ghost tour leaves at 8 from outside the Jefferson Historical Society and Museum at 223 W. Austin St. Other tours can be arranged via reservation.

The candlelight Tour of Homes held several weekends in December is a wonderful time to see a handful of specially decorated historic homes. But any time of year, one can take a walking tour, driving tour or horse-drawn carriage tour of Jefferson's almost overwhelming historic district. Some of the homes that are not bed-and-breakfasts provide tours. One of the best is the House of the Seasons with its four-color glass cupola.

A walk down West Austin Street takes you past not only the two hotels but also the delightfully jumbled Jefferson Texas General Store. It has an old-fashioned soda fountain, vintage toys and posters, candies, jams, gimmie caps, books, cards—you name it. Fred's Books on the Bayou, also on

Jefferson relishes its Southern Gothic aura, complete with ghosts and extant residents who look back on a more graceful era.



West Austin Street, is the antithesis of the chain bookstore. Ninety-year-old proprietor Fred McKenzie is the town's pre-eminent historian and author of *Hickory Hill: Family Stories of Race, Religion and Romance in an East Texas Town* and *Avinger Texas, USA*. One can take an hour's trip on the bayou with Turning Basin Riverboat Tours. Or get a ride on an actual paddlewheel steamer, the Graceful Ghost, on nearby Caddo Lake. Call before making a visit, because neither boat runs all year.

Jefferson's variety of restaurants is surprising for a town of 2,000. Try Lamache's Italian Restaurant in the Historic Jefferson Hotel. People brag about the lasagna, but we preferred the Roma del Mar. The restaurant has a warm atmosphere and an impressive list of seafood and other specials. Chef-owned Stillwater Inn Restaurant serves sophisticated French/American cuisine with fresh herbs and homemade stocks. The best breakfast in town, complete with dainty Orange Blossom Muffins, comes with the bed-and-breakfast package at the Excelsior House. You may not be as well dressed as the fine table setting of linen and silver, but the proprietors are happy to see you, nonetheless.

Left: You can get (almost) anything that you want at the Jefferson Texas General Store. **Right:** Ninety-year-old Fred McKenzie can spin you a tale to get you primed for some of the great historic tomes in Fred's Books on the Bayou.

For your basic good grub, Jefferson's House of Pies on East Austin Street serves pies, of course, as well as cornbread sandwiches with a selection of meats, including fried baloney, should anybody want it (maybe 1840s residents considered it a delicacy). And then there's the Hamburger Store on the corner of North Market and West Lafayette. The store offers virtually every variety of hamburger ever conceived in a unique décor—the walls are covered with dollar bills posted by customers, many with messages penned on them.

There are simply too many wonderful bed-and-breakfasts to highlight just a couple in Jefferson. Go to the website of one or both reservation services and click to your heart's content: Jefferson Reservation Service, www.jeffersonreservationservice.com, or Classic Inn Reservations, www.classicinn.com.

Candlelight Tour of Homes: www.historicjeffersonfoundation.com

The House of the Seasons: (903) 665-8000, <http://houseoftheseasons.com>

Turning Basin Riverboat Tours: (903) 665-2222, www.jeffersonbayoutours.com

The Graceful Ghost: 1-888-325-5459

Stillwater Inn Restaurant (reservations required): (903) 665-8415, www.stillwaterinn.com

Marion County Chamber of Commerce: (903) 665-2672, www.jefferson-texas.com

Melissa Gaskill is a travel writer based in Austin.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park



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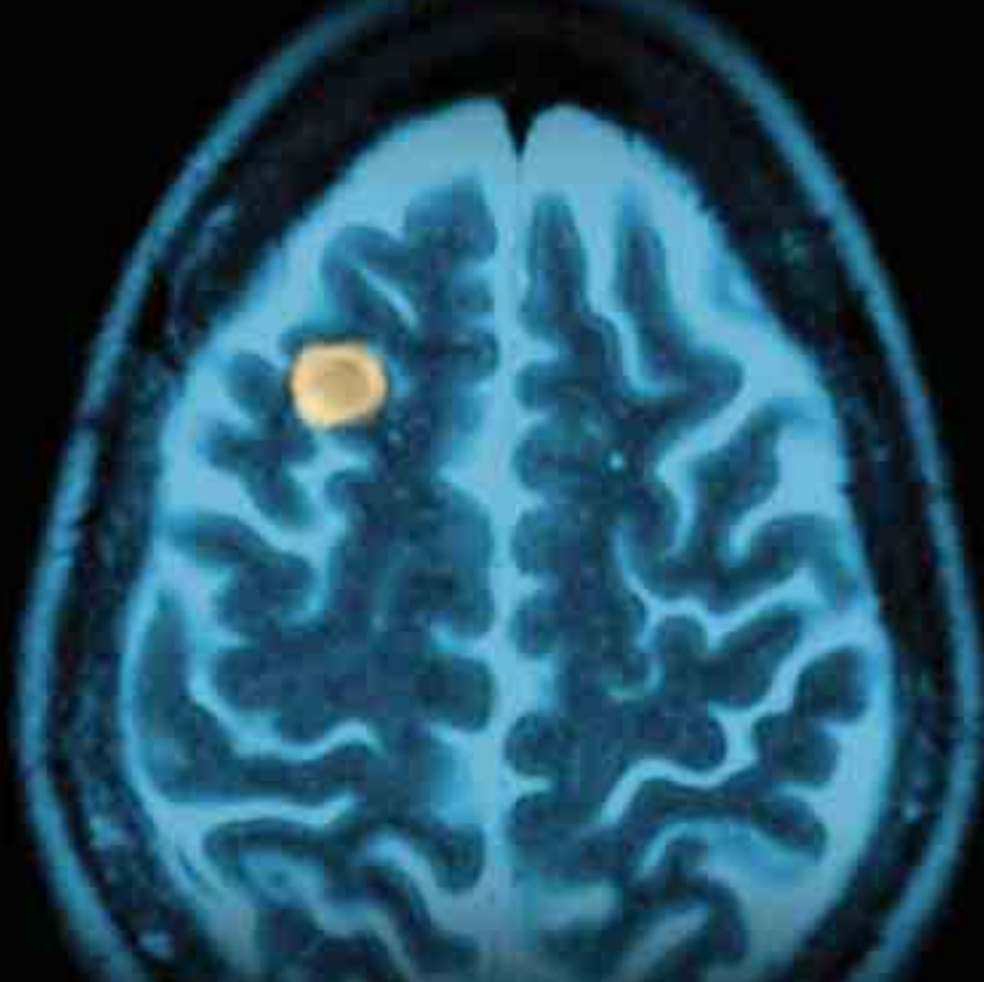
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American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum



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THE OTHER BIG BEND

BY DAN OKO

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT



Come explore the wild wonders of Texas' largest state park. A wide range of new Texas Parks & Wildlife Department initiatives make Big Bend Ranch State Park more welcoming than ever.



I am doing the shake and bake to the Left Hand Shutup, and though that sounds like some sort of newfangled dance, the desert view through the windshield tells a different story.



I AM RIDING SHOTGUN WITH BIG Bend Ranch State Park ranger Bill Broyles. The 14-year veteran of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) steers his Suburban deftly over the bumpy roads. We are heading toward the Solitario—Spanish for lonely or solitary—a collapsed volcano that forms the park's signature geological feature. The Left Hand Shutup is one of three steep canyons that drain this caldera,

which in aerial photos looks like a giant carbuncle burst open on the earth's cheek. As the sun warms the inside of our vehicle, the rough landscape outside looks as tan and wrinkled as the face of an old vaquero, while spiny ocotillo and stumpy yucca litter the mesas. Hidden seeps provide water for cottonwoods and wildlife.

"This country, you either love it or you hate it," Broyles says of this far-flung, north-central portion of the Chihuahuan Desert. "It can be a little humbling, if you know what I'm saying."

I know what Broyles is saying. I've come to this park to sample some new developments, including more than 50 new primitive campsites and an expanded trail system that will eventually offer more than 200 miles of multiple-use trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding. These latest efforts are part of the state of Texas' push to encourage public use of the 300,000 acres of state land that extends along the Rio Grande from southeast of Presidio to near Lajitas. While it's an area big and roaming in its own right—for example, it's more than twice the size of Saguaro National Park in Arizona—the park is often overlooked by outdoor lovers who tend to stick with the 800,000-acre Big Bend National Park next door, to the east. Taken together, the two parks are an adventure wonderland, offering everything from overnight trips to the sky islands of the Chisos Mountains of the national park to day hikes to explore the hidden, bowl-like Cinco Tinajas (the Spanish name means five pools)—a narrow canyon in which five pools of water staircase down the rock—in the heart of the state park that holds water year-round, attracting birds and other wildlife.

BUT EVEN THOUGH THE PARKS SHARE MANY attributes—abundant bird life, expansive stretches of uninhabited scenery, acreage along the last wild stretches of the Rio Grande—they are as distinct in their character as the gregarious blue jay is to the demure bluebird. Both are beautiful, but whereas the national park is bold and in your face, the state park is shy, subtle and a little more difficult to know.

For while the Chisos Mountains in the national park climb high above the desert floor, offering a woodland respite from the rough and prickly ecology below, on the state land, it's canyons and depressions like the caldera of the Solitario, which spans nine miles, that make the state park a special place for visitors. Considering that Big Bend Ranch is Texas' largest state park, it's all the more remarkable that while the

neighboring national park gets nearly half a million visitors each year, a mere fraction of that—some 10,000 individuals—visit the state property. The rewards, however, include the chance to see ancient tribal pictographs created thousands of years ago, three of the four highest waterfalls in Texas and virtually limitless exploring by foot, horseback, mountain bike or four-wheel-drive vehicle.

Standing on the rim of the Solitario, before making our descent to the Shutup, a closed canyon where ranchers used to pen cattle, Broyles points out lonely beige peaks, such as Needle Peak at 4,608 feet, Solitario Peak at 4,786 feet and Fresno Peak at 5,131 feet, which marks the entrance to Fresno Canyon and appears as a needle-eye notch in the distance. At the base of that canyon, TPWD has worked with the Nature Conservancy to obtain the 7,000-acre Fresno Ranch, which is being assessed for public recreational use. Directly before us, we spy surreal geological patterns where hardened magma has congealed below limestone layers, created when the pre-Paleozoic sea covered the desert floor.

Elsewhere hoodoo spires—tall, skinny spires of rock that protrude from the bottom of arid basins and badlands—that rival those in Utah aim skyward, and breathtaking cliffs shine like quicksilver. It's wilderness as far as I can see, reminding me of another name oldtimers had for the Big Bend: *El Despoblado*, Spanish for "the uninhabited land."

HISTORICALLY, EXTREME WEATHER, LACK OF potable water in the park despite numerous springs (potable water is available at park headquarters) and rough roads have challenged all but the hardest visitors to Big Bend Ranch State Park. Today, you will find a warm welcome at the Saucedo Complex, where visitors can sleep dormitory-style in the Saucedo Lodge Bunkhouse or take advantage of more expansive accommodations in the Big House. Saucedo, in the park interior, a 45-minute drive over rough ranch roads (though two-wheel drive is adequate), also offers a gift shop, mountain bike rentals (though, frankly, you are better off bringing your own), and an information center. On the park's eastern edge near Lajitas, the recently renovated Barton Warnock Environmental Education Center has a 2-acre botanical garden highlighting desert species and can provide permits for backcountry camping and access to the Contrabando Loop, which offers the best biking in the park.

Deep down in the Solitario, the road reaches its end, and we leave the Suburban to stretch our legs and explore the Shutup. Birds flit along a brushy wash that looks like it hasn't seen water in eons. Whether sparrows or flycatchers, neither Broyles nor I have the wherewithal to name our fast-moving feathered friends. Then the need for naming things passes in the canyon breeze, and I find that being in the depths of Big Bend Ranch brings with it a moment of serenity. There are few places left on the planet, much less in Texas, where the weight of the world can be sloughed off so completely. Even if you never intend to visit, this treasure that belongs to us seems worth celebrating.

Dan Oke, who lives in Austin, writes about the outdoors.



Truly Unique

Time travel at the speed of a 1935 Speedster?

The 1930s brought unprecedented innovation in machine-age technology and materials. Industrial designers from the auto industry translated the principles of aerodynamics and streamlining into everyday objects like radios and toasters. It was also a decade when an unequaled variety of watch cases and movements came into being. In lieu of hands to tell time, one such complication, called a jumping mechanism, utilized numerals on a disc viewed through a window. With its striking resemblance to the dashboard gauges and radio dials of the decade, the jump hour watch was indeed "in tune" with the times!

The Stauer 1930s Dashtronic deftly blends the modern functionality of a 21-jewel automatic movement and 3-ATM water resistance with the distinctive, retro look of a jumping display (not an



True to Machine Art esthetics, the sleek brushed stainless steel case is clear on the back, allowing a peek at the inner workings.

actual jumping complication). The stainless steel 1 1/2" case is complemented with a black alligator-embossed leather band. The band is 9 1/2" long and will fit a 7-8 1/2" wrist.

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Sometimes Capitol Hill seems pretty far away, but you can make sure the folks in Congress hear how you feel about keeping electricity affordable by visiting www.ourenergy.coop.

Help Cooperatives Keep Electric Bills Affordable

America's families are facing tough economic times. Many struggle to afford the basics: food, housing and energy. In fact, the cost of residential electricity in the United States climbed an average of 26 percent between 2002 and 2007, and it is projected to go even higher. As if that wasn't bad enough, some predict today's electricity supplies won't be able to keep pace with future demand.

Now, elected officials in Washington, D.C., are poised to make important policy decisions that will determine our nation's energy future. To guide lawmakers in a sound direction, electric cooperatives are making sure that your voice—the voice of the consumer—gets heard during legislative debates.

Through the "Our Energy, Our Future" grassroots awareness campaign, hundreds of thousands of electric cooperative consumers have sent more than 1.5 million messages to

their members of Congress.

Through this outreach, co-ops have shared our insight drawn from decades of offering safe and reliable electricity at affordable rates; service that always makes consumers—not the bottom line—priority one.

If you haven't already done so, please get involved in the campaign by asking your representatives on Capitol Hill one important question: Are you willing to work with your electric cooperative to ensure that our nation has reliable power at a price consumers can afford? The stakes are too high to miss this opportunity to help secure YOUR energy future.

To learn more about how you can begin a dialogue with your elected officials, please visit WWW.OURENERGY.COOP. Together we can keep electric bills affordable.

Today is the time to act. Tomorrow might be too late.

Lighten Your Cooking Load

You'll lighten the load on your electric bill if you conserve energy while cooking. Here are several quick and easy steps you can take to reduce energy use when cooking:

- Leave oven and burners off when not in use.
- Cook oven items simultaneously when possible.
- Leave the oven door closed as much as possible while cooking.
- Use self-cleaning features after you cook—when oven is already hot.
- Thaw frozen foods before cooking.
- Double your recipe—and freeze half for later.
- Match pan size to burner.
- Cook with less water—you'll save energy and keep nutrients in food.
- Once water reaches a boil, lower burner setting.



- Foods cooked in pots and pans with tight-fitting lids cook faster, using less energy.
- Don't preheat oven any sooner than necessary.
- When possible, preheat food in microwave—then finish in conventional oven.
- Dust off the Crock-Pot. Slow cooking in a Crock-Pot uses a lot less energy than simmering on the stove.
- Keep the reflector pans under your range-top heating elements bright and clean.
- Don't line your oven with aluminum foil. It can reduce your oven's efficiency by interfering with heat circulation.

Spring Has Sprung

Warmer Weather Ushers in Storm Season

Spring storms in Texas often pack a wicked punch and can leave your house without electricity. Are you prepared?

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Keep your electric cooperative's outage number handy. If the lights go off during a storm, or anytime, call us to report it.

- If you have a special medical condition that requires electrically powered equipment, it is essential that you inform your cooperative so we can add you to our registry. We will make every effort to restore your power quickly.

- Remember, if you have cordless telephones, they will not work without power. Have at least one phone that plugs directly into a wall outlet so you can call for help.

- Turn off all electrical appliances except a porch light. That way, when

the power is restored, a power surge won't trip your breakers or damage your items. The porch light is an easy signal for co-op linemen that your power is back on.

- Use caution if employing candles or lanterns for light. You don't want to start a fire. Your best bet is to have a flashlight or electric lamp and a supply of fresh batteries handy.

- If you have a portable generator and feel the need to use it, please be careful. Only use the generator outdoors in a well-ventilated area. Never hook the generator directly to your home's wiring. Doing so could cause a "backfeed" onto power lines that could injure or even kill a line worker.

- Stash away emergency supplies including:

- Flashlight and batteries
- A supply of drinking water and canned food



- A battery-operated portable radio
- First-aid kit

- If your power goes out, do not open your refrigerator or freezer. Food in a packed freezer can remain good for at least a day without electricity if the door is not opened; refrigerated foods can last 4 to 6 hours. If there is a long outage and you are in doubt, cook food immediately or throw it away.

Things To Know Before You Plant

April 24 is Arbor Day in Texas. Your electric cooperative encourages you to plant a tree—or an entire grove. Trees add beauty to your yard, help clean the air, and provide welcome shade in the summer.

If you decide to celebrate the day by planting a tree, make sure you keep a few things in mind:

- Think about the mature height of the tree. That sapling you are putting in the ground today will become taller and broader before you know it. Make sure its limbs, trunk or roots will not interfere with roofs or damage foundations.

- Look up before you plant. If you see electric lines overhead, think about another planting spot. Trees that grow close to power lines can lead to outages and line loss, which costs your co-op—and you by extension—money.



Remember to allow for at least 10 feet of clearance around power lines.

- Call before you dig. Don't stick a shovel into the ground until you dial 811, the national clearinghouse for underground utility lines. Even a simple digging job such as tree planting can damage utility line, disrupt vital services to an entire neighborhood or

cause injuries. Not to mention, if your digging damages underground utility lines, it could result in expensive fines and repair costs that you would have to bear. There is no charge for the 811 service.

- Plant deciduous trees (ones that lose their leaves in the fall) on the south and west sides of your home. That will let in the winter sunlight that helps warm your house on cold days and block the sun in the summer that can make your cooling system work overtime.

- If you have a mature tree that has grown too close to power lines, don't try to trim it yourself. Please call your cooperative and let us know. Our tree experts know how to work safely around electric lines and they have the specialized equipment that will help keep them safe.

Mother Tongue

*Spanish is forever
the language
of family.*

BY WINTER D.
PROSAPIO



peak in English,” my mother tells me. I barely realize I’ve slipped into Spanish with my grandmother. We’re out shopping, and my grandmother, who at 93 is fully bilingual but hard of hearing, is in need of new bifocals.

Somehow, as I’m nearly shouting the information to my grandmother from the soft-spoken technician, I go from, “She says they need to measure the width” to “tus ojos, porque estos son muy grande.”

My mother’s admonishment has nothing to do with speaking English because this is the United States, and we speak English here. I’m a fifth-generation Texan, thanks to my grandmother’s people. They were working the land here long before my Anglo grandfather had arrived on Ellis Island. The Hispanic side of my family has been fully bilingual for generations. We speak in English as a matter of courtesy to those who know only one language. It’s considered rude in our family to speak Spanish in front of people who may not understand what we’re saying.

Still, speaking Spanish feels completely different than speaking English—and I’m not even fluent in Spanish. I know border Spanish, granddaughter Spanish. It’s just enough to get by in family gatherings and excursions across the border for corn tortillas.

For me, English has been the way I express everything, from poetry to irony. I’d be hard-pressed to tell a joke in Spanish, let alone manage a clever play on words. My mother was a stickler for correct word usage, and I owe her a debt I can never repay for a great vocabulary and my ability to speak in clear, accent-free English.

So why does Spanish feel like warm chocolate coating my vocal chords, sweet and smooth? Especially when my command of the language is so bad?

When I’m speaking Spanish and specific words are lost to my brain, when I can’t figure out how to say “frames” or “purple,” I am forced to toss in the English words like rocks in the flowing stream. They land with a thump in the middle of my Spanish sentence, the water of words rushing around it. If my sister (who is fluent in both languages) talks too quickly, or when I try to keep up with an announcer on Spanish-language TV, I fall hopelessly behind, grasping at the few key words for purchase.

Yet with my grandmother, even my broken Spanish seems so much more loving that it slips out instinctively. Spanish is forever the language of family, and it’s a bond that won’t break. In our family we call our children “mi vida”—my life. It’s much more common to say “mija”—a slurring of the words “my” and “daughter”—than “hija”—which is merely “daughter.” The diminutive is sweeter, too, with the word “chiquitita” meaning little girl, but from my grandmother’s and mother’s lips an intense love forms like a wave on their tongues, and instead the word has



always meant “my precious, precious, little one.” To this day, if I hear this word, I expect a hug at any moment.

Out of respect for the technician, I nearly shout, in English this time, to my hard-of-hearing grandmother. I explain how long it will take for them to make the changes she needs in her new glasses. She nods and thanks the technician for her help—in English, of course—and notes that she’ll be happy not to have the headaches the old pair was giving her.

We leave and, as I help her into the car, I slip into the embrace of Spanish again. This time, there is no one to feel left out.

“Aquí, estamos agusto.” Here, we are at home.

Winter D. Prosapio frequently writes essays for Texas Co-op Power on family matters.

BLANCO

Weeds Redefined

Sometimes, a little digging can change your way of thinking in the garden.

**By Sheryl
Smith-Rodgers**



They grew in dense, tall thickets that blanketed the vacant fields around our suburban home in Corpus Christi. As a child, I spent hours playing in those common sunflowers, mashing down trails, building forts and hiding out with other neighborhood kids.

Weeds. That's what they were, of course. Undesirables that would never fit in with the wax-leaf ligustrum, variegated pittosporum, Chinese tallows and carpet grass that dominated our yard in the 1960s. With grudging help from me and my brother, Dad regularly mowed, trimmed and fertilized that big lawn, a project that typically took most of a hot, muggy afternoon.

To this day, I still *hate* wax-leaf ligustrum. With a vengeance. I'll never forget the countless hours I spent cutting its leggy branches into neat hedges, picking up the piles of clippings and depositing them in the same field where the sunflowers thrived. In other words, they created too much *work*, the antithesis of a happy childhood.

Or so I thought then. Now that I'm wiser (though not much older, mind you), I despise the ligustrum—some call it “disgustrum” for a loftier reason: It's highly invasive and to be avoided at all costs. For that matter, so are Chinese tallows, pyracantha (another resident of our '60s yard) and dozens of other species. Sure, we have a few forbidden plants established in our yard (they came with the house, you see). But as certified Texas Wildscapers through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, my husband, James, and I adhere to the program's No. 1 priority as much as we can: Plant at least 50 percent or more Texas natives.

Into our third year of wildscaping, we're amazed to see how our once-plain yard has transformed into a wildlife habitat that attracts more and more critters. Monarch butterflies hover over the blue mistflowers, sometimes depositing eggs on nearby butterfly weeds. In a tall clump of red Turk's cap, two anoles (lizards) secretively share quarters, now and then hanging out on our Wildscape sign. Last summer, a mysterious hole the diameter of a quarter appeared in our brushy sanctuary (left wild for protective cover). A bit of research turned up the chubby digger's name: an ox beetle (*Strategus aloeus*).

I've enjoyed learning so much about nature. Thanks to the Internet, I can look up (or e-mail an expert) my questions about insects, plants, animals and gardening dilemmas (I decided to let the oleander aphids on our butterfly weed win). On my blog, “Window on a Texas Wildscape,” I share what I learn, plus photos of flowers, bugs, spiders, current projects and more. I even write up adventures when they happen. Last summer, for instance, we rescued three orphaned eastern fox squirrels. Miraculously, I even coaxed the last one down from 30 feet up in our live oak!

All this is to say that these days whenever I'm out in our yard, I look at the ground with different eyes. Once, I yanked and pulled whatever I deemed uninvited. Scraggly grasses, strange plants about to bloom, strange plants in bloom,

bushy ground covers, you name it. If I (or someone else before me) didn't put them there, then they *must* be weeds. Right?

Now I question. Now I investigate.

"Want me to pull this up?" James asked one evening as we surveyed the pink and red blooms of our prolific *Salvia coccinea* (Coral Nymph and Lady in Red).

"Let's wait and see what the flowers look like," I replied, already curious. When the lavender, trumpet-shaped flowers appeared, I thumbed through *Wildflowers of Texas* and solved the mystery: violet ruellia (*Ruellia nudiflora*). Sometimes called wild petunia, the flowers of this species bloom at sunrise, then fall off in early afternoon.

The plant stayed. So did several more I spotted in the sanctuary.

When another species of purple flowers showed up in a field across the street, I snapped photos, then returned to the wildflower book. Hmm, a silverleaf nightshade (*Solanum elaeagnifolium*), listed on the Texas toxic plant database. Just a few days later, I noticed an uninvited guest with familiar-looking yellow flowers in our withering vegetable garden. Another photo, another investigation. Turns out the buffalo bur (*Solanum rostratum*) and silverleaf nightshade belong to the same family, Solanaceae.

James offered to transplant the prickly buffalo bur (so named because its spiny fruit once stuck to the hides of roaming buffalo). Ultimately, we let it stay.

Our interest in native plants naturally led us to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, where we spent a hot July afternoon. After the field trip, we planted rock penstemons (*Penstemon baccharifolius*) and blackfoot daisies (*Melampodium leucanthum*), both hardy Texas species we'd admired growing at the center. But what absolutely stunned me during our visit was seeing something I'd considered a weed nearly all my life actually *showcased*.

"That's a *plant*?" I said, staring at the sign, completely dumbfounded. Heck, I'd never even considered the thought of it having a *name*. Back at home, I got out my book and learned that Texas frogfruit (*Phyla incisa*) makes an excellent ground cover. Plus, larvae of the phaeon crescent (butterfly) eat the leaves. Wow. Fascinating!

Which leads me to another weed-turned-plant in our wildscape—horse herb (*Calycotarpus vialis*). Two summers ago, I yanked up the green stuff with tiny yellow flowers by the droves to make way for a patch of grass I'd rooted. "Weed, weed, weed," I'd mutter as I worked. Then drought hit last summer, and what bounced back first when the rains came? That weed! But by then, I'd done some research. Depending on your viewpoint, horse herb either makes a great ground cover ... or it takes over everything where it shouldn't.

Needless to say, I asked James to go easy when he mowed over the horse herb. And could he please also watch out for the whitemouth dayflowers (*Commelina erecta*) with the little blue blossoms? They're not a weed, you know.

Well, at least, not any more.

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers writes about life and nature for Texas Co-op Power.



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To make matters worse, my wife's become obsessed with emeralds. She can't stop sharing stories about how Cleopatra

cherished the green gem above all others and how emeralds were worshiped by the Incas and Mayans and prized by Spanish conquistadors and Indian maharajahs. She's even buying into ancient beliefs that emeralds bring intelligence, well-being and good luck to anyone who wears them. I don't have the heart to tell her that I'm never going to find another deal this lucky.

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O. Henry: the Most Complex Character of All

BY NORMAN L. MACHT

Of the more than 300 short stories written by William Sydney Porter under the pen name of O. Henry, about 50 of them were based on his life and times in the West. Many reflect the nearly 16 years he lived in South Texas, Austin and Houston.

Porter was 20 in 1882 when a family friend invited him to come and live on sheep and cattle ranches that the family managed on the Nueces River. Porter was a guest, but he worked alongside the ranch hands, listened to their short and tall tales around the campfires, rode the range with them, and witnessed firsthand the range wars between the cattlemen and rustlers. Everything he saw and heard stuck in his mind like a burr.

For his Texas stories, he created more than 200 characters, composites and variations of the men and women he had seen, lived among and worked with: cowboys, outlaws, train robbers, saloon keepers, gamblers, prospectors, tramps, swindlers, general store proprietors, lawmen, schoolmarm—characters he could choose from to populate his stories like a casting director with a corral full of actors.

One character took on a life that has lasted more than a century: the Cisco Kid, a complex good guy/bad guy who became a staple of every form of storytelling in the 20th century, down to a 1972 song called “The Cisco Kid” by the group War.

Porter depicted his characters at work, as seen in this passage from “The Higher Abdication”:

“Six cowpunchers of the Cibolo Ranch were waiting around the door of the ranch store. Their ponies cropped grass near-by, tied in the Texas fashion—which is not tied at all. Their bridle reins had been dropped to the earth, which is a more effectual way of securing them (such is the power of habit and imagination) than you could devise out of a half-inch rope and a live-oak tree.”

When Porter visited nearby San Antonio, he tucked away pictures of the sidewalk games of chance, the drifters looking for a handout, the city folks with their fancy clothes and the city itself. Such imagery found a place in “The Higher Abdication”:

“The winding, doubling streets,

leading nowhere, bewildered him. And then there was a little river, crooked as a pot-hook, that crawled through the middle of the town, crossed by a hundred little bridges so nearly alike that they got on Curly’s nerves.”

Porter saw the temporary tent towns, where every other storefront was a saloon or gambling room or both that moved with the railroad construction gangs crossing the nation, and he witnessed the outlaws and ranch hands fogged with whiskey who shot up the towns on their way out. A passage from “The Reformation of Calliope” reads: “Glass fell like hail; dogs vamosed; chickens flew, squawking; feminine voices shrieked concernedly to youngsters at large.”

In addition to his two years on the ranch, Porter’s Texas influences included working at the state land office and a bank in Austin and a newspaper in Houston. His position as a draftsman at the land office led him to a search for the Lost Bowie Silver Mine that introduced him to the Hill Country. Following the directions on a 30-year-old document, Porter and two others set out through Pleasant Valley, Dripping Springs, Johnson City and Fredericksburg to Menard County. The directions were too vague, and they never found the treasure.

As a bank teller, Porter was responsible for the accounts each day. Somebody had been dipping in the till. Numbers didn’t balance. Banking regulators noticed. Porter, charged with embezzlement of money, took the rap and went to prison. The experience taught him about bank frauds and bank examiners, and they became story devices. Even his time in prison, where he heard the adventures of a train-robbing cellmate, gave him material for stories of outlawry that ring with authenticity.

Unlike Zane Grey, the most widely read writer of Western fiction who visited the Southwest but never lived there, Porter’s Texas stories are based on personal experiences, his keen ear for dialogue and powers of observation.

Norman L. Macht wrote about the Newton Gang in the October 2008 edition of Texas Co-op Power.



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Small Bites: Big Flavor

BY KEVIN HARGIS Any time we're hosting dinner or a party, I like to spend a little time getting appetizers ready. I find myself relying on a regular cast of characters (hot pepper jelly on cream cheese, guacamole and chips, relish trays). There's not a thing wrong with that, and often, it's those snacks that are the most popular. But sometimes I like to stretch my horizons with something unexpected or a little more challenging.

I recently ran across an interesting recipe in *Reata: Legendary Texas Cuisine*, a cookbook that chronicles the upscale Western-inspired dishes served at the Reata restaurant, which has locations in Alpine and Fort Worth.

Many of the cookbook's recipes are for game, which, unless you're a hunter or know one, isn't easy to obtain. But this appetizer is based on a more common ingredient, catfish, and yields a finished product reminiscent of crab cakes at a fraction of the cost.

CATFISH CAKES

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 pound fresh catfish fillets | 4 teaspoons Reata Grill Spice (recipe to follow) |
| 2 tablespoons yellow onion, finely chopped | 2 teaspoons Tabasco sauce |
| 2 tablespoons green bell pepper, finely chopped | 2 teaspoons dried basil, crumbled |
| 4 teaspoons oil | Peanut oil |
| 2 eggs, beaten | All-purpose flour |
| 4 teaspoons Old Bay seasoning | |
| ½ cup mayonnaise | |
| 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard | |
| 1 cup dry bread crumbs | |
| 2 teaspoons lime juice | |

In large pot of boiling water, poach catfish 15-20 minutes, until fish begins to flake with a fork. Drain and allow to cool. In large skillet, sauté onion and pepper in 4 teaspoons oil until vegetables are soft; set aside. When catfish is cool enough to handle, crumble into large bowl. Add

eggs, cooked onion and pepper and mix. Add remaining ingredients except peanut oil and flour and mix into firm consistency that holds its shape. Form mixture into six to 10 round cakes of equal size. Heat enough peanut oil to fry cakes in iron skillet or deep fryer to about 350 degrees. Just before frying, dust cakes with flour. Fry, turning frequently, until golden brown and drain on paper towels. Serve with sauce of your choice.

GRILL SPICE

- ¼ cup black pepper
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 4 tablespoons thyme
- 3 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2½ tablespoons sugar
- ¼ cup cumin
- ½ cup paprika

Combine and blend well and store in airtight container.

Serving size: 1 cake. Per serving: 222 calories, 9.9 g protein, 15.2 g fat, 9.1 g carbohydrates, 192 mg sodium, 63 mg cholesterol.

One of my favorite appetizers is one my dad used to make when he'd host a barbecue. It has a simple roster of ingredients, but the lip-smacking total surpassed the sum of the parts. Thinking about it makes me want to grab a toothpick and dive right in.

BARBECUED SAUSAGE

- ¼ cup butter
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 cup barbecue sauce
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1½ tablespoons hot pepper sauce
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
- ⅓ cup vinegar
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 can (12 ounces) beer
- 1 whole lemon, chopped
- 1 link sausage

Simmer butter and onion in ⅓ cup water in medium saucepan until onion is tender. Add remaining ingredients except sausage to onion mixture and cook uncovered until thickened. Cut sausage into bite-sized pieces (about 24). Transfer sauce to Crock-Pot and add sausage. Cook until sausage is heated through.

Serving size: 2 pieces. Per serving: 127 calories, 1.6 g protein, 5.1 g fat, 17.1 g carbohydrates, 591 mg sodium, 13 mg cholesterol.




DEBBIE FOY *Wood County Electric Cooperative*

 Prize-winning recipe: **Nanny's Italian Stuffed Mushrooms**

If you like mushrooms, then you're in for a treat with these beauties, which remind one of miniature pizzas in a way. The flavors of pepperoni, pepper, onions and spices blend nicely in this appetizer that will look great on the serving platter.

NANNY'S ITALIAN STUFFED MUSHROOMS

- 12 large fresh mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 ounces pepperoni, diced
- 1/4 cup green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 cup finely crushed crackers
- 3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, finely grated
- 1 tablespoon snipped parsley
- 1/2 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1/4 teaspoon oregano
- Dash pepper
- 1/3 cup chicken broth

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Wash mushrooms. Remove and finely chop stems. Drain caps and allow to dry. Melt butter in a skillet and add onion, pepperoni, bell pepper, garlic and chopped mushroom stems. Cook until vegetables are tender, but not brown. Remove from heat and add cracker crumbs, cheese, parsley, salt, oregano and pepper. Mix well. Stir in chicken broth. Spoon stuffing into mushroom caps, mounding tops. Place caps in shallow baking dish with about a quarter inch of water in bottom. Bake 25 minutes or until heated through.

Serving size: 1 mushroom. Per serving: 89 calories, 4.3 g protein, 4.9 g fat, 7.9 g carbohydrates, 2.7 g fiber, 244 mg sodium, 12 mg cholesterol.

COOK'S TIP

When choosing mushrooms at the store, look for ones with moist, firm, uncracked stems. The mushroom should have an even color and not appear at all slimy.

PRAIRIE FIRE DIP

- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 medium onion
- 1 can (4 ounces) diced jalapeños
- 1 can (4 ounces) diced green chiles
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 cups grated Cheddar cheese

1 cup grated mozzarella cheese
Combine all ingredients in a heavy saucepan. Heat on medium-low heat until cheese melts. Stir well and serve hot.

Serving size: 1/4 cup. Per serving: 149 calories, 7.7 g protein, 11.4 g fat, 3.2 g carbohydrates, 0.6 g fiber, 168 mg sodium, 35 mg cholesterol.

DEBBIE GREEN
Comanche Electric Cooperative
CAJUN PINWHEELS

- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- Dash salt and pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/4 cup black olives
- 1/4 cup green olives
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- 1 cup Monterey jack cheese, shredded
- 1 pound cooked salad shrimp, deveined and chopped
- 7 flour tortillas, room temperature

Combine cream cheese, spices, olives, onion, cheese and shrimp in a small bowl. Stir well. Spread over each tortilla, then roll tightly. Cover with plastic wrap and chill in refrigerator at least two hours. Slice rolls 1/2 inch thick and layer on platter.

Serving size: 3 slices. Per serving: 239 calories, 12.8 g protein, 11.5 g fat, 19.2 g carbohydrates, 1.3 g fiber, 446 mg sodium, 74 mg cholesterol.

GINGER MARTIN
Pedernales Electric Cooperative
CHOCOLATE BALLS

- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate chips
- 1/4 cup honey
- 2 1/2 cups crushed vanilla wafers
- 1/3 cup sweet red wine
- 2 cups ground walnuts
- Granulated sugar

Melt chocolate chips with honey in saucepan over low heat. Remove from heat and stir in wafer crumbs, wine and nuts. When cool enough to handle, shape into 1-inch balls and roll in sugar. Store in airtight container at least five days to allow flavors to blend.

Serving size: 2 pieces. Per serving: 229 calories, 3.9 g protein, 12 g fat, 26.6 g carbohydrates, 1.6 g fiber, 74 mg sodium, trace cholesterol.

JOHN AND SHARI RUDY
Pedernales Electric Cooperative
PRESENTATION TIP
Serve Naturally

Use a hollow vegetable as a serving bowl. For instance, use bell peppers of various colors. Cut the tops off and take the seeds out. Cut a thin slice off the bottoms to give them a flatter surface to rest on, taking care not to cut into the hollows. Fill them with dip. Pumpkins or other hard-shelled squash prepared in the same manner make unusual soup bowls. A hollowed-out melon will hold fruit salad.

CORRECTION AND CLARIFICATION

The directions for "Texas Today Cake" featured in January's issue may have been unclear. The sweet potato should be cooked, peeled and mashed, and the beef jerky should be chopped fine. In addition, the correct spelling of the recipe contributor's name is Mollie Hejl.

—KEVIN HARGIS

RECIPE CONTEST

August's recipe contest topic is **BUDGET STRETCHERS**. When times get tough, the tough get thrifty. Do you have any recipes that make for the best use of inexpensive ingredients or repurpose leftovers? We'd also like to pass along tips for stretching your food dollars. The deadline is **APRIL 10**.

Send recipes to Home Cooking, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You may also fax them to (512) 763-3408, e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.texascoop.power.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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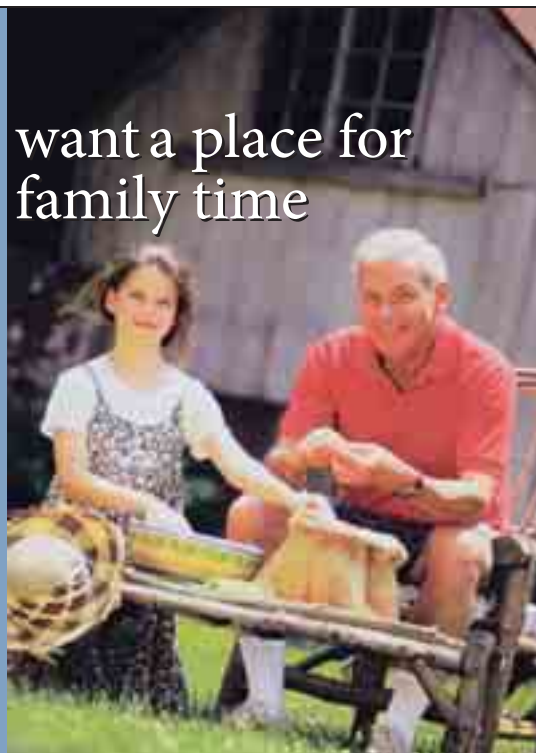
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◀ If it could talk, this no-longer-functioning bridge near Uteley would have lots of stories to tell. **Jan Emerson Riley** sent us this photo; she and her husband are members of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

▼ Go to Goliad State Park in South Texas, and you'll find this shaded, wooden pathway. We fell in love with this pedestrian bridge, which looks like it's stepping away from the fast and modern world and back to the days of Huck Finn. **Wendy Riggs** of Floresville sent us this nostalgic photo; her parents, **Weldon** and **Sally Riggs**, are members of Karnes Electric Cooperative.



▲ Fayette Electric Cooperative member **Paul Bailey** sent in this photo which quickly became one of our favorites. This covered bridge—which looks like something out of a fairy tale—is not located in New England; rather, it spans a small stream on his friend's property near Houston.



▲ Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative member **Holly Norris** sent us this photo taken in Brackenridge Park in San Antonio. The San Antonio Zoo Eagle, the miniature train that travels these bridged tracks through the San Antonio Zoo and the park, has been in operation since 1956. It has withstood several derailments, a couple of collisions and even a modern-day train robbery in the summer of 1970.



▲ This rusty, functional railroad bridge carries trains safely into the East Texas town of Liberty. Thank you to Sam Houston Electric Cooperative member **Mindy Bortz** for giving us a different and artful way of looking at something we pass by every day.

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ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
June	Stained Glass Windows	Apr 10
July	Vacation Photos	May 10
Aug	Sisters	Jun 10
Sep	Texas Skyscapes	Jul 10
Oct	Cowgirls	Aug 10
Nov	Daredevils	Sep 10

STAINED GLASS WINDOWS is the topic for our JUNE 2009 issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to Stained Glass Windows, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, before April 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.texascooppower.com.

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Sylvan Beach Festival & Crawfish Jam, (281) 471-1123, www.laportechamber.org

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Zedler Mill Classic Canoe Race, (830) 875-3214, ext. 4, www.zedlermill.com

PRINCETON
Onion Festival, (469) 952-5400, ext. 3508, www.princetononionfestival.com

25 WALLER
Demolition Derby, (281) 813-6665

CISCO [25-26]
Civic League Folklife Festival, (254) 442-3827

26 BELLVILLE
Fruehling Saengerfest, (979) 865-0935

30 HELOTES [4/30-5/3]
Cornyval & PRCA Rodeo, (210) 695-2103

PORT NECHES [4/30-5/3]
Riverfest & Classic Car Show, (409) 722-9154

MAY

01 GONZALES
Country Music Show, (830) 672-6532, www.gonzalestexas.com

02 BRENHAM
Country Flavors Festival, 1-888-273-6426, www.downtownbrenham.com

HUNTSVILLE
Airing of the Quilts, (936) 295-2150, www.tallpinesquiltguild.com

WHITEWRIGHT [2-3]
Winery & Rose Tour, (903) 364-2000

Everything's bigger in Texas, including this list of events. To see them all, please go to www.texascooppower.com.

Event information can be mailed to **Around Texas**, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, faxed to (512) 763-3407, e-mailed to aroundtx@texas-ec.org, or submitted on our website at www.texascooppower.com. Please submit events for June by April 10.

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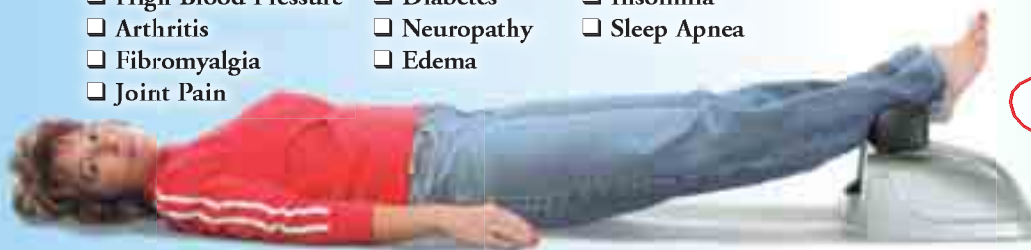
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis | <input type="checkbox"/> Neuropathy | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep Apnea |
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I have had pain in both of my knees since I had them replaced in 2000. I use the Exerciser 2000 when I first get up in the morning and the last thing at night before I go to bed. After a couple of days I worked up to a full 16 minute session. What a blessing! I have no pain, can walk better, keep my balance better and am so grateful, at 77, to lead a normal life again. I thank you so much.—*Gwen S.*

I have had such lower back pain that I could hardly stand it. I saw your ad two years ago and thought it wouldn't help me. But, I ordered one anyway. I have used it for four months now. I have very little back pain, am more regular, and I sleep much better thanks to the Exerciser 2000.—*C. Cordes*

I am 97 years old and have edema in my left foot and leg. My daughter saw the Exerciser 2000 in an ad and encouraged me to try it. It is helping a lot and I feel alive again. Thank you!—*Grace R.*

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I am 76 years old, heavy, stiff with arthritis and a leukemic for the past nine years. Using your machine twice a day has made me feel ten years younger. I also have a great deal more energy. When you say that your company is in the business of "helping people feel better", it is no fib!—*Kate B.*

I have loved your product for many years now and couldn't live without one. It truly is the best product on the market... and I would never pay a person to do what this does better. You have the control of it all...and I love that. It definitely pays for itself many times over!!—*Kathy C.*

As a Chiropractor, I would say the Exerciser 2000 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 freeing up a spine that had become stiff and arthritic.—*Garry Gorsuch, D.C.*

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It's possible to stay on Interstate 20 and speed right by Tyler, Longview and Marshall on the route to Shreveport, Louisiana, but you would miss three gems of East Texas that lie just off the freeway along a 70-mile stretch of dense pines and hardwoods. No doubt originally fueled by oil wealth and the lumber and cotton industries, the fine arts museums are especially remarkable. They would make a nice tour by themselves. Be sure to check museum hours. All three towns also have elegant bed-and-breakfasts, historic homes and buildings, and antiques galore.

TYLER

Traveling east on Interstate 20, take a jog south to Tyler on U.S. Highway 69, returning to the interstate via U.S. Highway 271. Tyler is known as the Rose Capital of the World, and the 14-acre **MUNICIPAL ROSE GARDEN** is a must-see with its vast formal displays of All-America roses. In October, the town goes all out for the annual **TEXAS ROSE FESTIVAL**, where the queen and her attendants, wearing a king's ransom in beaded finery, reign from imaginative floats. In the rose garden complex is a museum dedicated to the Rose Festival, the gowns and Tyler's role in the rose industry.

The **TYLER MUSEUM OF ART** has a permanent collection focusing on early and modern Texas artists. On an equally genteel note, one can view antebellum furniture at the **GOODMAN MUSEUM**.

Children will enjoy several of Tyler's other museums, including **HARROLD'S MODEL TRAIN MUSEUM**, **THE DISCOVERY SCIENCE PLACE**, **THE HISTORIC AVIATION MEMORIAL MUSEUM** and **BROOKSHIRE'S WORLD OF WILDLIFE MUSEUM & COUNTRY STORE**, which has a replica of a 1926 grocery store. And don't forget the **CALDWELL ZOO**. Phew. There's more. But we must get on to Longview, which brushes I-20 on its southern edge.

Convention and Visitors Bureau: 1-800-235-5712, www.visittyler.com

TYLER to MARSHALL

From All-America roses to great American art, there's a lot to like on this short excursion.

BY KAYE NORTHCOTT



Texas Rose Festival and Museum: (903) 597-3130, www.texasrosefestival.com/museum/garden.htm

LONGVIEW

Perhaps the best time to visit Longview is in July during the **GREAT TEXAS BALLOON RACE**, the state's largest sanctioned balloon event. These magnificent inflatables are wonderful to watch on a sunny day, but even better on Friday and Saturday evenings during Balloon Glow. As the sun sets, the operators tie down their beauties and let visitors come up close to see how the balloons are fired up and inflated.

Any time of year is good for viewing historic homes and buildings downtown. And don't forget the **GREGG COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM**. Also downtown is the **LONGVIEW MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS**, which has six permanent collections.

Convention and Visitors Bureau: (903) 753-3281, www.longviewtx.com

The Great Texas Balloon Race: (903) 753-3281, www.gtbr.net

MARSHALL

Back on I-20, proceed to Marshall, which is also just north of the freeway. Marshall is best known for its venerable pottery works, **MARSHALL POTTERY**, founded in 1895. Today, it still produces wheel-thrown utilitarian gray stoneware, the only company in Texas to do so. One can be transfixed watching the artisans carefully shaping pots and bowls at their wheels. They use the same local white clay the Caddo Indians worked with. In addition to its distinctive stoneware, the pottery company puts most of its efforts these days in mass-produced earthenware flower pots, which go for a song.

The Christmas season is a good time to go to Marshall for the **WONDERLAND OF LIGHTS** when more than 125,000 lights embellish the historic courthouse, and businesses and neighborhoods also get into the act.

And then there's the lovely **MICHELSON MUSEUM OF ART**, established in 1985 to care for the life work of Russian-American artist Leo Michelson (1887-1978). The museum has more than 1,000 paintings, drawings and prints donated by Michelson's wife. They made their circuitous way to Marshall via Wendy Reves, a Marshall-born high-fashion model who married Winston Churchill's publisher and made Michelson's acquaintance—along with all the other great names of her period on the continent. The museum has two rare candid portraits of Churchill, the only ones he sat for.

Across the street from the historic courthouse, **OS2 RESTAURANT & PUB** is a great place for a fine meal. If you're in the mood for soul food, try **P&J** at 506 E. Travis St.

Convention and Visitors Bureau: (903) 935-7868, ext. 12, <http://visitmarshalltexas.org>

Marshall Pottery: (903) 938-9201, www.marshallpotterystore.com

Kaye Northcott is editor of Texas Co-op Power.

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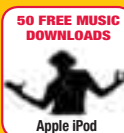
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