

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

JULY 2009

RED, WHITE AND BOOM

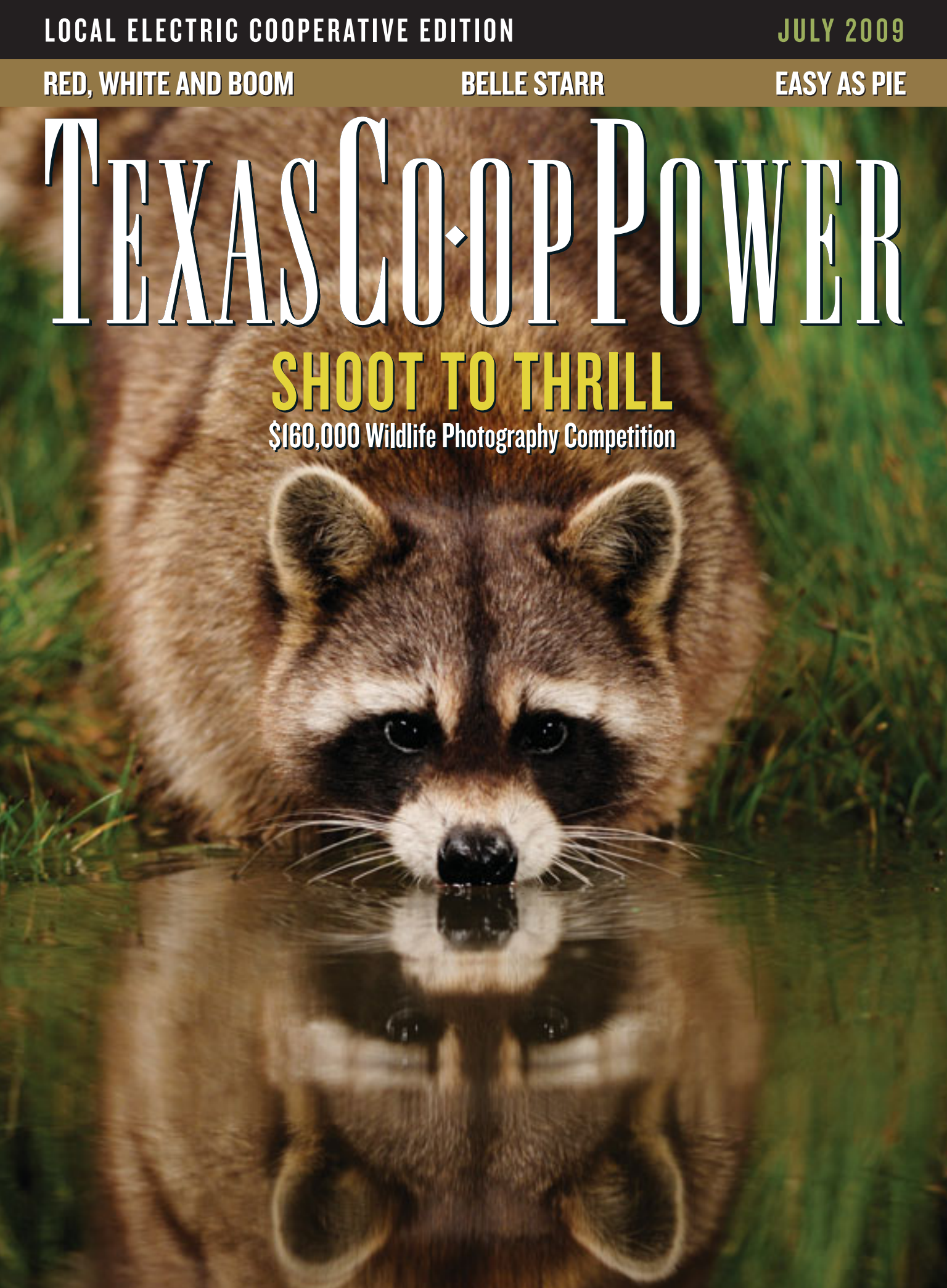
BELLE STARR

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SHOOT TO THRILL

\$160,000 Wildlife Photography Competition





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July

2009

VOLUME 66 NUMBER 1



FEATURES

8 Wildlife Photography Shoot To Thrill

By Melissa Gaskill

Photos by Rolf Nussbaumer

Promoting wildlife photography and land conservation are the goals of the Texas-based Pro-Tour of Nature Photography. Last year, it offered the largest wildlife photography purse in the world—\$160,000 in total.

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By Thomas Korosec

On a ranch in southwest Fannin County, Pyrotex has assembled Fourth of July fireworks displays for 34 cities, small towns and country clubs across the state.

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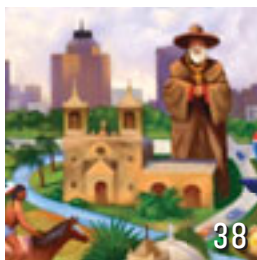
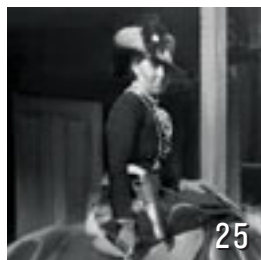
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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

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letters



HONOR TEXAS HERITAGE

I love to read your magazine—lots of fun articles. I would love to see a write-up on Texas dance halls. This is another Texas heritage being brought back to life by Texas Dance Hall Preservation, which has helped restore Sengelmann Hall in Schulenburg. The dance hall was mentioned in your May 2009 issue in the “Hit the Road” travel column.

PAULA JUNGSMANN

Bandera Electric Cooperative

Editor's note: “Texas Dance Halls” was our cover story in January 2006. There are plans to return to them in a future “Hit the Road.”

WHICH WAS FIRST?

In the May 2009 issue of *Texas Co-op Power* is an article about the first washateria. A report from my wife's kinfolk indicates the original was in Hollis, Oklahoma, a year earlier than the Fort Worth one.

DEE BRANNAN

New Braunfels

Editor's note: According to the family genealogy, the *Helpy-Selfy Laundry* was founded in 1933, a year before the much-publicized *Laundromat* in Fort Worth.

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.

POWER TALK

THE I-HOUSE: IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

The industrial-chic i-house may soon be available for those on a manufactured-housing budget. Clayton Homes, the country's largest builder of manufactured homes, recently showed the cutting-edge dwelling in Omaha, Nebraska, at the annual shareholders' meeting of investor Warren Buffett's Berkshire-Hathaway, Inc., company. Berkshire-Hathaway owns Clayton Homes.

The 1,023-square-foot model, which went on sale the first weekend in May, carries a base cost of \$93,300. Perfect for the ecology-minded buyer, it includes Energy Star appliances, compact fluorescent lighting, energy-efficient windows and a v-shaped metal roof for collecting rainwater and anchoring optional solar panels. It's the standard prefabricated trailer of two bedrooms and one bathroom with industrial airs and high-quality built-ins, such as optional bamboo floors. The long, main core house has a deck off one of the bedrooms.

For \$26,600 more, you can add a flex room, which is designed for office space or guests and has a roof deck. On the floor plan, the flex room dots the lower-case “i” shape formed by the main structure of the house—hence the moniker “i-house.”

The Associated Press reports that Clayton Homes CEO and President Kevin Clayton, who claims that the i-house is at least 30 percent more energy efficient than traditional homes, acknowledged paying homage to the iPod and iPhone for the name.

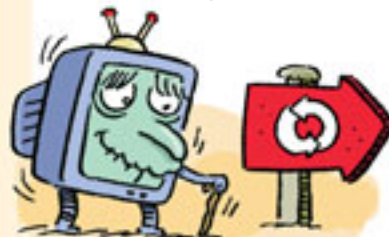
Clayton Homes plans to price the i-house at \$100 to \$130 per square foot, depending on amenities and add-ons, such as additional bedrooms. Clayton marketing officials say a “stick-built” house—one that's built on-site, out of lumber—with similar features could range from \$200 to \$300 a square foot to start.

For a virtual tour of the i-house, and for company contact information, go to www.claytonihouse.com.



Where To Recycle

More and more, companies are helping you recycle old electronic items. According to *Consumer Reports*, LG (including the Zenith and GoldStar brands) has 206 drop-off centers in 46 states; Samsung has more



than 200 centers in 50 states; and Sony has 274 nationally. Sharp, Panasonic and Toshiba offer combined drop-off programs for TVs and audiovisual equipment at 280 sites in 50 states. In addition, people who buy new Dell computers from the company's home and home office site can recycle any brand of an old personal computer at no charge.

For information on recycling cell phones, go to www.recellular.com/recycling. For information on public recycling programs, primarily in major metropolitan areas, go to www.mygreenelectronics.com.

H A P P E N I N G S

If you're itchin' for some summertime fun that packs a big, friendly bite, head down south of Houston to Clute for the 29th annual **GREAT TEXAS MOSQUITO FESTIVAL**.

Scheduled for July 23-25, the festival honors the pesky, humidity-loving mosquito in this Southeast Texas town that's a five-minute drive from the Gulf of Mexico. The Swat Team—the festival's executive board of directors—will be on hand to keep events such as the Mr. and Mrs. Mosquito Legs and Mosquito Calling contests running smoothly in Clute Municipal Park.

And Willie-Man-Chew, a 26-foot-tall inflatable (think parade float) that organizers claim is the biggest mosquito in the world, will give the anticipated 18,000 attendees something to gawk at as they listen to live music and enjoy food and arts and crafts from a variety of vendors.

Other events include the Dodge Ball Sting Tournament and the Skeeter Beaters Baby Crawling contest. For more information, call 1-800-371-2971 or go to www.mosquitofestival.com. For tips on how to protect yourself from mosquito bites and mosquito-borne diseases, go to www.mosquito.org/resources/summer-safety.aspx.

WHO KNEW?



In his book *Spare Time in Texas* (2008, University of Texas Press), author David G. McComb writes about the J.U.G.s—Just Us Girls—who made a literary impact in the Panhandle:

"In the Lone Star State ... bright, educated, middle- and upper-class women inspired the drive to establish public libraries. Typical were the J.U.G.s (Just Us Girls) of Amarillo, Texas, an intellectual discussion group that needed books for their conversations and started a public library in 1902. Even though the J.U.G.s could not vote, no city council, no man, could withstand their determination."

RESACA DE LA PALMA STATE PARK

The 1,200 subtropical acres of Brownsville's **Resaca de la Palma State Park** boast the largest tract of native habitat in the World Birding Center's network of nine wildlife preserves along the Rio Grande. Several cities and counties, working with state and federal authorities, collaborated to create the network—no mean feat in such a densely populated area of the state across the border from Mexico.

Through the years, flooding of the river carved out *resacas*—small tributaries, or channels—that deepened with every flood. These *resacas* were cut off when the river meandered in a different direction and was dammed upstream of the state park. But during wet seasons, the area's *resacas* make prime habitat for birds seeking shallow ponds and marshes. Dense stands of brush and woodland thickets adjacent to South Texas' *resacas* attract other local and migrating birds and butterflies.

Resaca de la Palma, which opened in 2008, has eight miles of trails and four miles of observation decks that overlook the four-mile-long *resaca* that curves through the park. In addition, a 2.8-mile tram loop winds through the park. For more information, call (956) 350-2920 or go to www.worldbirdingcenter.org.



JUAN ARIAS. © TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

FUTURE TALK

SWITCH TO ELECTRICITY

Switch grass is one of several forage grasses being studied in Texas and

elsewhere as a potential biofuel ... but maybe not to produce gasoline. Researchers at the University of California, Merced, say there might be more bang for the buck—or mileage to the experiment—if the grass is burned to produce electricity that will power battery-operated cars.

The journal *Science* reports that preliminary studies indicate using biomass—plant matter that's grown and used to generate electricity—is more efficient for transportation than making biofuels. It might also do more to cut levels of carbon dioxide.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN MARGESON

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2 Good 2 Be True = False

Beware of 'too good to be true' energy claims

By Elizabeth McGowan



LEAN TIMES UNDERSTANDABLY TEND to make people vulnerable to money-saving products and schemes that often turn out to be entirely false or more costly than they're worth. The old adage "If it's too good to be true, it probably is" still applies.

Most people already know the tried-and-true ways to lower their electric bills, such as installing proper insulation, investing in Energy Star appliances and unplugging devices they are not using.

But isn't there a quicker, easier way? What about investing in one of those "magic boxes" that promises to slice home electricity costs by up to 50 percent? Claims such as that should immediately raise a red flag.

Dangerous (Maybe Illegal)

A pocket-sized, seemingly innocuous item sold online—called the RPU-190—falls into this category. Engineers

agree that this \$200 piece of copper wire will cut a homeowner's electricity bills. The catch is that attorneys and municipal and state authorities nationwide also agree that installing such a device is against the law because it requires tampering with a meter and stealing power from a utility.

"I'm concerned that people could be taken in by this thing pretty easily," says Thomas Suggs, vice president of engineering for an electric cooperative in Tennessee. "The safety aspect jumped out at me immediately."

He pursued the product to its Internet site and viewed a video that failed to warn potential customers about what qualified engineers know: Power surging through a compromised meter can cause an electrical explosion. Furthermore, a short circuit could produce an arc flash bright enough to cause temporary blindness, hot enough to melt metal and powerful enough to launch fragments of shrapnel-like debris.

"Anytime you get into those meter bases, you're running a risk," Suggs says. "With an arc flash, somebody could get hurt or killed."

Back in Texas, John Ohlhausen, manager of engineering services for Medina Electric Cooperative, ordered an RPU-190. "We wanted to have one on hand, study it and be knowledgeable about it in case questions arose," Ohlhausen explains. The product arrived in a manila, bubble-wrap envelope with a simple return address of Maitland, Florida. Ohlhausen describes it as a poorly constructed copper shunt coated with black insulated paint. It offers minimal resistance and no energy storage capability.

Deceptive and Ineffective

Numerous products fall into the deceptive and ineffective category. One

notorious example is the Xpower Energy Saver. Forum Trading, Inc., was collaborating with several other companies to sell a \$200 cylinder they claimed consumers could plug into the wall to trim electricity consumption by 25 percent and extend the life of household appliances.

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott issued a temporary restraining order against Forum Trading's sales last spring, and the case is scheduled to go to trial later this year. Texas-based Forum was selling Xpower through a multi-level marketing scheme, Abbott said.

Engineers at the University of Texas at Austin concluded that the Xpower could produce no more than a sixteenth-percent reduction in electric use in an average house. Laboratory tests revealed that the product is an ordinary capacitor. Capacitors are usually employed in electronic circuits to store energy or differentiate between high- and low-frequency signals.

Unfortunately, it's a buyer-beware world with all of these devices, says Dan Greenberg, an associate director at E Source. The Boulder, Colorado-based organization provides independent research to utilities, major energy users and others in the retail energy marketplace.

"A lot of these salespeople make unrealistic claims for energy savings," Greenberg says. "They might not even know their claims are unrealistic because the distributor or vendor believes claims from the manufacturer that aren't true."

"It's so important for consumers to be skeptical," Greenberg emphasizes. "They really should check in with their co-op before making any purchase."

Generally, Greenberg says, the legal but mostly ineffective devices such as Xpower promise to "fix up" a consumer's power in some way. The device likely won't harm anything, but it also won't save you a noticeable amount of money on your electricity bill. And the dangerous and illegal devices could ultimately cost you a whole lot more than they promise to save.

Elizabeth McGowan is an energy journalist with Energetics, Inc., in Washington, D.C., and writes articles for the Cooperative Research Network's Tech Surveillance.



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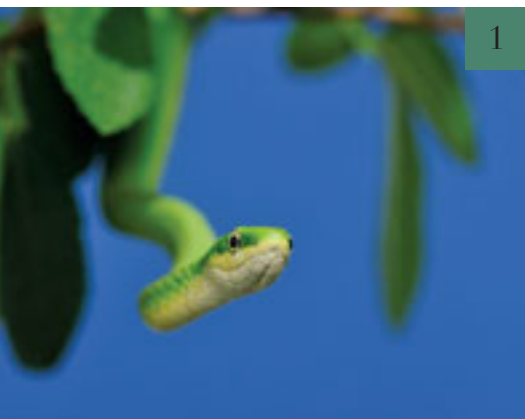
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SHOOT TO THRILL



'Animals are worth more alive now': Wildlife photographers and landowners are in the hunt for a lucrative purse on the conservation-conscious Pro-Tour of Nature Photography.

BY MELISSA GASKILL
PHOTOS BY ROLF NUSSBAUMER

When he arrived the first day of April 2008, Rolf Nussbaumer scattered the contents of a bag of dog food around the travel trailer that would serve as his temporary home on the Fennessey Ranch outside Refugio. One of 20 professional photographers competing in the Pro-Tour of Nature Photography, Nussbaumer counted on the chow to help attract subjects for his photos.

"Mammals are the toughest to photograph," he says. "Most are nocturnal. Deer on this ranch are shy. Coyotes and bobcats take a lot of luck. I knew I'd be photographing raccoons, possums and skunks, things you attract with food.

"It isn't enough to get a photograph," he adds. "It has to be a good photograph." Nussbaumer should know: The 2008 winner also took top honors in the first Pro-Tour, in 2006, in the Hill Country. Officials with Images for Conservation Fund (ICF) select 20 professional photographers and 20 landowners, randomly pair the two, and give them 30 days to shoot pictures. The idea is to promote wildlife photography and land conservation by offering the largest wildlife photography purse in the world—\$160,000 in total. The 2008 photography competition focused on the Coastal Bend. The competition is held every other year.

The 3,500-acre Fennessey Ranch is blessed with lots of natural water, including nine miles of Mission River front, a 200-acre freshwater marsh and wetlands. With water so readily available, Nussbaumer knew resident wildlife would be unimpressed by the inviting ponds typically used to attract animals to photo blinds. At one blind on the ranch, though,

he noticed squirrels. So he put out pecans and soon had four squirrels visiting regularly. Because squirrels aren't really impressive mammals, photographically speaking, Nussbaumer wanted to photograph them doing something spectacular to impress the judges.

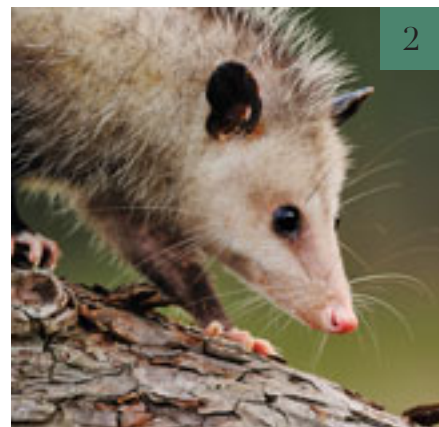
"I hooked a vine up to a tree over to a cup of pecans," he says. "After the squirrels got used to using that, I separated the vine so they would jump. At first the squirrels just jumped to the ground, so I put some plastic lids on the ground to discourage that." His efforts paid off in the form of an impressive shot of a squirrel in midair.

To photograph birds, Nussbaumer tried luring them with seed, but feral hogs wreaked havoc on the feeders, and grackles stole what the hogs missed. So he concentrated on the ranch's marsh, building a floating blind to get close to the avian action. On the last day of the competition, he shot photos of a grebe with a crayfish in its mouth and a Purple Gallinule. "The last day was my lucky day," he says. "I took six of the 60 pictures I submitted on that day."

The abundance of water at least made the amphibian category relatively easy, and insects are never a problem, he says: "Wherever you are, you'll get those."

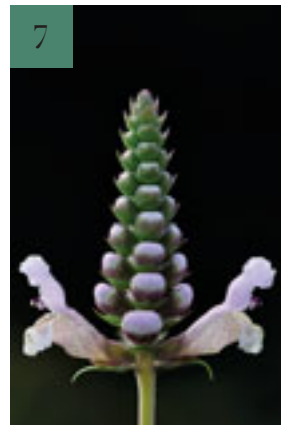
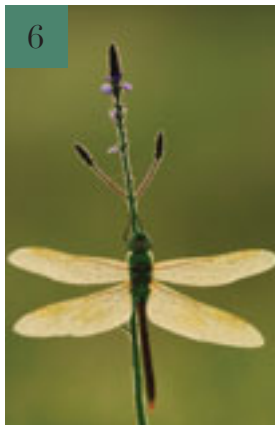
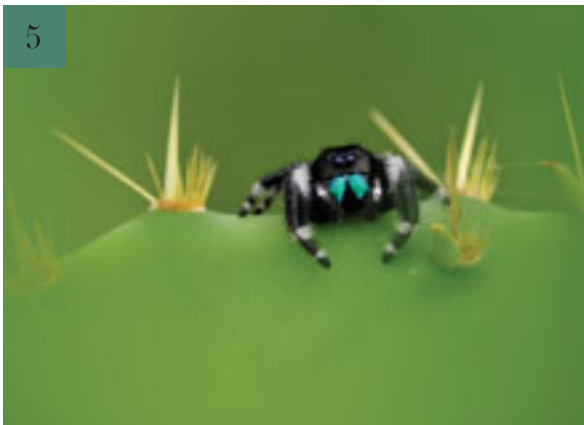
Fennessey owner Brien O'Connor Dunn represents 176 years of family ownership of this land. The ranch still runs cattle and sells hunting leases, but in 1991 began offering birding and educational trips and leasing photography blinds.

Photographers, professional or otherwise, rent the blinds for \$100 per day. The ranch also offers guided group tours and group bird-watching for spring and fall migration and hawk migrations. "We made





1} Rough green snake, *Opheodrys aestivus* 2} Virginia opossum, *Didelphis virginiana* 3} Eastern fox squirrel, *Sciurus niger* 4} Blue curls, *Phacelia congesta* 5} Daring jumping spider, *Phidippus audax* 6} Green darner, *Anax junius* 7} Rattlesnake flower, *Brazoria truncata*



more off photographers last year than cattle,” says Sally Crofutt, the ranch’s general manager. “Animals are worth more alive now. We don’t shoot coyotes, or birds of prey, and we don’t kill rattlesnakes.”

As Dunn puts it, “You can kill a turkey once, but you can take its picture a thousand times.”

That pretty well sums up the philosophy behind the Pro-Tour. “There’s not enough money to purchase adequate land to preserve habitat in Texas,” says ICF founder John Martin. “But nature photography is a \$4 billion industry. The Pro-Tours are about making wildlife valuable to landowners.” Nussbaumer and Fennessey Ranch shared \$51,000 for their first-place prize in the 2008 Pro-Tour.

Thanks to the growing popularity of nature photography and its economic impact, other landowners are changing their attitudes and land practices. But it can be a tough transition. “The photography market is a tough nut to crack,” Crofutt cautions. “You can’t just put a photographer in your deer blind. It takes a lot of work.”



8

Pro-Tour by the Numbers Twenty photographer/landowner teams compete in the one-month tournament. Each team submits images from each of five divisions: 1) birds; 2) mammals; 3) reptiles, amphibians and fish; 4) invertebrates (insects and arachnids); and 5) landscapes, plants and flowers. To qualify as a professional photographer, an individual must have made at least 80 percent of his or her earned income for the past three years from nature photography or have won a qualified competition. Landowners with 1,000 acres or more of diverse habitat may apply.

Laredo will host the 2010 Pro-Tour, which will take place along the South Texas border in eight counties. A grand prize of \$40,000 will be shared by the landowner/photographer. Cash prizes are awarded through 10th place, and additional money—\$500 per picture—is awarded for a selection of 100 individual photographs chosen by the judges. The entry fee is \$1,200 for photographers and \$2,200 for landowners. Prize money comes primarily from sponsors. Books from the 2008 competition are available for purchase and are scheduled to be delivered in October. They can be ordered from the ICF website, www.imagesforconservation.org. For more information, call the ICF at (956) 381-1264 or go to www.fennesseyranch.com.



9



11



10

8} American alligator, *Alligator mississippiensis* 9} Least Bittern, *Ixobrychus exilis* 10} Purple Gallinule, *Porphyrio martinica* 11} Yellow waterlily, *Nymphaea mexicana*



The Pro-Tour multiplies that work. “If Rolf wanted a hole dug, we dug it,” she says. “He asked for a generator, and we had one for him the next day. People ask why we win, and one reason is we work hard.”

Success takes much more than simply snapping pictures, in other words. Nussbaumer rose most mornings before sunup, took pictures all morning, then had lunch and perhaps a nap. In the afternoon, he explored the ranch for photo opportunities, often making lists of requests for Crofutt. In the evenings, he began taking pictures again, frequently working until midnight.

“I enjoy the contests. You get lots of stock photos that would cost a lot to do on your own,” Nussbaumer says. Nature photographers often have to spend a lot of money to travel to and within a location in order to get marketable photographs, and it usually takes a long time to earn that money back. The Pro-Tour offers a chance to work for a month at little or no expense.

Thirty days, though, isn’t all that long to capture professional images. “You see *National Geographic* photos, and they (the photographers) were out there five or six months,” Nussbaumer says. “So you can’t waste time on things that might not work out. You concentrate on the things you can get.”

Nussbaumer, a former furniture maker from Switzerland, met his future wife, Karen, in 2000 when he was photographing Bald Eagles in Alaska. After visiting her in Texas, he read about and decided to enter the five-month Valley Land Fund’s Wildlife Photo Contest in the Rio Grande Valley in 2002. The prize money and exposure from winning that event launched his career as a professional photographer. “Going into the Valley competition, I had no clue about what to expect or what would work,” he says. “After a few competitions, you get a better idea. It really helps.”

The couple, now married, recently welcomed a baby, and Nussbaumer took a short break from photography. At their home outside New Braunfels, though, deer wander through the backyard and birds and squirrels crowd a half-dozen feeders scattered around the house. So when he’s ready to pick up the camera again, Nussbaumer won’t have to look far for subjects.

Melissa Gaskill has written about Kemp’s ridley turtles and state parks for Texas Co-op Power.



KENT BARKER

RED, WHITE AND

BY THOMAS KOROSCEC

BOOM!

Pyrotex's explosive success proves fireworks aren't just for Fourth of July.

THE AERIAL FIREWORKS THAT RANDY Beckham tests on his North Texas ranch are so bright in the dark country sky, they sometimes get mistaken for scheduled displays in nearby towns.

"We shoot some pretty big stuff out here," says Beckham, whose fireworks company, Pyrotex, will be busy this Fourth of July firing shows in 34 cities, small towns and country clubs around the state. "One Friday night in the fall we tested some product, and I had people thanking me for the halftime show at the Leonard football game. They said it helped the team."

Independence Day is the most hectic time of the year for Beckham's crews, who travel as far as Brady (southeast of San Angelo) and Washington (south of College Station) to launch their colorfully explosive displays. But with fireworks becoming more common at weddings, Christmas tree lightings, New Year's Eve celebrations, high school and college homecomings, and corporate events, Pyrotex's three full-time employees and 49 part-timers have their fingers on the firing button year-round.

Every display is designed and at least partly assembled at Pyrotex's 80-acre ranch headquarters in southwest Fannin County, a normally peaceful setting of pastures and oak groves where one can get a behind-the-scenes look at the anatomy of a modern fireworks show. Each July, Beckham places his order to suppliers in China for the aerial shells he will use during the coming year. With the shells as large as 8 inches in diameter, the fireworks are stored in 10 metal bunkers spaced a safe distance apart. In a nearby assembly building, shells are connected with a time-delay fuse that is fired electrically at show time; the shells fire in an order carefully synchronized to a musical score Beckham has arranged.

SAFETY COMES FIRST DURING THE assembly process. "The walls are made out of Styrofoam, so you can run right through them if you need to," the 52-year-old Beckham says of the assembly building, explaining how employees could escape in the case of an explosion or fire.

As another precaution, there is no electrical lighting inside the building. During the day, it is illuminated by natural light streaming through special,



TODD EVERT DESIGN

Green and gold chrysanthemums, color coordinated to the bride's colors for a wedding

south-facing clerestory windows that are built high on the wall. At night, lights mounted on the outside of the building shine through the windows.

Stacks of pallets holding the plastic mortar tubes used for firing the shells sit in a barn near the ranch entrance. So many mortars are used in a good-sized show that it takes a 48-foot trailer

to haul them to the site. Beckham's largest show ever consisted of 140,000 shells and other effects, or fireworks, fired over a 10½-minute period for a society wedding in Houston.

FOR HIS INDEPENDENCE DAY REGULARS—from Wolfe City, a small town near his ranch, to Southlake, a well-to-do Dallas-Fort Worth suburb



Multicolor peonies with fans of silver glitter for a society wedding in Oklahoma

TODD EVANT DESIGN

whose business district resembles an old-time town square—he sets off between 4,000 to 100,000 effects.

With crews and trailers departing and arriving over a run of a few days, the first week in July is an exercise in logistics, one Beckham has perfected over his 30 years in the business.

Fresh out of Southern Methodist

University, where he studied theater and film, Beckham went to work for a company that staged multimedia presentations at company events. “This is back in the day when multimedia meant 20 slide projectors stacked up in a row,” he recalled. One client, a manufacturer of flea collars and roach motels, wanted more pizzazz for a sales

presentation. So Beckham brought in an indoor pyrotechnic display like those catching on with rock bands and magic shows. He soon struck out on his own as a distributor of “indoor pyro,” supplying musical touring acts such as Nazareth, the Bee Gees, the Commodores and Reba McEntire. Later, he began producing indoor fireworks and by the late 1980s had added outdoor aerial displays as well.

A number of technological advances during Beckham’s time in the business have made for more artistic and complex displays and safer working conditions. “When we first got into the industry we were hand-lighting all the fireworks. You had a 3-foot-long road flare in your hand, you lit a fuse and ducked,” he remembered. Electric firing devices came along, allowing technicians to be up to 100 feet away. They, in turn, are being replaced today by computerized systems extending the safety margin to 150 or 200 feet, he said.

The size, complexity and color range of the air bursts advance a little every year, although some of it can get lost on breezy summer evenings in Texas. “In the last 10 years or so, they’ve become a lot more elaborate. You can shoot the letters USA as a group, but when the winds blow it tears them apart,” Beckham said. “We shot a shell that formed the shape of the state of Texas over the Palo Duro Canyon, but when it got above the cliff tops the wind caught it and it could have been Oklahoma or Tennessee. It looked like Texas for three or four seconds, at most.”

The wider selection of colors has been a plus for the wedding business, where shows are highly customized in pastel hues. But sometimes, Beckham has to convince demanding brides that a display in nothing but pink might not be the best way to go.

FOR THE MOST PART, THOUGH, FIREWORKS mean the Fourth of July, with a soundtrack mixing, say “God Bless America” sung by country performer LeAnn Rimes with “America the Beautiful” sung by soul man Ray Charles. Beckham gets ready for the holiday by hosting “pyro camp,” his annual training weekend at the ranch when new and old employees fire test shows and try out new products.

Among his regular hands is Darnetta Miles, a lead pyrotechnician and man-



Left: Gretna Harrison and Scotty Tecce prepare aerial shells for shows. **Center:** Workers load a wedding reception display in Houston's Discovery Green park. The firing site received two inches of rain the day before loading. A hundred sheets of plywood were brought in to provide a solid firing surface. **Right:** The top view of a loaded semitrailer. Aerial shells are loaded by size into high-density polyethylene mortars, which are then put in racks.

ager of the anatomic pathology lab at Dallas' Parkland Hospital. She met Beckham through a friend who knew she'd be right for a holiday fireworks crew. "I've always loved watching fireworks," says Miles, who has a "life list" of watching fireworks displays the same way some people have one for riding roller coasters. "My daughter and I have

been to shows in London, California, New York. When they reopened the Statue of Liberty in 1986 (after it was refurbished), I was there. It was one of the largest I've ever been to."

To Miles, the Fourth of July means spending hours setting up mortars and fuses in the summer heat—at times in dry, mowed fields teeming with chig-

gers. Come nightfall, though, all that work pays off in thrills. "When you're firing it, it's really all around you, it's beautiful and it's loud," she said. "I truly have the best seat in the house."

Thomas Korosec wrote about the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo for Texas Co-op Power in January 2009.

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—By Sarah Tucker

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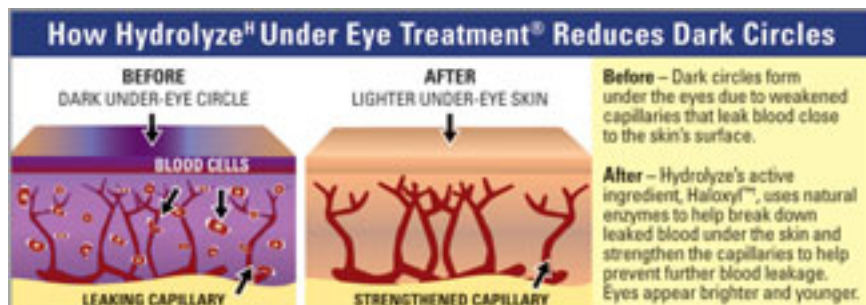
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Substations Play Key Role in Safe, Reliable Power



You may think, “Why would I want to know about substations?” Substations are an important part of the system that brings you safe and reliable electricity each time you flip a light switch or turn on an appliance.

Substations are key components of your electric co-op, serving as points of delivery in the transmission system. Substations meter distribution equipment, and power lines step down voltage for distribution to homes and maintain voltage at a constant level.

This constant level of voltage is particularly important—to travel long distances over wires, electric power voltage must be much higher than the level at which it is actually produced by a power plant. For example, electricity leaves a power plant at about 22,000 volts then is increased to as much as 765,000 volts. The higher the voltage, the lower the line loss and voltage drop—thus, the greater the system’s efficiency. As the power gets

closer to its destination, voltage is gradually decreased to a level safe for consumers.

Transmission substations give the power its first step-down, and distribution substations step it down even further so that it may be sent on to the consumer. The lines leaving a distribution substation are owned and maintained by the local co-op. These lines carry the power to homes, businesses and schools.

There is a multitude of equipment in substations: transformers, lightning arrestors, circuit breakers, insulators, and much more. A transformer performs the main substation function, which again is to alter the voltage to an acceptable level for distribution. The voltage regulator then maintains a constant outgoing voltage.

It is easy to confuse a “switching station” with a substation, but they are different. Also known as breaker stations, switching stations exist for the protection and reliability of the system. They allow any faults in the system to be sectionalized so that outages will affect fewer customers.

The thing that looks like a garbage can near the top of a pole is, in fact, the transformer. The transformer’s function is to increase voltage for efficient long-distance transmission and to lower voltage for use by customers.

So the next time you drive by one of those fenced conglomerations of power lines and equipment, remember that, in spite of appearances, it’s an important part of your cooperative’s power system. It is helping ensure that you receive electricity in a reliable and safe manner.

But the most important thing to remember about substations is to observe the warning signs and stay away. The substation fences are there to protect you and the equipment that keeps your power on.

PLUGGED-IN KIDS

Websites offer fun ways to ‘switch on’ youth to efficiency

BY MEGAN MCKOY

Getting children excited about energy efficiency may seem hard—for some parents, it’s enough of a challenge to get them to do chores! But several websites have been designed with young energy savers in mind.

Mascots asking kids to help their parents save energy are popular. The U.S. Department of Energy’s Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) has employed Disney’s Tinker Bell character to encourage youngsters to conserve energy.

“The magical thing about using energy wisely is that anyone can do it,” touts the campaign in a video featuring Tinker Bell and her friends at WWW.ENERGY.GOV/TINK.

The Alliance to Save Energy Project Super Powers at WWW.PROJECTSUPERPOWERS.COM highlights videos of super heroes trying to use their abilities to save energy at home, often with embarrassing results. Children are encouraged to help by suggesting fictional super powers that might successfully reduce energy use.

Energy Star’s website for youth, WWW.ENERGYSTAR.GOV/KIDS, provides interactive ways to learn how to make small changes with a big effect. The site gives guidance on what items use power even when they’re not on (cell phone chargers, certain TVs, etc.) and basic things such as air leaks that kids can look for and help their parents fix.

For teachers, EERE offers lesson plans, science projects and more at WWW.EERE.ENERGY.GOV/EDUCATION.

No matter which website you point kids to, the message remains clear: Energy efficiency starts at home, and everyone in the family has an important role to play!

Megan McKoy writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Small Weatherization Steps Yield Big Results

BY MEGAN MCKOY

Weatherization—the process of sealing air leaks and properly insulating a home—can produce an average energy savings of \$358 per household per year, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

And good news! Through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, known as the stimulus bill, you can recover 30 percent of the cost—up to \$1,500—of insulation materials and exterior doors, windows and roofs designed to help reduce your home's heat loss or gain (installation costs are not covered). The credit applies to improvements made to existing homes in 2009 and 2010.

Here are a few of those improvements, as well as tips, that can help make your home more energy efficient:

AIR INFILTRATION

Air that leaks in and out of homes through cracks, crevices and holes can increase energy consumption. Here are some helpful tips to avoid air infiltration:

- Seal around pipes coming through walls.
- During hot and cold weather, ensure windows are closed tightly and locked.
- Ensure weatherstripping around doors and windows is tight.
- When your fireplace is not operating, its flue should be closed tightly, with a sign hanging from the flue handle warning it is closed.
- Check the ceiling behind the cornice of built-in bookshelves for holes cut during construction.
- Drop-down, disappearing stairways should fit tightly into the ceiling and be carefully weatherstripped.
- Make sure your outside dryer vent door closes when the dryer is not in use. This requires cleaning away lint accumulation periodically.

INSULATION

Use home remodeling projects as a convenient means to add insulation to existing cavities. Different insulation requires different installation techniques—follow what is recommended by the manufacturer.

- If you have R-19 or less insulation in your attic, consider bringing it up to R-38 in moderate climates and R-49 in cold climates.
- In cold climates, if you have R-11 or less floor insulation, consider bringing it up to R-25.
- Blown-in wet cellulose or high-density foam insulation can stop infiltration better than fiberglass.
- Proper installation of insulation should prevent moisture in your walls.
- Make sure to have perimeter insulation around crawl spaces, basements and ceiling insulation—the most impor-

tant places to have adequate insulation.

- During construction, seal all openings, plates and walls with foam or caulk.
- Insulate and seal ducts in attics, crawl spaces, garages and other unheated areas.

WINDOWS

A considerable amount of heat transfers through windows. If you have single-pane windows, consider doing the following:

- Tighten and weatherstrip your old windows and add storm windows.
- Consider replacing old single-glazed windows with new double-glazed windows.
- In colder climates, low-emissivity coatings on glass can help reduce heat loss through windows.
- In hot climates, consider adding solar screening to west-facing windows that catch a lot of sun late in the day.



HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING

Heating and air conditioning use the largest chunk of your home energy dollar. Keep them running “lean and mean.”

- HVAC systems should be checked to verify they are moving the correct amount of air. An HVAC technician can tell you whether they are.
- Heat pump and air-conditioning systems should be checked annually to verify they are properly charged, strictly in accordance with manufacturers' guidelines.
- Inside and outside coils should be kept clean and free of debris.
- Return filters should be changed monthly.
- Have an HVAC technician check carefully for duct leaks. Leaks that are found should be sealed with fiberglass mesh and mastic sealant.

Megan McKoy writes on consumer affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Sources: Energy Star, Database for State Incentives for Renewables and Efficiency

BROWNSVILLE

Where the Wild Things Roam

*Take a trip to
the tropics at
Brownsville's
Gladys Porter Zoo.*

By Eileen Mattei



At Brownsville's Gladys Porter Zoo and Botanical Park, the subtropical climate of Texas' southernmost city—minutes from South Padre Island and Mexico—creates an idyllic palm- and bougainvillea-filled setting for the zoo's animals and their visitors. Rather than cages, Gladys Porter Zoo uses islands and moats to separate most animals from the public. The Old Town Resaca, an ancient Rio Grande overflow stream, loops through the zoo, where the sound of falling or trickling water provides a backdrop for the hooting of chimpanzees, the crazy laugh of kookaburras and the squealing of kids spotting tigers or seals.

Buy a bag of animal crackers and munch your way through this compact 27-acre garden with animals grouped by their home continent. Front and center in the lowland gorilla habitat, a gorilla mom resting in the shade cradles a napping baby in her arms, while juveniles romp around their green, one-eighth-acre island. The 15 gorillas here represent three generations, one of the most prolific populations in the United States.

"In the right climate, when they're comfortable and eating well, animals will breed in spite of us," says zoo facilities director Jerry Stones. Gladys Porter offers the ideal combination of factors for gorillas, flamingos, giraffes and Philippine crocodiles. Thriving populations have brought the zoo awards for its reproduction programs. But for the Jentink's duiker, the last such antelope in captivity in the world, the story is sadder. There will be no progeny.

Year-round greenery drapes the private islands where gibbons and spider monkeys, lemurs and orangutans climb and swing on log structures. In contrast, the dry savanna enclosures of rhinos and the sleek massive guar, or wild Asian cattle, evoke images of long walks to water holes. Shaded benches along the broad walkways invite visitors to relax and observe the animals, although the zoo's railings are a perfect height for comfortable leaning.

The atmosphere is pure peaceable kingdom. A huge Hong Kong orchid tree throws shade and orchid-like blooms into the lions' grassy enclosure, where only glass separates you during truly close encounters. Tropical strangler fig vines creep up the reptile house. Red bougainvilleas tumble down the walls of the sun bear and spectacled bear enclosures. Everywhere, it's pothos ivy gone wild, with leaves up to 20 inches long and twines running up trees and buildings.

Live kangaroos and wallabies compete for attention with a massive bronze statue of a saltwater crocodile, its snout gleaming from the touch of thousands of children who dare to stick their fingers in its mouth. A young camel suckles in the shade of its mother, and a dama gazelle wanders among the giraffes. Bongos, bonobos and oryxes, all antelopes, graze.

For relief from the sun, duck inside a nocturnal exhibit. Large Egyptian fruit bats dart around their enclosure and then stack up like coats on a hook, attaching them-

selves to an air vent high on the wall. Another cool and dark facility brings you face to face with the herps: pythons, rattlesnakes, deadly mambas and yellow-banded poison frogs. Outside, an alligator snapping turtle poses underwater with its mouth open waiting for a fish to be attracted to its quivering “bait,” a tongue part that resembles a red, wriggling worm.

The zoo’s tropical lushness results from equal parts planning and chance. Migrating birds stop here on their flights north and drop seeds of southern plants. Much of the volunteer vegetation gets to stay, but the few poisonous invaders are uprooted immediately. “Some are so bad, so invasive, that it’s like having a coyote on the zoo grounds,” Stones says. Only a few blocks from Brownsville’s international bridges, the zoo also ends up with illegal tropical plants seized by customs officials.

Red banana trees grow freely, and the fruit is fed to the primates, “if we can beat the possums and birds to them,” Stones says. Yet tropical implies palms, and the zoo identifies many varieties: bottle, ponytail, foxtail, pindo and Texas’ only native palm, the Sabal. The botanical pride and joy is a limoncillo (*esenbeckia runyonii*), which is possibly Texas’ rarest tree. It’s the northernmost species of its type, a citrus associated with rain forests.

Native plants, like the limoncillo, make up about 50 percent of the zoo’s vegetation. That’s a result of the Rio Grande Valley’s last freeze some 20 years ago, when tropical plants’ tender leaves froze and temporarily deprived the zoo of its signature greenery of giant split-leaf philodendrons, hibiscus and birds of paradise. But freeze-hardy natives like anacua and huisache trees and lantana bushes not only add color and authenticity to the zoo, their abundant flowers and berries attract butterflies and birds. Flocks of wild Red-crowned Parrots and Green Parakeets descend to eat figs, nuts and tender flowers. Other local freeloaders—Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks and Great Blue Herons—roost and nest here, too.

“Butterflies, Bugs and Blooms,” the zoo’s newest exhibit, spotlights native plants like mesquite and ebony trees, cactus, and mistflower that provide food and shelter for a show-stopping array of local butterflies, plus tarantulas, scorpions and other critters. Some butterflies remain inside an enclosed, walk-through aviary that arches over the *resaca*.

The zoo’s Small World shelters small and young animals, from the cute golden-handed tamarin piggybacking a nearly invisible baby to screech owls and meerkats. The petting zoo, with its own hand-washing sink, lets kids cozy up to Nigerian dwarf goats, burros, hens and Merry, a baby camel whose heavy eyelashes seem caked with mascara.

A kiosk near the zoo entrance posts feeding times, a listing of animal babies and the amphitheater presentations that might feature an endangered species one day and skulls and skins the next. Sunday tram tours (\$2) are available, as are ample benches and unobtrusive refreshment stands.

No matter the season, the animals of Gladys Porter Zoo and their visitors seem to relax amid the gorgeous tropical and native plants. Lions and tigers and Brasil trees, oh, my!

For more information, call (956) 546-7187 or go to www.gpz.org.

Eileen Mattei is a travel writer based in the Rio Grande Valley.

PHOTO BY LARRY DITTO



It's in the Bag

*Grocery sacking
is not a lost art
after all.*

BY CAMILLE WHEELER

M

y friend Stewart isn't picky about how his groceries are bagged.

"They can chuck it in any way they want," he says. "Just don't squash the potato chips."

Sorry, Stewart, but I'm jotting down a few more items on my grocery-bagging request list: Don't pack my bags too heavy. Don't pack 'em too light (surely there's room for more than a tube of toothpaste and a box of baking soda in one plastic bag). Please ask me if I want paper or plastic (it's paper; I still haven't made the switch to cloth bags, which I know, I know, is the green thing to do). Please be gentle: Place, don't throw, my bags of groceries into the shopping basket.

And above all, please be courteous: Eye contact and a smile still go a long way, especially when the checkout line is long, the conveyor belt is jammed and people's nerves are frayed.

Yikes. I sound like a grouch. But I'm really not one of those shoppers. You know, the impatient ones who nearly run you over with their cart while you're trying to pay or the angry ones who question the price of every item that's been scanned. No, I remain poker-faced through it all, watching in silent horror as a misplaced half-gallon of Blue Bell ice cream smushes my whole-grain bread.

Clearly, I'm carrying emotional baggage into the grocery store. Maybe my memory's faulty, but it seems that when I was a kid, there was always a capable bagger available to sack my mom's groceries at the local Piggly Wiggly or United Supermarket. Everything went into paper sacks, and the baggers worked like magicians, deftly wielding cans of spinach and Ranch Style Beans, flipping them from one hand to the other and slipping them into the sack.

And back then, you always got carryout. It was a long, awkward walk through the parking lot, but the experience always ended pleasantly, with the bagger setting the groceries in the back of the station wagon, gingerly closing the door and saying, "Y'all have a good night."

I miss full-service gas stations, too. But truthfully, when it comes to full-service treatment at the grocery store, I don't want or need carryout. I just want my groceries to be coddled and pampered, as though every item were a fragile egg.

Clearly, I'm delusional and need to face the truth: Old-fashioned grocery bagging is a lost art. Or is it?

I did a little digging, and much to my delight, I found that good bagging is alive and

well. First, there's the National Grocers Association U.S.A. Best Bagger Championship held each February in Las Vegas. Contestants are judged on speed, bag-building technique, weight distribution among bags, style, attitude and appearance.

Texas wasn't one of the 24 states represented at the 2009 U.S.A. championship, but by no means is the Lone Star State void of bagging talent.

Take, for example, H-E-B's statewide bagging competition called S.T.A.R.S.S.—Striving To Always Role Model Superior Service—in which two-person teams, a bagger and a checker, race against the clock.

I hooked up with the 2008 second-place team, Karen Vasquez and Jesse Hopson, one Saturday afternoon at the H-E-B Plus in Round Rock, north of Austin.

As much as I complain about bagging, I sure can't imagine myself doing it. So I asked Vasquez, 20, and Hopson, 17, for bagging lessons. With the blessings of their supervisor, Central Checkout Operations Manager Kim Gebert, I got a crash course in IPMs (items per minute), IPBs (items per bag), CAT (check all tops, meaning anything with a cap that might leak), building the walls (placing items such as cereal boxes along the sides so bags won't collapse), building a produce pyramid (apples on bottom, bananas and cherries on the top) and the baggers' creed: Greet, smile, think, offer carryout.

I learned basic bagging principles: "Colds to colds, red meat to red meat, veggies with veggies, Clorox by itself," Vasquez recites. And chicken always goes in a plastic bag by itself.

I learned about mystery shoppers: H-E-B pays customers to come through the line and spy on checkers and baggers.

"If you're a bagger, you have to offer carryout and you always have to have a positive attitude," Gebert says. "You cannot exclude them (the customers) from your conversation." Her command podium with its diagrams of all 29 checkout stations looks like something an air-traffic controller would use.

I tell Vasquez and Hopson that I'd panic as a new bagger. Nonsense, they say. First, you'd have a trainer beside you. And before I hit the floor, I'd take a baggers' quiz, watch a training video, plow through a packet of paperwork and undergo Gebert's rigorous interviewing process.

Hopson smiles reassuringly at me: "If you keep the fresh meat away from the chicken, build your walls, make your produce pyramid, and smile, you'll be all right."

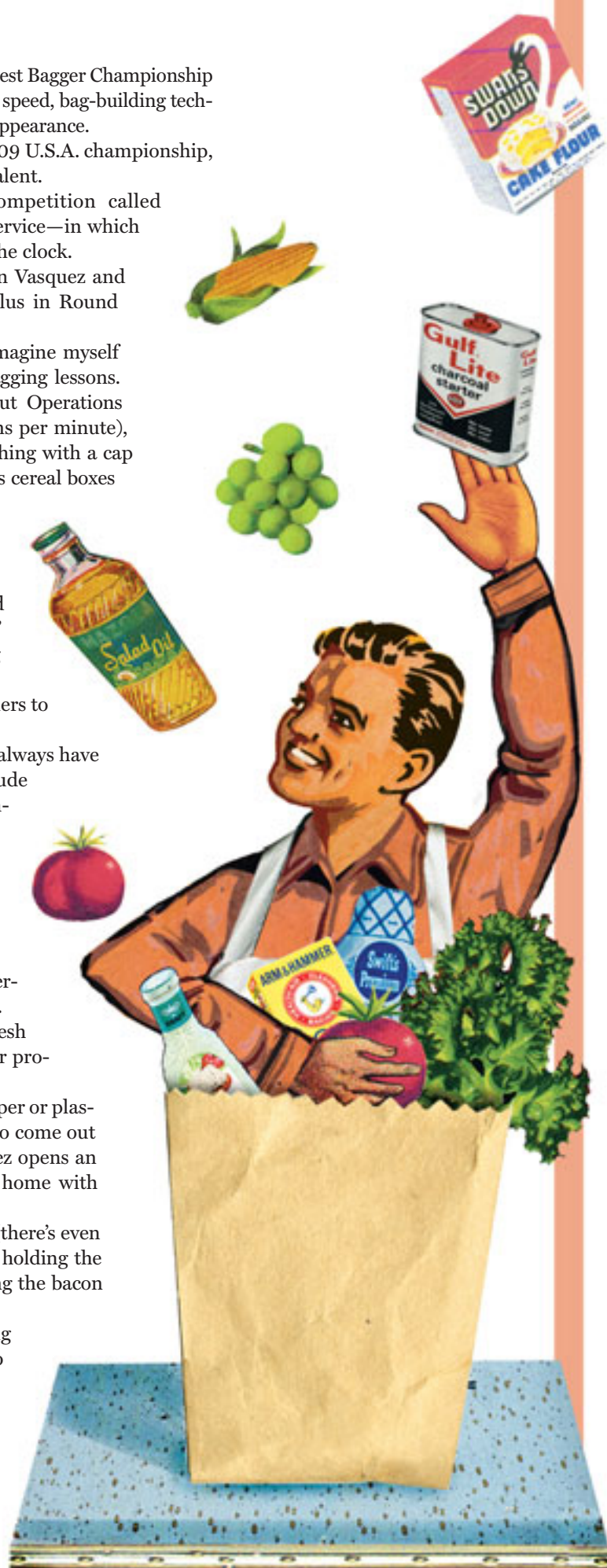
I'm so shy sometimes, it might be hard to even ask, "Paper or plastic?" But there's no time for shyness here: Baggers have to come out of their shells. After building a produce pyramid, Vasquez opens an egg carton and checks its contents. "Who wants to go home with cracked eggs?" she asks. "I wouldn't."

All the while, Vasquez is clearing the belt of groceries (there's even a secret red button baggers push to keep items moving), holding the basket steady so a young boy can safely climb out, keeping the bacon away from the tomatillos and talking to people in line.

"You have to be efficient, not just fast," she says, whirling around to address a customer. "Do you need help out to your car?"

Next, I accompany Hopson on a carryout. To generate conversation, he peers into customer Wanda Andrews' basket. "You like hash browns? I like hash browns," he says. "You can always find something to talk about."

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



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Bawdy Belle Starr

BY MARTHA DEERING

A feisty little lady with an accurate aim and a fondness for the company of outlaws, Belle Starr enjoyed her reputation as the “Bandit Queen.” Although she was well known in Texas, it wasn’t until after her death in 1889 that stories of her escapades sprouted up all over the country in newspapers and dime novels (which, by then, cost a quarter).

Belle’s involvement with questionable characters started early. Born Myra Maybelle Shirley in Missouri in 1848, Belle went to a private school where she learned to play the piano—and to fight. One of her classmates remembered her as “... a bright, intelligent girl but was of a fierce nature and would fight anyone, boy or girl, that she quarreled with.”

The Missouri home of Belle’s parents was a frequent stopping-off place for William Quantrill, a notorious criminal whose expert tutoring helped to shape the futures of Jesse and Frank James and a young outlaw named Cole Younger. At the age of 15, Belle fell head over heels in love with Younger and, according to some historians, irritated her parents by riding off and marrying him in an unofficial horseback ceremony witnessed by Younger’s outlaw comrades. Younger deserted her soon after the mock wedding to pursue a new interest in train robberies.

Belle’s parents, Confederate sympathizers, moved to Texas in 1863 and settled near Dallas, then a dirt-road town of about 2,000 people. In 1866, Belle legally married Jim Reed, a former member of Quantrill’s Raiders, and bore a daughter. Belle refused to identify the baby’s father, but she named the child Pearl Younger. Leaving the baby with her parents, she left for the Dallas dance-hall scene, making a fine living as a singer and piano player. In her spare time, she dealt and played poker and operated a stable where she sold horses that most likely were stolen by her husband, Jim. Never afraid to take a fashion risk, she dressed outlandishly. Her favorite outfit was a full-length black velvet gown she wore with a man’s Stetson hat ornamented with ostrich feathers. Around her waist hung a pair of highly polished pistols.

The romantic life of an outlaw called to Belle, and a few years after her marriage she joined her husband in a life of thievery. Dressed as a man, Belle and the other members of Reed’s gang relieved Watt Grayson, a wealthy Oklahoma Creek Indian, of \$30,000 in gold. Reed was recognized and went into hiding, but Belle moved into the Planter’s Hotel in Dallas. The *Dallas News* described her as “... a dashing horse-woman, and exceedingly graceful in the saddle.” Never a wallflower, she was spotted at the circus, the horse races and the county fair, when she wasn’t off robbing stagecoaches with her husband. In time, Reed was killed as he attempted to escape from a deputy sheriff.



Belle Starr, Fort Smith, Arkansas, 1886

RESEARCH DIVISION OF THE OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Without a husband to tie her down, Belle hooked up with a band of rustlers. The only member of the gang who could read and write, she planned the operations and fenced the stolen property. In 1880 she married Sam Starr, a Cherokee Indian, and took his last name. Along with her daughter and a son, Ed Reed, the couple settled in a log cabin in Oklahoma’s Indian Territory. Ironically, Belle christened the new property “Younger’s Bend” in honor of her first love. The isolated cabin on the Canadian River allowed her to escape the company of women, whom she claimed to “thoroughly detest.” Belle complained that women never talked about anything but pumpkins and babies.

By 1882, Younger’s Bend had become a headquarters for roving gangs of horse thieves, most of whom were Belle’s former acquaintances. In 1883 her luck ran out, and Belle and Sam Starr were arrested and appeared in court before “Hanging” Judge Isaac Parker. The trial caused a sensation. It was the first time a woman had appeared before Judge Parker, who proved his lack of gender prejudice by sentencing each of them to a year in a Detroit prison.

Belle reportedly spent her time in prison writing a book, which never was published, and teaching music and French to the warden’s children. Upon her release, she was quoted in the *Dallas News* as saying, “I am a friend to any brave and gallant outlaw ...”

In 1886, Sam Starr met his end in a hail of bullets, and Belle, who was then 39, took up with 24-year-old Jim July, who moved in with her at Younger’s Bend. On February 3, 1889, she was killed by a shotgun blast to the back. Though there were many suspects, none was ever arrested. Belle was buried in her front yard wearing her favorite black velvet gown and clutching a six-shooter.

Martha Deering is a regular contributor to Footnotes in Texas History.

A Crust To Remember



BY KEVIN HARGIS Sometimes, I like to imagine that moment in history when the primordial pie maker, the baker lost in the mists of time, had the brilliant idea of wrapping dough around filling, thus inventing pie. I'd sure like to shake his or her hand, because pie is surely one of humankind's greatest inventions.

Likely, the early pies were something hand-sized, easy to carry and the perfect vehicle for a farmhand's lunch. Somewhere along the way, the pie plate came into being, and the two-crust pie has been an American staple since colonial times.

Much like the foundation of a house, the crust is the foundation of a pie. You want something that's flaky, but not too crumbly. Rolling and shaping a round crust takes a bit of practice and patience. You sometimes have to patch holes and stretch

edges to make things fit just right.

I am by no means a pie expert or even a neat cook. My crusts won't win any prizes. But I do have a recipe that's so simple I can now remember it without consulting the well-worn recipe card in my box.

I've used this crust again and again, always with good results. It came from my dear, departed Aunt Ruth, my mom's oldest sister, who always had a delicious slice of strawberry-rhubarb pie waiting for me when I'd visit.

The nice thing about this dough is that it is forgiving. It can be rolled and folded—or even wadded back up for a re-do—without getting tough or falling apart like other overworked crusts tend to do. The key to keeping the crust from sticking is to use generous amounts of flour on your rolling surface and rolling pin. The dough can absorb a good amount of flour without falling apart.

If you happen to make a hole in the crust, you can patch it. Just wet your finger in a glass of water and run it around the edge of the hole. Place a scrap of dough over the hole to cover it and press to seal.

AUNT RUTH'S PIE CRUST

2 cups flour

Scant cup shortening

Measure flour into large mixing bowl. Remove four tablespoons flour and put in small mixing bowl or glass. Add three tablespoons of water to removed flour and mix into smooth paste with spoon. Add enough water to just cover paste. Pour most of that water back off and mix. Paste should slide off spoon. Cut shortening into flour in large bowl until well blended. Pour paste over shortening mixture and mix.

Divide dough in half and form into balls. Place one on floured board. Flatten with hands into round disk. Roll with floured rolling pin, keeping round shape and turning and flipping often. Keep rolling surfaces well floured. When you are ready to put crust in pie plate, drape loosely over rolling pin and lift into plate.

Repeat above steps with remaining dough. Makes two single crusts or a top and bottom for two-crust pie.

1st**JUDY BROUGH** *CoServ Electric Cooperative*Prize-winning recipe: **Knock Your Socks Off Buttermilk Pie**

Call it a win-win situation. This buttermilk pie is downright delicious—sweet and rich—and is simple to make. CoServ Electric Cooperative member Judy Brough wrote of the recipe: “It was described as one that set the phone ringing for requests and a run on buttermilk at the stores. I am most tempted to try recipes that have been described as those frequently requested. It did live up to my expectations, and my sister-in-law, a ‘non-cook,’ even made the recipe for a party.”

KNOCK YOUR SOCKS OFF BUTTERMILK PIE

- 2¾ cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 3 tablespoons flour
- ¾ cup margarine, melted
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- ½ cup crushed graham crackers
- ¾ cup chopped pecans
- 2 9-inch pie crusts, unbaked

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. In a large bowl, mix together sugar and eggs; add vanilla and flour. Stir in margarine and buttermilk. Do not beat. Fold in crushed graham crackers and pecans. Pour into pie crusts, dividing mixture evenly between the two. Bake 45 minutes or until center of each pie is firm when tested with a knife.

Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 745 calories, 8 g protein, 37 g fat, 95 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, 447 mg sodium, 109 mg cholesterol.

CHOCOLATE TRUFFLE PIE

- ½ cup pecan pieces, toasted and coarsely chopped
- 1 pre-made 9-inch chocolate crumb pie crust
- 5 ounces caramel squares (about 17 pieces), unwrapped
- ¼ cup evaporated milk
- 1½ cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 3 tablespoons butter
- Sweetened whipped cream for garnish
- Caramel ice-cream sauce for garnish

Sprinkle pecans on crust. In heavy saucepan or microwavable bowl, combine caramels and milk. Put pan on low heat or heat bowl in microwave. Cook, stirring frequently, until caramels are melted and mixture is smooth. Pour over pecans.

Clean pot or bowl, then combine chocolate chips, cream and butter inside.

Heat pan over low heat or bowl in microwave until chocolate is melted and mixture is smooth. Pour over caramel layer. Refrigerate about four hours until set. Before serving, decorate with whipped cream and caramel sauce.

Serving size: 1 slice (10 per pie). Per serving: 410 calories, 4 g protein, 27 g fat, 41 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 203 mg sodium, 27 mg cholesterol.

KATHLEEN GORDON*United Cooperative Services***MACAROON PIE PASTRY**

- 1⅔ cups flour
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- Grated peel from two oranges, plus 5 tablespoons of their juice
- ½ cup butter, softened
- 1 egg, slightly beaten

Preheat oven to 325 degrees.

Mix flour, sugar, baking powder, salt and orange peel in mixing bowl. Cut in butter with pastry blender until fine. Add egg and juice and stir with fork until blended. Work by hand into ball. Remove 1/3 of dough and set aside. Roll remaining dough on waxed paper to fit 10-inch pie pan, but don't allow dough to hang over edges. Bake for 8 minutes. Roll rest of dough into ropes for lattice top.

FILLING

- 2 eggs
- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ cup flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups sweetened flaked coconut
- ¼ cup orange juice
- ¼ cup melted butter
- ¼ cup coconut syrup or apricot jam

Beat eggs slightly. Stir in sugar, flour and salt. Add coconut, orange juice and butter. Mix and pour into pastry. Make lattice; trim and press into edges of pie. Bake 40 minutes at 325 degrees until filling is set and crust is browned.

Heat coconut syrup or jam and brush on pie while it is warm. Let cool. Is best after sitting a day.

Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 566 calories, 7 g protein, 24 g fat, 81 g carbohydrates, 4 g fiber, 299 mg sodium, 124 mg cholesterol.

PATSY HENDERSON*Central Texas Electric Cooperative*

MAYAN CHOCOLATE CREAM PIE CRUST

- 1 1/3 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup butter-flavored shortening
- 3 tablespoons cold water

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Combine flour and salt and cut in shortening with a pastry blender until it forms pea-sized chunks. Sprinkle with water, one tablespoon at a time. Toss lightly with fork until dough forms ball. Roll dough and line 9-inch pie plate. Prick bottom and sides of crust with fork and bake for 8-12 minutes or until golden brown. Allow to cool.

FILLING

- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
- 2 egg yolks, slightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon, plus more for garnish
- 1 package (3 ounces) cream cheese
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream

In 2-quart saucepan, mix cornstarch, sugar and salt. Stir in milk until well blended. Add chocolate chips, egg yolks, cayenne pepper and cinnamon. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until thickened. Remove from heat. Beat in cream cheese and vanilla extract until smooth. Allow to fully cool.

When mixture is cool, pour cream into large bowl, with a teaspoon of sugar if desired, and beat until soft peaks form. Remove one cup of beaten cream and set aside. Fold remaining whipped cream into cooled chocolate mixture. Spoon into baked pie shell. Top with remaining whipped cream and, if you desire, sprin-

kle lightly with more ground cinnamon. Refrigerate at least six hours, or, preferably, overnight.

Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 517 calories, 7 g protein, 32 g fat, 50 g carbohydrates, 2.5 g fiber, 248 mg sodium, 103 mg cholesterol.

ALLISON JORDAN

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative

COOK'S TIP: This pie's spicy heat might be a bit much for some people. If you reduce the amount of cayenne pepper in the recipe, reduce the amount of ground cinnamon to match.

RECIPE CONTEST

November's recipe contest topic is **WINTER SOUPS**. Soup has got to be one of the best warmer-uppers one can have for lunch or supper during cold weather. Not only is soup satisfying, it can be as simple or as complex as you'd like to make it. Send recipes for your heartiest winter soups and stews. The deadline is July 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.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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Each entry **MUST** include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Send entries to: *Texas Co-op Power*/Holiday Recipe Contest, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can fax recipes to (512) 763-3408 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org. E-mails must include "Holiday Recipe Contest" in the subject line and contain only one recipe (no attachments). Up to three entries are allowed per person/co-op member. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. For official rules, visit www.texascoopower.com.

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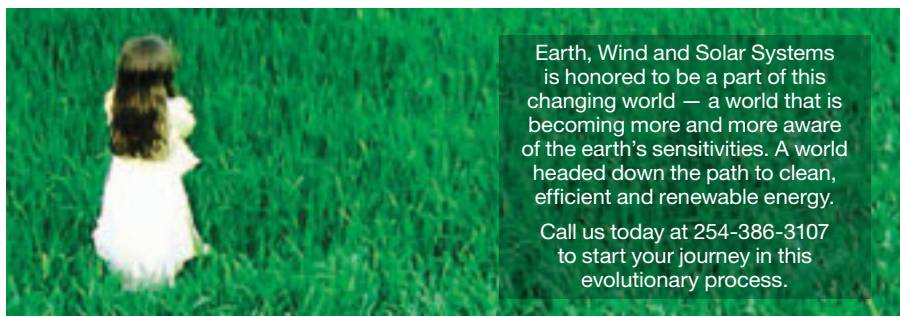


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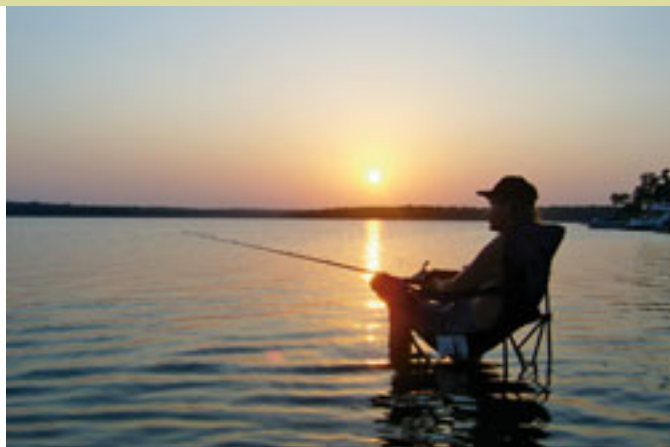


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T E X A S ' L A R G E S T R U R A L L E N D E R





▲ Cherokee County Electric Cooperative member **Elaine Cannon** sent us this picture of her husband, **Joe Cannon**, on Fairfield Lake. “The fish weren’t biting, but it was a gorgeous sunset,” she said.



▲ Can you spot the baby in this picture? Try as he might, then 16-month-old **Logan Kainer** couldn’t hide in a New York City Walt Disney store from his parents, **Brian** and **Stephanie Kainer**, who are Fayette Electric Cooperative members.

Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Sep	Texas Skyscapes	Jul 10
Oct	Cowgirls	Aug 10
Nov	Daredevils	Sep 10
Dec	Roughin’ It	Oct 10
Jan	Snow Daze	Nov 10
Feb	Firsts	Dec 10

TEXAS SKYSCAPES is the topic for our SEPTEMBER 2009 issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to Texas Skyscapes, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, before July 10. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We regret that Texas Co-op Power cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. Please note that we cannot provide individual critiques of submitted photos. If you use a digital camera, e-mail your highest-resolution images to focus@texas-ec.org, or submit them on our website at www.texascoopower.com.



▲ The **Mitchell** family and friends sure had a good time cooling off during their annual camping trip to the Frio River/Garner State Park area. Thanks to Sam Houston Electric Cooperative member **Rachel Mitchell** for sending us this fun, summertime photo of their pit stop at the nearby, scenic Lost Maples State Natural Area.

VACATION PHOTOS

It’s not very often that we allow a photo on this page that isn’t shot within our great state’s borders—this month is definitely an exception. From familiar Texas, down south to Costa Rica and over the big, blue Atlantic Ocean to Africa, your entries made us all wistful for that great getaway.

—ASHLEY CLARY



▲ We loved this picture of Fayette Electric Cooperative member **George Jasek** in a “poor man’s umbrella.” His wife, **Diana Jasek**, snapped the shot during their vacation in Costa Rica.

▼ **April Stewart** of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative sent us this spectacular shot of silhouetted giraffes taken during an African safari in July 2008.



AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

JULY

02 CLARENDON [2-4]
Saints Roost July 4th Celebration,
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4

TEMPLE
Family Fun Fest



03 CALDWELL
ELC July 3rd Celebration & Fireworks Display,
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LEAKEY [3-4]
July Jubilee,
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03 SHINER [3-4]
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WAXAHACHIE [3-4]
Crape Myrtle Festival & Driving Trail, (972) 937-2390, www.waxahachiechamber.com

ABERNATHY [3-5]
All-School Reunion, (806) 298-2169, www.abernathyex-students.org

UVALDE [3-5]
Fourth of July Golf Tournament,
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04 ATHENS
Fireworks at the Fishery,
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INDEPENDENCE
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JEFFERSON
Fireworks Fantazmagoria,
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04 LUCKENBACH
Walt Wilkins
4th of July Celebration,
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MCMAHAN
Whizzerville Summerfest,
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NOVICE
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ROCKPORT
Patriotic Boat Parade,
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AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

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06 JACKSONVILLE [6-11]
Western Week,
(903) 586-2217

LAMPASAS [6-12]
Spring Ho Fiesta at the
Springs, (512) 734-1759,
www.springho.com

10 BALCONES HEIGHTS
[10, 17, 24, 31, 8/7] Jazz
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www.reachfortheheights.org

MASON [10-11]
Roundup Festival,
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BLANCO [10-12]
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10 TRINITY [10-11, 17-18]
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11 BOERNE Wild West
FunFest, (830) 510-9515,
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MARBLE FALLS
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2157, www.fallsmuseum.org

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17 GATESVILLE Jamboree,
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17 HEMPSTEAD [17-18]
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18 ANDICE Arts & Crafts
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18 FRIONA
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COMANCHE Open Rodeo
Parade, (325) 356-3233

FRIONA Texas
Cheeseburger Cook-Off,
(806) 250-3491

23 BROWNWOOD [23-25]
County Rodeo,
(325) 646-9535

25 BONHAM Heritage Day
Festival, (903) 583-0302

25 WINCHESTER
Area Volunteer Fire
Department Fish Fry &
Auction, (979) 242-5866

31 CAMP WOOD [31-8/1]
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AUGUST

04 NEW BRAUNFELS [4, 11,
18] Two Ton Tuesdays,
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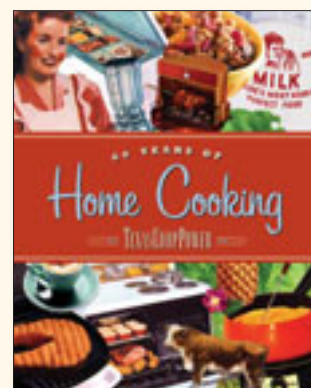
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Remember the Alamo—but don't forget the other four Spanish missions built along the San Antonio River three centuries ago.

Magnificent and mysterious, these missions are the bearers of secrets, from the origins of faded frescoes on stone church walls to the identities of unknown artists and masons.

They are the keepers of the flame of the Coahuiltecan, the Native Americans who gave up their language, religion and nomadic way of life to become farmers and ranchers at the mission compounds they helped build.

And the missions tell the story of how merging cultures laid the foundation for San Antonio, a vibrant and multicultural city.

The Alamo, of course—founded in 1718 as Mission San Antonio de Valero, the first of the five missions established along the river—is a must-see. But when you tire of the crush of the crowds at this Texas shrine, head just south of downtown to the San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, where there's ample room to quietly roam the grounds of these four missions that still hold regular church services.

Here's a look at the four missions—each spaced two to three miles apart—that are listed in order heading south from the Alamo. For more information about daily tours, call (210) 932-1001 or go to www.nps.gov/saan.

Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña

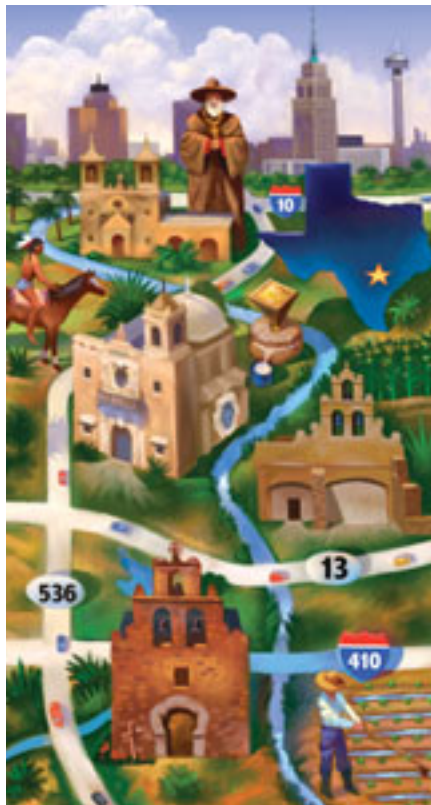
Founded in 1731 on the east bank of the river, the mission built nearest to the Alamo traces its roots to 1716 in East Texas. The twin bell towers of the church stand as a reminder that the missions “were the first skyline in Texas,” says park ranger Dan Hollifield. Dedicated in 1755, this is considered the oldest, unrestored stone church in the nation.

Mission Concepción's history reads like a mystery novel, from the remnants of elaborate frescoes on the church's façade to the steep, winding stone stairs that lead to the office of the Father President, the supervisor of all mission activity.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Rich with mysteries, San Antonio's Spanish missions paved the way for a dynamic, multicultural city.

BY CAMILLE WHEELER



Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo

Set aside extra time to tour the 6-acre Mission San José—the Queen of the Missions—which served as Texas' largest Spanish mission compound. Founded in 1720 on the west bank of the San Antonio River, it is the city's second oldest mission. Of particular interest is the restored, water-powered gristmill built around 1794.

This mission zealously guards its secrets: Art historians and architects come from all over the world to study the famous Rose Window on the south wall of the sacristy, but no one knows who created this exquisite example of Spanish Colonial Baroque architecture

with its winding and curling tendril-like scrolls. Was the window carved by carpenter Pedro Huizar, whose sweetheart Rosa was lost at sea? Or, in a more likely theory, was it named for Saint Rose of Lima, the first canonized saint of the New World?

Architecture aficionados also come here to study the ornate façade of the limestone church. Considered one of the finest examples of Spanish Colonial Baroque architecture in the United States, the façade depicts Christ's family tree with statues and other intricate carvings.

Mission San Juan Capistrano

Mission San Juan's history dates to 1716, when it originally was built as Mission San José de los Nazonis in East Texas. The mission was re-established, and then renamed, on the east bank of the San Antonio River in 1731.

Mission San Juan, the least developed of the San Antonio missions, struggled to make progress in the face of Apache raids and disease outbreaks. The mission never completed construction of a permanent church—another building was converted to a church—but it did make its mark in agriculture, thanks to rich farmland that produced corn, sweet potatoes, squash, sugar cane and wheat. Plans are under way to build a Spanish Colonial demonstration farm here.

Mission San Francisco de la Espada

Mission Espada—or Mission of Saint Francis of the Sword—originally was established as Mission San Francisco de los Tejas near the Neches River in 1690. It moved to the west bank of the San Antonio River in 1731.

Of the four missions, Espada boasts the best-preserved *acequia* system, with the irrigation ditches still carrying water to nearby farms. Espada Dam, completed by 1745, diverts river water into an *acequia madre*—mother ditch—and through the Espada Aqueduct, a National Historic Landmark that's the oldest Spanish aqueduct in the United States.

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

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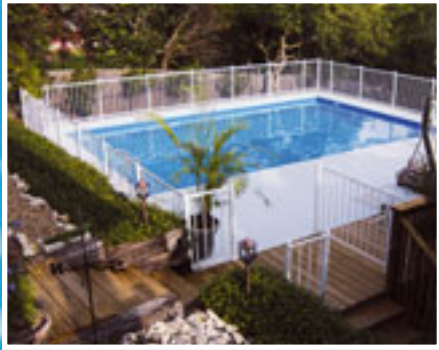
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