


LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

JANUARY 2010

WHOOPING CRANES WINTER IN TEXAS

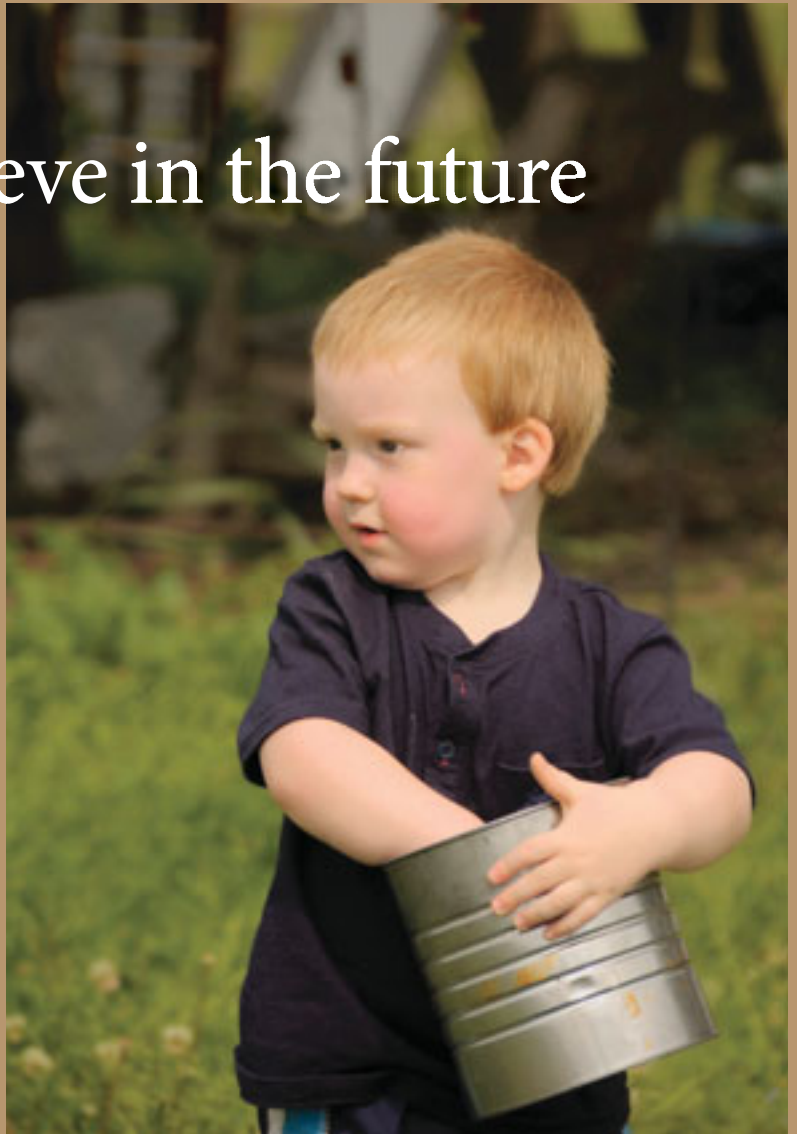
KITCHEN MAGIC

TEXAS Good POWER

A man with a beard and a white baseball cap is holding a large watermelon over his shoulder. He is wearing a blue and white plaid shirt. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and other people.

SEEDS *of* CHANGE
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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



FEATURES

8 Seeds of Change

TEXAS FAMILY FARMS

Story and Photos by Jody Horton

Family farming, in the span of just a few generations, has gone from the dominant way of life to one that has nearly vanished. In the first of a three-part series, meet the members of the Johnson family, who farm near Center.

16 On a Wing and a Prayer

By Elaine Robbins

The world's last natural wild flock of Whooping Cranes navigates a precarious course. They return to the same wintering grounds on the Texas coast each year.

FAVORITES

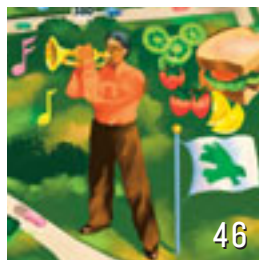
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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

HE LIKES US

What a DY-NO-MITE publication. I eagerly await the arrival of each new one—more so than my paid subscriptions.

DAN BRANSON

Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative

SOLAR WATER HEATING THE OLD WAY

Re: "Solar Water Heating the Easy Way" in the October 2009 issue. I lived in Honolulu in the early 1950s. Most of the houses had a link on the roof—galvanized pipe in a zigzaggy pattern with a glass cover. This was the hot water system. That was 50 years ago.

RUTH DAVIS

Central Texas Electric Cooperative

WEST TEXAS TOUGH

Elmer Kelton and I were in Crane Elementary together. Elmer rode a horse to school; I rode the school bus.

Our population in Crane County consisted of rattlesnakes, scorpions, centipedes, tarantulas, coyotes and huge jackrabbits. We survived two dust bowls, the Great Depression, the great oil boom and World War II. Our vegetation consisted of mesquite trees, prickly pears and tumbleweeds.

It is said, "If you aren't tough when you go to West Texas, you are tough when you leave."

Thanks, Elmer, for the legacy that you left for all who read your books about our West Texas heritage.

HARRIETTE GORMAN

Bandera Electric Cooperative

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.texascooppower.com. Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and are printed as space allows. Read additional letters at www.texascooppower.com.

POWER TALK

TEXAS LIONS CAMP: Unforgettable Memories for Free

As district governor of the 55 Lions Clubs in her region of West Texas, Big Country Electric Cooperative General Manager Fredda Buckner is responsible for facilitating and promoting many community, state and international charitable projects.



But one cause is especially near and dear to her heart: the Texas Lions Camp on the outskirts of Kerrville that gives children with physical disabilities, cancer and Type 1 diabetes the chance to climb a rope, ride a horse, fish, explore nature, pet goats, sheep and calves, and even plan and implement their own on-site radio show. In short, it's the chance to be a kid. And, the camp is free, thanks to the sponsorship of individual Lions Clubs across the state.

"This is one of Texas' best-kept secrets, and we need to get the word out," Buckner said of the camp that rests on more than 500 acres in the Hill Country. It offers nine sessions, starting June 6 and ending August 7. All sessions last one week, with campers staying on-site, except for a three-day camp at which children go home every evening.

The first five sessions are for children from the ages of 7 to 16 with physical disabilities or who have been diagnosed with cancer. Qualifying physical disabilities include absence or amputation of limbs, cerebral palsy, hearing, vision and speech impairments, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida and orthopedic conditions.

The next two sessions are exclusively for children who have been diagnosed with cancer. After the subsequent day camp, the Texas Lions Camp concludes with two sessions for children from the ages



of 8 to 15 who have Type 1 diabetes and are insulin-dependent. Those sessions emphasize medical education.

For more information, including how to obtain an application or make financial donations to the camp, call (830) 896-8500 or go to www.lionscamp.com.

HAPPENINGS

Pageantry reigns at the **TEXAS CITRUS FIESTA** in Mission, where King Citrus and Queen Citrianna provide the crowning touches, and the tangy smell of grapefruit and oranges—such as those sliced to decorate parade floats—draws spectators into the festivities.

First held in 1932, the fiesta celebrates the bountiful winter citrus harvest from the lush, subtropical Rio Grande Valley. The fiesta is held on nonconsecutive days and starts January 16 with the product costume style show in which models of all ages, male and female, wear hats and outfits made of dried fruits and vegetables. Tickets are \$5.

The Royal Coronation of King Citrus and Queen Citrianna, set for January 28, is a beautifully orchestrated event. One young boy serves as the crown bearer, and four more carry the 12-foot-long train of the queen's white dress with gold trim as she and her royal court proceed up a runway and onto a stage. Tickets are \$3 and \$5 for general and reserved seating, respectively.

The fiesta concludes on January 30 with a flurry of events, including the Vaquero Cook-off competition and the Fun Fair featuring live music and arts and crafts booths. Then there's the grandest event of all, the Parade of Oranges, which is expected to draw 100,000 onlookers with floats, high school marching bands, and city and fiesta dignitaries.

For more information, call (956) 585-9724 or go to www.texascitrusfiesta.net.

THE MOTHER OF ALL PEPPERS

Many in the South and Southwest know the chiltepin as an attractive, easy-to-grow, shade-tolerant ornamental that in the fall is covered with scores of pea-sized, bright red berries. ... It is easy to forget that this plant is actually a wild, native pepper, and not just any pepper but the reputed progenitor of all domesticated peppers classified as *Capsicum annuum*, the most important and widely cultivated pepper species in the world today.

—Matt Warnock Turner, *Remarkable Plants of Texas: Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives*, University of Texas Press, 2009



SALLY & ANDY WASOWSKI

UPDATE Reservoirs at Risk

When last we reported on giant salvinia (in November 2008), this highly invasive aquatic fern was choking portions of

Caddo Lake in East Texas. By October 2009, it was firmly established in 11 Texas reservoirs. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) urges people to immediately clean all vegetation from boat trailers and boats when they come out of the water; giant salvinia can easily ride on boat trailers and travel to other lakes. And all those who enjoy our waters should learn to spot this free-floating plant. For more information, call the TPWD at (409) 384-9965 or go to www.nature.org/initiatives/invasivespecies.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN MARGESON

WHO KNEW?



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The post office uses a special red-ink stamp every day in February except on Valentine's Day, February 14, when the ink changes to black—a change that postmark collectors love. The folks at the Valentine Post Office suggest that you send your valentine in a white, pink or lavender envelope. How jazzy is that? For more information, call (432) 467-2912.

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'Smart Grid' Is in Eyes of the Beholder

Progress coming, nonetheless

By Kaye Northcott

The term "smart grid" has taken on a life of its own, even as people try to agree on what it means. The closer consumers and energy professionals get to defining a smart grid, the more they realize it is not a single entity.

"The term doesn't mean anything specific," said Martin Gordon, a program manager with the Cooperative Research Network who spoke at the Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC) Annual Meeting in August. TEC is the statewide association for electric cooperatives.

Gordon explained that the general goal is to establish a system in which electric consumers' home meters have two-way communication with the electric co-op.

Certainly there have been advances. Take meter reading, for example. Originally, many co-ops asked members to walk outside their homes and get a reading on their electricity usage for billing purposes at a particular time each month. Other co-ops had meter readers walk routes, record informa-

tion and return to the office with it. Then came automated meter-reading equipment that can send electricity usage information from customers' boxes to co-ops. The latest thing is automated meter infrastructure that can instantly provide a co-op and a customer with up-to-the-minute electricity usage figures.

But this is just one component of a smart grid. The process of making systems communicate with one another is in its infancy. The various components that would make up a smart grid don't necessarily share a common language. Experts have to program the components to talk to one another. Integrating the various systems is slow going.

In addition, Gordon said consumer psychology is the most important element of a program. "Will it change people's behavior?" he asked. If consumers don't want to fine-tune their electric usage to conserve electricity and save money, then the interactive improvements won't matter much, he explained.

Some consumers say that electric utilities should refrain from telling them how much electricity to use.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, based in Bastrop, is a leader in moving toward a smart grid and, beyond that, to what General Manager/CEO Mark Rose calls a "sustainable" grid. In an essay on that vision, he writes that the co-op "will set goals to neutralize, if not reduce, our system's impact on the overall state grid."

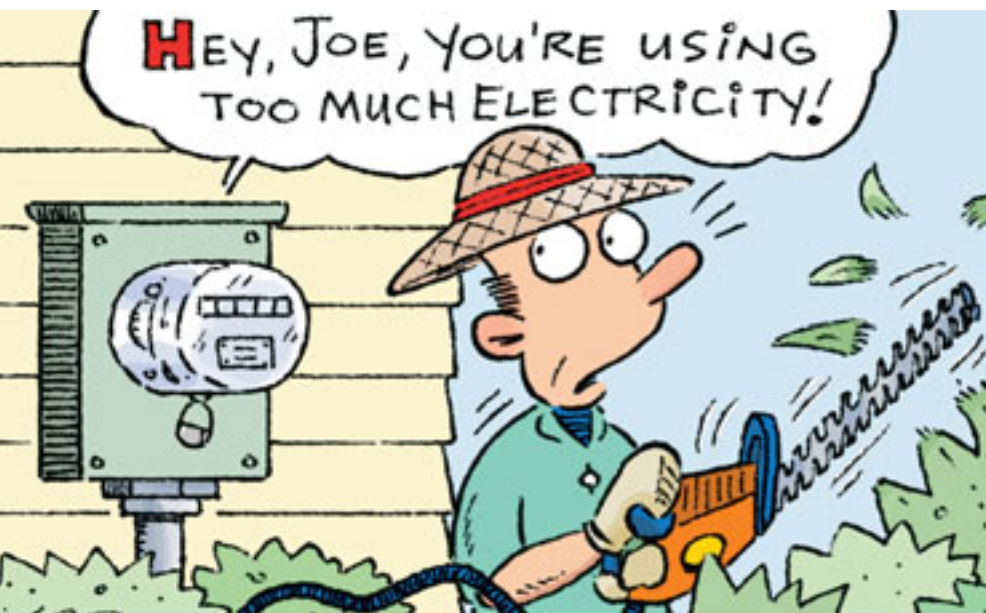
The co-op is purchasing an energy-management system with in-home displays and programmable smart thermostats that will give customers the data and device control necessary to manage energy use and expenses. An in-home, wireless, touch-screen device will provide consumers with updates on energy usage and costs, tips for saving money on energy bills, power alerts, including power spikes from the utility, and information on various loads and activity within the home.

Pending board approval of Bluebonnet's five-year business plan, the cooperative will fund a transformation of its entire electric distribution system to a smart grid through its rates and long-term borrowing. The co-op already has an alphabet soup of infrastructure improvements, including a new business information system (BIS) and customer information system (CIS) designed by a company called SAP, a digital microwave network and geographic information (GIS), outage management (OMS) and automatic vehicle locator (AVL) systems. The co-op can instantly read any meter, check its status and efficiently pull up a member's current account information. In many cases, this allows the co-op to alert customers to a problem before they discover it themselves. All of these improvements make the co-op more efficient. In fact, Rose says the co-op has reduced its costs and labor force by 30 percent.

Bluebonnet plans to start integrating smart grid technology in its members' homes and businesses by the end of June.

Many other Texas electric cooperatives are also applying for federal grants to upgrade their networks.

Kaye Northcott is editor of Texas Co-op Power.





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SEEDS *of* CHANGE

TEXAS FAMILY FARMS

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JODY HORTON



EDITOR'S NOTE: *The redefining of the family farm and the erosion of rural communities during the past century has been as dramatic in Texas as anywhere in the nation. In 1900, 83 percent of Texans lived in rural areas. Most of them were involved in farming. By 2005, 86 percent of Texans were living in urban areas. While agricultural production was once spread over many farms, today the vast majority of food, feed and fiber are produced by a relatively few large operations.*

Family farming, in the span of just a few generations, has gone from the dominant way of life to one that has nearly vanished. In a special three-part series, "Seeds of Change—Texas Family Farms," we will meet three Texas farmers who carry on their families' farming traditions. Look for Part II in March. We hope these stories offer a glimpse of what it takes to run a family farm in 21st-century Texas.



"Everybody farmed when I was a kid, but there's just one now," says Royce Johnson, referring to his son. "I'm grateful Shelby wanted to continue."

The Johnson family history in farming southwest of Center runs deep, stretching back to the turn of the century before names and particulars are lost to memory. Shelby Johnson, the last in the line of Johnson farmers, is among just a few still farming in Shelby County. His farm, served by Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative, is also the largest in that area in terms of variety and quantity of produce, which includes tomatoes, peas and watermelons. Many community members call him "The Last Farmer."

"This is what my father did and what his father did," says Shelby, 40. "I guess it's a heritage thing."

Friday, July 17

We're in Shelby's pickup truck on the way to the watermelon field for a resupply run. During the peak of harvest season, Shelby might cut this road between the family's two farm stands, one in town and one on U.S. Highway 96, and the farm a dozen times a day. It's now mid-July, and the most frantic days have passed. Smashed watermelon chunks litter the sandy dirt road every few hundred feet—casualties of frequent trips in the past weeks. There's a thud and a squish as the truck's tire hits one.

"You have to love farming to farm," Shelby says. "If you do it to make money, I don't recommend it." He is quick to point out that while he has had some success, farming has never entirely paid his bills. Like many in the area, Shelby is also an industrial chicken farmer—a business he entered at the age of 18. In past years, during the peak of the farming season, he has been able to leave day-to-day operations of the poultry enterprise in the care of his friend and neighbor, Gene Edward Smith. While Shelby is happy with the stability that growing chickens has brought to his finances, many farmers in the area, including his father, have soured on the industry, claiming it puts farmers in too much debt and at too much risk for too little return.

"The other thing you have to know about farming is that there is no way you can do it yourself," Shelby says. "I'm a lot more than just one old boy planting a pea patch. I'm literally surrounded by good help."

He rattles off the names of family members, friends and two full-time farm hands, describing what they do for the business. "So if you want to farm, the first thing you have to do is get 10 to 12 dang good people to help you," he says. "If

any one of them decided to jump ship I don't know what I would do."

The back doors of the pickup pop open, and the team sets to work. Shelby puts the truck in gear and eases forward. Full-time farmhand Gustavo Florencio mans the bed while his brother-in-law, Regal, and a high school-age neighbor, Lynn, fan out to one side, staying parallel. Lynn stoops and rises, imitating a shot-putter as he arcs a watermelon 10 feet through the air. It is caught by Regal, and in the same movement floated to Gustavo and stacked in the pickup bed.

"I've got the easy job," Shelby says sheepishly.

He describes the effort and expense of laying irrigation tape, a flat, hose-like apparatus that drips water, and the worry he had over his crops this year. While this part of East



The Johnson family has farmed in East Texas for approximately a century. Louise and Royce Johnson have turned the farm operation over to son Shelby.



Shelby Johnson inspects some purple-hull peas.



Regal tosses a watermelon fresh from the field to Gustavo Florencio, his brother-in-law, in the truck bed.

Texas skirted the brutal drought felt in much of the state, the period between rains was enough to leave many fields burned up when they should have been peaking.

"That last rain a week ago really saved us," Shelby says. Despite some long, dry spells, it has been a record year for his watermelons. "We're on our fifth cutting, and that's just about unheard of," he adds.

Since taking over operations from his father eight years ago, Shelby has added well systems and drip irrigation—a rarity for a region where crops almost exclusively are grown on dryland farms. The improvements helped him reduce his total farmed acreage almost by half—to 80 acres—and have saved a few seasons from ruin, including this one.

"We worked real hard. And I prayed about it. We've had a good crop," Shelby says.

Back at the roadside farm stand, James—a cousin of Shelby's wife, Renee—and James' wife, Natalie, are handling a steady stream of customers. Recognizable by its weathered farmhouse and patches of merciful shade beneath tall pines, the stand has been a landmark for more than 28 years on U.S. Highway 96 south of town. This roadside stand and a trailer pulled to the town square at the beginning of the season are the only places you can buy Johnson produce.

"We used to farm commercially," says Royce, who 15 years ago transitioned sales exclusively to the family's farm stands on the highway and on the square. "You used to be able to sell to local grocery stores, but all that changed. Now they only buy from the big wholesale markets. We couldn't compete in wholesale."

"Now we can focus on quality instead of quantity," adds Shelby. "Commercial growers might grow a certain variety of tomato just because it ships better. We grow for taste."

At the roadside operation, boxes of green and fresh ripe tomatoes are stacked on tables and under a small, blue canopy tent in front of the house. Displays of cucumber, squash, okra, peppers, sweet corn, new potatoes and cantaloupes share space with a variety of relishes, sauces and jams made by Shelby's mother, Louise. A glass-door chiller on the porch holds bags of shelled purple-hull peas—a local favorite—as well as butter beans. Hundreds of watermelons cover tables of steel mesh. Hundreds more are stacked on the ground.

But the showstopper is a cluster of eight watermelons as big as hogs, piled to one side near the front of the stand. This is Shelby's store window dressing. Travelers spy them from the road and stop to take pictures of them or people with them as if the melons were celebrities. In fact, three of them are. They won third-, fourth- and fifth-place prizes at the 20th annual WHAT-A-Melon festival in Center the weekend before. The first-place winner isn't here. It's also from the Johnsons' melon patch and holds court at the stand on the square.

"I could have sold those 50 times," Shelby says, pointing at the monsters, "but they've made more money for me sitting right there."

Saturday, July 18

We meet at dawn at the pea patch where Gustavo and his brother Miguel, the other full-time hand, are already picking purple hulls. Meanwhile, Louise is picking green tomatoes, and Royce is pulling sweet corn. After bagging and weighing

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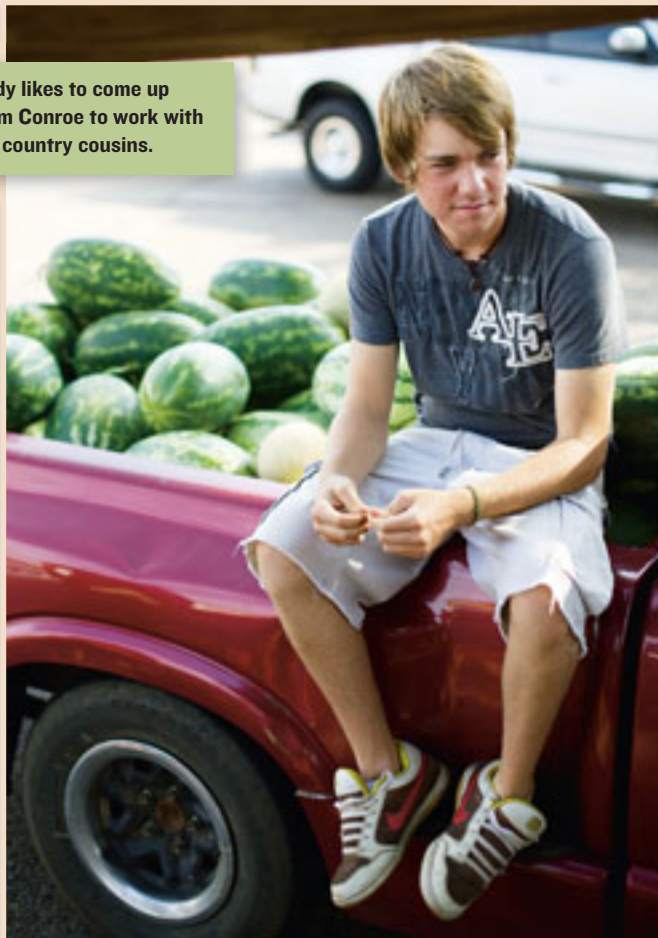
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Cody likes to come up from Conroe to work with his country cousins.



Jenny Johnson, 14, totes a box of fresh tomatoes to the stand.

peas and setting them aside to be shelled, Shelby will make stops to collect squash and okra, watermelons, shelled peas and ripe tomatoes picked the evening before. Everyone converges on the Center town square around 8 a.m.

"Mama's the one that built that business on the square," Shelby says. "When she started that stand 20 years ago, she didn't make much. And she would sit there all day."

Today, the stand in town enjoys a steady stream of repeat business. Cars and trucks begin rolling in by 8:15 a.m. Some people get out, but many just lower a window. Shelby and Renee's daughters, Olivia, 8, and Jenny, 14, offer enthusiastic drive-up service. Their cousin Cody, 14, is here from Conroe for the summer and is also helping at the stand. Sitting on a truck bed full of watermelons, he launches into an explana-

CHICKEN FARMING: Golden Eggs or Chicken Scratch?

Widespread chicken farming began in East Texas after World War II. Since then, the chicken business here and elsewhere has changed dramatically. Once defined by independent backyard farmers and small-scale family operations, the industry today is dominated by large-scale industrial farming, contracted through several large corporations.

"Back in the '50s, we bought our own chickens and feed and sold on the open market," says Royce Johnson. "You could run a chicken business for very little startup back then. Now I'm told the average cost is about a million dollars. And of course you have to borrow that money up front."

He recalls the era when chicken farming was a family business and no outside employees were needed.

"On a typical farm you would have two chicken houses, each with about 3,000 chickens," Royce explains. "It was a manageable size for a family to run. Now a farmer might have as many as 20 houses—or more—with 30,000 birds per house."

Scale alone is not the only change the industry has seen during Royce's lifetime. Demand for increased efficiency has created faster-growing chickens through genetic engineering and food supplements.

"It took us 12 weeks to grow a 3-pound bird," he recalls. "Today it takes six weeks to grow a 6-pound bird."

While some farmers here have found relative stability through chicken farming, others like Royce have grown increasingly discontent with the industry.

Royce said he was forced out five years ago, unable to pay for costly upgrades required by the corporation that contracted him. He said the same happened to many more growers in this East Texas area during the past year.

"If you could build your houses and ride it out for the 20-year contract, you could do OK," he says.

"I farmed and ran cattle and raised chickens, and it worked real good for me," Royce says. "Young people today have it a lot harder."

tion of why small towns are better than cities: “You know everybody, people are nicer, there’s basically no crime ...”

Jenny is on her cell phone calling the local radio station to make sure there’s an announcement about the “farmers market” at the square. In reality, the Johnsons are the farmers market. The only competition is a man selling eggs from his pickup.

Renee watches Olivia sweet-talk a lady with dark glasses. It seems everybody knows everyone else. These shoppers are more than customers, they are longtime friends. Olivia gives the lady a hug and helps her pick out some cantaloupes, then delivers them to her car. For this she earns a dollar tip, which she pops in the air to show her sister when the lady drives away.



“Try this,” James says.

We are back at the roadside stand on the porch where James has just cut the heart from a yellow-meat watermelon. Some friends have stopped by to pay a visit. He slices the meat, passing chunks all around. The yellow is almost iridescent, perfectly sweet with a texture grainier than a red meat.

Shelby, a cell phone on one ear, cuts open a red watermelon, skewers a square from the heart and slides it off with his teeth. He is tacking down plans for when everybody will meet up for lunch.

An hour later, 30 or more people of all ages have gathered at a small house in the woods for a feast of fried fish and a little bit of everything the Johnsons grow on their farm. Known simply as “The Cabin,” this one-room structure that’s flanked by sheds and kennels for hunting dogs is a hunting camp and the stage for occasional spontaneous lunches like this one. All of the Johnsons and many of their friends from the community are here. It has been weeks since the last lunch, and enthusiasm is high.

Food is piled up along a serving table and on top of an old, white enamel-plated stove.

Two deer heads watch from adjacent walls. Antlers and a few hornet nests hang from the rafters. Men and women grab plates and file through the food line, then huddle at tables to play Texas 42. After most are settled and fed, a storm blows in. Olivia and four other girls lie on a bed in the corner, propped on their elbows, and peer through the window to watch rain pour off the tin roof. It feels like a gathering of extended family.



“I’m blessed,” says Shelby. It’s now September. The harvest ran unusually long due to late-season rains. Shelby has had a good year and now is out for some R&R at another family hunting cabin.

“I’m sitting here on the Sabine River, and I hope to be here another month,” he says. This off time—to hunt and fish and just relax—is part of what Shelby loves most about farming. “My priorities might be a little different than others,” he explains. “My truck is probably worth \$2,000, and my wife doesn’t have any credit cards. I don’t make a lot of money, but I sure do enjoy my life.”



Royce plays Texas 42 with family and friends at the Johnsons’ one-room cabin in the woods.



James Wilhite, a cousin of Shelby’s wife, Renee, shows off a slice of bright yellow melon at the family’s highway vegetable stand.

FOOTNOTE: The Johnson family roadside stand on U.S. Highway 96, just south of Center, is open all day, seven days a week during growing season (June 1 through early August). The Johnson trailer stand can be found on the Shelby County courthouse square in Center, Monday through Saturday from 8 a.m.-2 p.m., during growing season.

Jody Horton is an Austin-based writer and photographer whose stories and photographs have appeared in previous issues of *Texas Co-op Power*.

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ON A WING & A PRAYER

World's Last Natural Wild Flock of Whooping Cranes Navigates a Precarious Course

BY ELAINE ROBBINS



WHOOPEE WATCHING

From late October through the end of March, the Whooping Cranes can be seen in their winter home on and around the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, about 70 miles north of Corpus Christi. The best way to see them is a boat tour on the Skimmer or the larger Wharf Cat that cruise into Aransas Bay to see the birds feeding in their coastal habitat. Bring binoculars and a windbreaker or rain jacket; conditions can be chilly. For more information and to make reservations, contact the Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce at 1-800-826-6441 or go to www.rockport-fulton.org and click on birding.

At the Aransas refuge, you can view Whooping Cranes from the observation tower that overlooks Mustang Lake and the surrounding salt marsh. (The birds are territorial, claiming the same piece of land each year, so you'll probably see only one pair.) The refuge offers two-hour guided van tours, which also provide an opportunity to see Whooping Cranes as well as resident white-tailed deer, alligators, Wild Turkeys and many other birds. Tours are offered January through April, on Saturdays and Sundays at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.; for reservations, call (361) 286-3559. The annual Whooping Crane Festival in Port Aransas is scheduled for February 25-28. For more information, call 1-800-452-6278 or go to www.portaransas.org.



Boat tours to view the Whooping Cranes are available from early November through March or April.

DAN GURAVICH/CORBIS

When it comes to the precarious existence of Whooping Cranes—an endangered species that numbered just 15 in 1941—the birth of each chick is a cause for celebration. So it wasn't surprising when Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, greeted the news of the arrival of twins with the excitement of a new father. On a brisk November morning in 2008, the twins—two of a record 16 Whooping Cranes that descended on

the grounds that morning—landed on private property on the Lamar Peninsula north of Rockport on the Texas Gulf Coast. For the chicks and their parents, it marked the end of a 2,500-mile journey from their summer home in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park.

Stehn quickly identified the twins' parents as "Al" and "Diane"—a pair named by wildlife biologists after Al and Diane Johnson, owners of Johnson Ranch, which features the Crane

House bed-and-breakfast. Earlier this decade, the Johnsons sold 245 acres of ranch land to the Nature Conservancy, which then donated the land to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, where the cranes winter. "This has been the most productive pair during the past dozen years," Stehn said appreciatively. "They have brought a total of 12 chicks to Aransas in the last 12 years."

Indeed, biologists prize fertility among the world's last natural wild flock of Whooping Cranes. North



The twins, center, were about 5 months old when they landed in Texas in November 2008 after a 2,500-mile journey with their parents from Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park. The young birds' ocher-colored feathers will turn white as they mature.

America's tallest flying birds—nearly 5 feet tall with a 7-foot wingspan—have made a slow climb back from the brink of extinction. Still numbering just 56 birds in 1970, the flock passed the 100-bird mark in 1986, the 200-bird mark in 2004 and now numbers 247. The total number of Whooping Cranes, including captive populations such as one housed at the San Antonio Zoo, stands at 537. Also included in that count are two flocks—one is nonmigratory, and the other migrates between Wisconsin and Florida—of captive birds released into the wild. Neither flock is self-sustaining.

The population rise comes courtesy of 70 years of conservation efforts in the United States and Canada. Habitat protection, wetland restoration and hunter education have all helped the species, once thought to number by the thousands in North America, recover. (Inexperienced hunters sometimes mistake Whooping Cranes—large white birds with distinctive black wingtips visible in flight—for Sandhill Cranes or Snow Geese, which are legal to hunt in most states.)

Although the trend has been gener-

ally positive, Stehn is not ready to pass out cigars and declare the cranes' comeback a complete victory. During the winter of 2008-09, a severe drought in Texas caused the record deaths of seven adults and 16 chicks. With the lack of rainfall and increased water use inland, not enough fresh water flowed into the bays, creating a scarcity of blue crabs, the Whooping Crane's dietary staple. The birds abandoned their usual salt-marsh habitat to seek fresh water inland and to find food in open bays and upland prairies. During one aerial survey, Stehn spotted a record 21 cranes at game feeders on the Lamar Peninsula. The cranes finally had a bit of luck at the end of March, when a harvest of fiddler crabs gave them a last-minute energy boost before their long journey north.

In coming years, Whooping Cranes will still face many threats. In the air, collisions with power lines, and efforts to avoid cell phone towers and wind turbines, make migration precarious. On the ground, the tar pits associated with vast oil-extraction operations in Alberta, Canada, pose a danger. And on the Texas coast, new housing developments in Seadrift, Holiday Beach, Lamar and

Port O'Connor are gobbling up territory that whoopers have occupied in past seasons. Wildlife biologists fear that a single catastrophic event such as an oil spill on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway could wipe out the entire flock.

But the cranes carry on as they always have, oblivious to human help and hindrance. Come spring, they'll return to Canada and perform one of nature's most elaborate mating rituals in which they flap their huge wings and leap into the air. They bow Japanese-style and toss sticks and bits of grass. Then they begin "unison calling." The female tosses her head back and emits two of the loud whoops for which the birds are named, and the male responds with a single, lower-pitched call. Four months after the chicks are born, they'll be ready to make their first long-distance migration to Texas—taking off on a wing and a prayer.

Elaine Robbins has a special interest in wildlife issues.

FRIENDLY SKIES

Collisions with power lines are the top known cause of death for fledged Whooping Cranes, but some utilities are making the skies friendlier. Victoria Electric Cooperative has installed special insulated power lines across the Cliburn Ranch in Calhoun County to protect cranes that could fly into the lines. Lester Green, manager of operations at VEC, said special precautions were taken because the birds spend the winter on the ranch. The co-op has worked with the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee, which brings together utility companies and habitat managers to find cost-effective ways to make transmission lines and power poles less of a threat for migratory birds. Several Texas electric cooperatives are consulting with the committee and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about building new lines away from migratory routes. In addition, installation of a bird flight diverter, a thick coil of wire that makes lines more visible to birds, has proved largely effective, according to Tom Stehn, Whooping Crane coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To learn more, go to www.aplic.org/resources.htm.

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Want Efficient, Safe Laundry? Ditch the Lint

Household chores like laundry seem fairly safe. But hidden problems like lint buildup in a dryer could lead to higher energy bills due to inefficiency and, ultimately, hazardous conditions in your home.



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Stay Safe, Energy Efficient and Lint Free

For energy-efficient and safe dryer performance, lint must be removed from the dryer and vent to allow air to circulate freely. Here are ways to avoid lint buildup:

- Clean the lint filter after each load.
- Occasionally remove the lint filter and clean it with a nylon brush and hot, soapy water.
- Periodically clean the back of the dryer where lint can be trapped.
- Keep the area around and on top of the dryer clean and free of clutter.
- Have a qualified service person clean the interior of the appliance and venting system once a year.
- Thoroughly clean the vent system if you notice your drying times have increased.

“Lint is the bane of our existence,” said Brian Wallace, president of the Coin Laundry Association in Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois. “We have to clean lint, not only as a safety issue, but to keep our energy costs down and ensure proper performance.”

At coin-operated laundries, dryers are key to customer

satisfaction. Other amenities pale if clothes don’t dry fast enough, so laundry owners remain adamant about maintaining proper air flow through commercial dryers. With 30 to 50 dryers at an average laundry, operators clear trash cans full of lint every day from their screens.

The same principle applies at home, although on a smaller scale.

“Cleaning the lint filter after every cycle is one habit we want to encourage,” said Jill Notini, communications and marketing director for the Washington, D.C.-headquartered Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM). “Repetition builds a habit.”

AHAM urges consumers to clean the lint filter after each load and occasionally remove the filter and wash it with a nylon brush and hot, soapy water to remove residue. This simple chore not only improves air flow and energy efficiency, but also reduces the chance of a dryer fire.

Statistics on dryer fires show no difference between the natural gas and electric dryers, according to John Drengenberg, consumer affairs manager for Underwriters Laboratories (UL), a Chicago-based nonprofit that tests and sets minimum standards for electric-consuming items. “If you forget to clean the lint screen too many times you’re going to get a buildup, and that’s where ultimately you could have a problem,” he said.

Manufacturers whose products carry the UL mark are required to ship dryers with safety instructions that specify cleaning the lint screen before or after each load. These instructions also recommend keeping dryer exhaust openings and adjacent surrounding areas free from accumulated lint, dust and dirt, and having qualified service people periodically clean the dryer’s interior and exhaust duct.

Without adequate air circulation, heat flow becomes stymied, clothes take longer to dry, and it costs more to operate the appliance. Like ovens and stoves, dryers apply extreme heat on potentially flammable materials.

“You wouldn’t leave something cooking unattended for long periods of time—at least you shouldn’t, for safety and edibility,” Drengenberg noted. “Dryers, though, often run up to an hour or more, forgotten in a basement, garage or utility space.”

This out-of-sight, out-of-mind practice makes it essential that a dryer be maintained on a simple and regular basis.

Wise Investments in Energy Efficiency

The economic uncertainty we're facing these days has many of us putting money into something with which we feel comfortable: our homes. Making a few upgrades around the house generally pays big dividends. And when boosting energy efficiency is one of them, the decision becomes a no-brainer.

For any energy-efficiency work done at your residence during the coming year, Uncle Sam will foot 30 percent of the bill—not a bad deal! Through the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—better known as the stimulus bill—the Internal Revenue Service offers a personal tax credit of up to \$1,500 for energy-efficiency improvements made to existing homes during 2009 and 2010.

The credit covers 30 percent of the cost of adding insulation materials and exterior doors, windows and roofs designed to help reduce a home's heat loss or gain. It also includes efficient central air conditioners, air-source heat pumps, hot water boilers and biomass stoves.

For weatherization-related work, the credit covers only the cost of materials. With heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, as well as biomass stoves, installation costs also count toward the credit.

So how does the math work out? Say you spend \$1,000 on new insulation. You would get, in the form of a tax credit, \$300 off your tax bill. If you spend \$3,000 to purchase a new HVAC system and have it installed, you'd have a \$900 tax credit to show for it.

To take advantage of the program, a home improvement must have taken place after February 17, 2009 (the day the stimulus bill was signed into law), and products must meet specific energy-efficiency criteria. A few rules of thumb will help you determine those criteria.

For exterior windows and skylights, rely on the Energy Star label. For other efficiency upgrades, request what's called a "Manufacturer Certification Statement" that the product or component qualifies for the tax credit. Many manufacturers post these

on their websites, but be sure to verify that the product does qualify before making a purchase. You can also visit www.irs.gov/recovery to review guidelines for eligible purchases.

Energy tax credits reduce taxes owed dollar for dollar and can be carried forward to following years. While they can help boost any refund you receive, you won't receive a check directly for the credit amount. You can file for energy tax credits using IRS Form 5695, with a total maximum value of \$1,500 for improvements made in 2009 and 2010.

Crunch the Numbers on New Year's Savings

If your New Year's resolution to spend less and save more always fizzles out by March, don't fret. You can save money on your energy bill each month by making just a few small changes around the house. Here's how:

- Save up to 20 percent on heating by installing a programmable thermostat that automatically lowers the heat when you leave the house for more than five hours or when the family goes to bed for the night.

- Save 1 percent to 3 percent on heating costs for each degree you turn the thermostat down. For optimal savings, set the thermostat at 68 degrees while at home and 65 degrees before you leave the house for the day.

- Save up to 20 percent on heating and cooling bills by sealing air leaks around doors and windows with caulk and weatherstripping. This inexpensive energy saver will pay for itself within a year.

- Save at least 25 percent on air conditioning when you replace your energy-inefficient central AC with one that has a seasonal energy-efficiency ratio (SEER) of 13 or higher.

- Save up to 40 percent on what you spend to run your refrigerator by replacing an old unit with a new Energy Star model.

- Save more than 50 percent on energy for cooking when you use a microwave instead of a conventional oven to heat meals.

- Save more than 10 percent on your water heating bill by lowering the water heater temperature from 140 to 120 degrees.

- Save 75 percent on energy for lighting by replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. They last about 10 times longer and will save you about \$30 or more in electricity costs over the life of each bulb.



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If you've added insulation to your home or made other energy-efficient improvements, you may be eligible for a tax credit.

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Faint but familiar, the chirrups trilled from somewhere high above our ancient live oaks. Bent over a bed of straggly salvias in our yard last spring, I stopped trimming and listened intently. More chirps! Dropping my scissors, I dashed to the edge of a stand of trees and peered into the dusky evening sky.

Were Purple Martins finally about to move into the three-story white birdhouse we'd put up and watched over so faithfully?

I held my breath. A martin—glossy blue-black and fork tailed—soared around the aluminum-sided house, set high on a sturdy pole and featuring six compartments, or rooms. Then he landed on a porch and peered curiously inside one of the compartments. “Yes, yes, YES!” I squealed excitedly, jumping, dancing and waving my arms all at once.

**By Sheryl
Smith-Rodgers**

OK, maybe I'm a little weird. But I'm not the only one who goes berserk at the sight of a Purple Martin. Every January and February, folks who call themselves “PM landlords” scan the skies daily and act nutty, too, when they spot their first martins of the season. As yet, however, my husband, James, and I are not official landlords because we don't have tenants in our house, but hopefully that will change this spring.

East of the Rocky Mountains, Purple Martins (*Progne subis*)—the largest members of the swallow family—almost exclusively nest in houses and gourds supplied by humans. It's believed their reliance on human-built housing dates back to when Native Americans hung hollow gourds near villages. The fiercely territorial martins kept scavenging animals away from tribes' crops and meats. Likewise, the martins' close proximity to people discouraged predators from raiding their nests. (Farther west, the species typically nests in natural cavities in trees and saguaro cacti.)

Contrary to popular belief, martins that show up first are not “scouts,” but simply the first to migrate north from their South American winter homes, primarily in Brazil. Adult martins typically return to the same housing every year if they've been successful in raising their babies there. Last year's youngsters, called “subadults,” migrate north from South America four to six weeks after adults do so. New landlords like us have the best chance of attracting subadults, who need their own place.

As a teen in Corpus Christi, I always loved to hear the cheerful chortling of our neighbors' martins. More recently, my interest in the species grew whenever I'd spy some at a martin house in our Blanco neighborhood. Entertaining to watch, Purple Martins also prey on flying insects, though not as many mosquitoes as once presumed. Mosquitoes compose only 3 percent or less of martins' diet. They prefer larger insects—wasps, flies, dragonflies, moths and beetles—caught way up in the air (mosquitoes hover near the ground).

Soon after arrival at their home for the season, martin romancing starts. The female chooses her mate based mostly on whether she likes the compartment he's

chosen. Next, the couple builds a nest of mud, twigs, straw and pine needles, topped with a layer of green leaves. When the offspring fledge, martins within the same colony turn out for the big social event, creating quite a ruckus.

In July, after the breeding season, thousands of martins gather in huge communal roosts in trees and under bridges before returning to South America. Their numbers can be so dense that they show up on Doppler radar when in flight!

As for our new martin house, despite some initial poking around, no one moved in last spring. Yes, James and I were disappointed. But we also understand that establishing a new colony takes time, sometimes several years. So we don't plan to give up. Like bona fide PM landlords across Texas, we'll put up our house again this month, then watch and listen ...

I can't wait to do the happy dance again!

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers wrote about salvias in the August issue of Texas Co-op Power.

LANDLORD CHECKLIST

Before investing in Purple Martin housing, make sure you have a suitable site. Find out if you live within their summer breeding range. The birds nest across the state except in far West Texas. Also consider:

- Successful colony sites should have at least 40 to 50 feet of large, open space around housing so martins can freely feed on flying insects. Proximity to water is a plus.
- Martins like to swoop, so a colony site needs at least 40 feet of clearance from trees and structures. The site should also be close to occupied buildings, about 150 feet away, so humans can monitor the birds' activity.

There are a multitude of housing styles and poles. We bought a pre-made aluminum house, a telescoping pole, an owl guard (bars that fit over the house and keep owls from reaching inside) and a predator guard (an upside-down "bucket" that fits on the pole and keeps out snakes and raccoons).

Experienced landlords may advise you to buy a winch or pulley system. Whatever pole you select, it's important that you're able to raise and lower your house easily to conduct martin nest checks and remove House Sparrow nests. Landlords may also favor white gourds—natural or artificial—over traditional houses. Ultimately, the decisions are yours. Just stick with a reputable manufacturer.

After lots of research, we chose a less expensive but heavy-duty telescoping pole that collapses in three segments, allowing access to martin housing. Much to our horror, the pole collapsed on its own, just prior to martin season. It would have been awful had the house been occupied. So we installed metal pins in each segment for ease of mind. (Mark your pole to ensure that you always orient your house in the SAME direction each year so martins won't get confused.)

Have your housing ready for occupancy by late January. Houses and gourds should be 12 to 15 feet high. Plug entrances to keep out starlings and sparrows. Network with other landlords to find out the martins' average arrival date in your area and unplug the entrances around that time, keeping starling and sparrow nests cleaned out.

To lure martins to your new housing, play recorded martin chatter ("dawn song") in early morning hours. Good luck!

ILLUSTRATION BY SCOTT DAWSON



Electrifying Job

One lady danced a jig when we turned her lights on.

BY HARRY P. NOBLE

I went to work with my father at the age of 8. I subsequently became a systems analyst, but that first job was one of the most rewarding I ever had. It all started in 1938, three years after the creation of the Rural Electrification Administration, with the rigging of high lines for the newly formed Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative. A practical man, my father said, “Son, we’ve got to keep food on the table, and I may need your help. I’ve got an idea.”

Each residence that joined the co-op and tied into the electric service had to have a meter installed and the house wired for ceiling lights and wall outlets. Dad’s idea was to teach himself to wire houses. With three children—I was the oldest boy—and a fourth on the way, he desperately needed to improve his chances of getting a steady paycheck. It turned into a skill that provided the family’s primary source of income for the duration of the Depression.

Dad bought tools that included a brace (a boring tool with a removable drill) and a variety of bits, four sizes of screwdrivers, cutting pliers, needle-nose pliers, a 20-foot retractable tape measure, rolls of rubber tape and water-resistant friction tape, a hammer with a hatchet blade on one side, a wood chisel and a file. He accumulated a wiring inventory that included fuse boxes, ceramic tubes and knobs, several gauges of Romex (electrical cable used for house wiring) and a large supply of electrical wire.

Dad found customers by following the high lines down dirt roads. He would mount a small fuse box and meter on an outside wall of a house. From there, he usually ran wires through the attic to each room for ceiling lights. At least this was the case for the better-built homes that had ceilings and attics, not just roof rafters. In these, he also added one or two wall outlets. Most of the structures had tin roofs, and during the summer, the attic temperatures became almost unbearable.

We quickly discovered I could cut Dad’s wiring time almost in half because I was small and could scamper about the attic fetching pliers, screwdrivers, brace and bits, electrical tape—whatever was needed. Another plus was my immunity to the attic’s scorching heat. Dad, who was in his mid-30s, would be dripping sweat in puddles, and I would still be going. I loved to help. Economically, we were a successful team, and he took me as often as possible.

It wasn’t unusual for workers to still be placing the poles when we finished wiring a house. In those cases when electric lines couldn’t be strung to the house, we mounted the fuse box and left. Other times, electricity was waiting, and we



were there when the lights went on. It was magic. In one farmhouse, when they flipped the switch for the kitchen light, it barely glowed and the lady of the house smiled. Then it came on full, and tears rolled down her face. On another occasion, the man of the house, while holding down a light's pull chain in the living room, said to another family member, "Come hold on to this so I can go turn on the light in the kitchen."

Turning the electricity on for the very first time was always a moving experience, not only for families but also for Dad and me. One lady, when the lights came on, ran out on the porch and danced a jig.

Back then, people were used to filling their kerosene lamps, not turning on the electricity. One time, as Dad hooked a meter to a power line, the customer said to him, "Harry, just fill that bowl (meter) halfway. If I like it, I'll have it filled next time."

When power lines were first being installed across the countryside, churches were wired and received free electricity. Ironing was one of the meanest jobs housewives faced each week, and electric appliances were expensive. So housewives used the cooperative model once more and pooled money to buy electric irons and radios for their churches. Presto—ironing parties, much like quilting parties, came on the scene. The ironing housewives could turn on the radio and follow the troubles and tribulations of two popular shows, "Ma Perkins" and "Pepper Young's Family," while they labored.

Home radios were a must for those who could afford them. In the evening, families sat around the radio to listen to such programs as "Lum and Abner," "Amos 'n' Andy" and "Fibber McGee and Molly." As the invisible current ushered in the era of radio to rural America, it served a larger purpose. It removed the dark cloak of clannishness while shining a light of knowledge down through the hills, creeks, rivers and backwoods where generations of families stayed in one area and many people mistrusted strangers and didn't want them on their land.

Those days are gone. So much has changed. But the memories are still there, and they tell such a beautiful story of courage, facing hardships and working together. They were hard times, but on each occasion the lights came on, we knew we had extended ourselves beyond the call of duty.

Author Harry Noble's mother told him that he's the boy in overalls strolling barefoot down Columbia Street in San Augustine. The photo was taken in 1939 by Russell Lee for the Farm Security Administration.

Harry P. Noble lives and writes in San Augustine.

My husband fell in love with a younger woman... me.

Breakthrough skin research turns back the clock 20 years—the secret is just under your chin!

Say goodbye to 'turkey neck.' Try it Risk-FREE for 30 days!

I remember the night I gave up on my neck. After a nice dinner out, my husband Steve and I went dancing downtown. We moved like teenagers out on the floor and it felt great... until I hit the ladies room lights. I was shocked. I recognized the face in the mirror and the low-cut black dress was definitely mine. But the neck belonged to someone else. It was wrinkled, tired and made me look 20 years older.

The little black dress went into the closet and for years I hid behind scarves and turtlenecks. I felt too old to dress sexy. My husband was still treating me respectfully, but the romance was slipping. A few less bouquets of flowers and our nights on the town were being replaced by naps on the couch. It felt like we had both given up, but then I found hope.

The Beauty Secret Under Your Chin

Top beauty experts agree that the one part of your body that can prematurely age you the most is your neck. While we worried about the slow creep of crow's feet, laugh lines and gray hair, it was our wrinkled necks that were giving us away.

Surprisingly, this is not because the skin on our neck ages faster than our faces. It's because women all over the world spend millions – even billions – on makeup, skin and hair products while doing little or

nothing for their neck! When I realized I was just as guilty as anyone, I decided to get back my younger, smoother neck.

Say Goodbye to Turkey Neck

That's when I discovered Declatone®, specially-formulated to firm, shape and smooth fine lines and wrinkles in the neck (including the décolleté area). Declatone® is more advanced than ordinary face and skin creams because it combines anti-aging ingredients in a proprietary formula that's sensitive enough for the delicate skin of your neckline.

As the skin below your chin ages, gravity takes over. The result is an embarrassing 'waddle' better known as "turkey neck." Nothing leaves you looking older beyond your years. The ingredients in Declatone penetrate deep to reduce the crepe-paper appearance of fine lines and wrinkles and restore your neck's youthful firmness. Smoother, tighter skin can be visible in as soon as two weeks!

The Sexy Black Dress Returns

After two months I really noticed a difference... and I wasn't the only one. My husband's frequent compliments came back ("Honey, you look great!") and the scarves and turtlenecks went into storage. As I looked better, I started feeling better too. It wasn't long before my husband surprised me with a weekend away at a fancy hotel. Of course, the low-cut



"I never thought much about how my neck looked until I saw a recent profile picture of myself at a wedding—I was horrified—sagging turkey neck. Upon my first application of Declatone, I noticed that the skin quality of my neck showed immediate improvement... Now, after 2 weeks—I am simply amazed... my neck is brighter, smoother and visibly tighter."

– Jamie, Berkeley Township, NJ

black dress came with us. My confidence was back and so was the romance!

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Old Blue: Top Hand on the Trail

BY MARTHA DEERING

During the Civil War, while Texas boys were away from home fighting in the Confederate Army, there weren't many cowboys around to tend the longhorn cattle abandoned on ranches and farms throughout the state. The longhorns, perfectly happy with this arrangement, returned to their wild ways and multiplied. By the time the soldiers got back home, Texas was teeming with wild cattle.

Most had no brand and little value. A scrawny longhorn might bring a dollar or two in Texas. However, cattle were worth \$40 a head in the market towns of the beef-starved north. The era of long cattle drives was about to get under way.

Driving herds of wild longhorns a thousand miles was tricky business. Freshly separated from thorny mesquite thickets, the cattle were bent on returning home. Few of them wanted to set out on what would become a four- or five-month hike up routes that included the Great Western Cattle Trail or the Chisholm Trail. Keeping them headed in the right direction tested the mettle of cowboy and cow pony alike, until some deep-thinking drover came up with the concept of using a lead steer.

Lead steers were born with a certain bossy mentality. They wanted to go first. The most famous of these was Charles Goodnight's Old Blue. Like some drivers you encounter on modern highways, Old Blue couldn't stand the sight of something in front of him. He passed all the other steers until he got into the lead. A tall, gunmetal-blue steer (the cowboys called his color "mulberry") with horns that spread wide, Old Blue commanded the point position on eight trips from the Palo Duro Canyon, where Goodnight's famous JA Ranch was located, to Dodge City, Kansas.

When Goodnight bought Old Blue as a 4-year-old, one of a group of 5,000, the young steer already showed signs of natural leadership. He seemed to have a steady quality that calmed the other flighty longhorns. Early on, Goodnight noticed that the cattle, after bedding down for the night, took up the same position in the herd the next morning that they had occupied the day before. Taking advantage of this insight, Goodnight hung a bell around Old Blue's neck. Before long, the rest of the herd grew accustomed to following the sound of the bell as it led them up the Great Western Cattle Trail.

When it was time to bed the herd down each night, the clapper on Old Blue's bell was tied up. Choosing not to sleep among the masses, Blue made his way to the campfire where, as legend has it, he feasted on cornbread, biscuits and dried apples given to him by the appreciative cowboys. They knew the value of a good lead steer. At river crossings, Old Blue

chose the best place to take the herd across and stepped smartly out into the water, never giving the herd a chance to mill around and decide they didn't want to get wet.

When the cattle finally reached their destination, he led the way into the pen and then stepped aside while the other steers entered. When the last trailing steer was inside the gate, Blue rushed back out. The big, blue steer was far too valuable to send to slaughter.

For eight years, Old Blue led cattle to market, an estimated 10,000 head. During the first few days of each trip, his patient presence and reassuring bawl soothed the skittish steers, which were always searching for a reason to stage a stampede. The snap of a twig, the yip of a coyote, any excuse would start them on a headlong run. Not only did the cattle run off lots of weight, but many were injured or killed in the panicked charges, along with an occasional cowboy. Old Blue refused to participate in these shenanigans. When the cattle tired, the seasoned steer would return to his place at the point and lead the panting animals north again. After Blue's eighth and final trip up the trail, he retired in comfort to a grassy pasture on the JA Ranch, where he lived to be 20. Upon his death, Blue's massive horns were mounted in the headquarters of Goodnight's ranch, but today they are on display at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon.

Martha Deeringer regularly writes history pieces for Texas Co-op Power.



Kitchen Magic for Kids

BY KEVIN HARGIS Somewhere at the intersection of physics and chemistry that is cooking, something entertaining, fun and almost magical sometimes appears.

The magic can happen in the kitchen, when a conglomeration of ingredients becomes deliciousness in an unexpected way. Sometimes, magic hides in a recipe when you read it and appears only when you cook it.

One famous example of that is the prize-winning Tunnel of Fudge Cake (find it at www.pillsbury.com), which makes its own interior chocolate filling while baking. I'm sure there's a rational, scientific explanation for the phenomenon, but there's also fun in the mystery.

Then there are times when the fun comes in the eating.

Once when I was a child, my mother decided she didn't want to cook a traditional supper, and instead we had waffles topped with butter-pecan ice cream. That spontaneous decision taught me that food doesn't have to be predictable or boring.

You can whip up a quick omelet using nothing more than a coffee cup and a microwave.



I've loved the unexpected ever since.

That's why I enjoyed these recipes, which came to me courtesy of Billie Baxley of Angleton, who is in the hospital auxiliary with my mom.

The equipment is simple: A microwave-safe mug and a microwave. The ingredients are also simple. Neither will take you more than a couple of minutes to make, but both yield surprisingly good results. The omelet is fluffy and cheesy, and the cobbler is gooey and warm.

OMELET IN A MUG

- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2-3 tablespoons shredded Cheddar cheese
- 2 tablespoons cooked ham, diced
- 1 tablespoon green pepper, diced
- Salt, pepper to taste

In microwave-safe cup coated with cooking spray, combine all ingredients. Microwave uncovered on high for 30 to 40 seconds. Stir with fork, then cook another 30 to 60 seconds longer or until eggs are completely set. Turn out onto plate to serve.

Servings: 1. Per serving: 407 calories, 32.6 g protein, 26.2 g fat, 3.9 g carbohydrates, 0.9 g fiber, 1,135 mg sodium, 408 mg cholesterol

PEACH COBBLER IN A MUG

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 tablespoon instant nonfat dry milk
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon baking powder
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cinnamon
- Dash salt
- 1 snack-sized container (4 ounces) diced peaches, well drained

Microwave butter in mug until melted, about 20 seconds on high. Add sugar, flour, dry milk, baking powder, cinnamon, salt and 2 tablespoons water to cup. Stir with fork until well blended, then add peaches on top of batter. Do not stir. Reduce microwave power to 70 percent. Cook for two minutes, then let stand in microwave one minute. Remove from oven, let stand until cool enough to eat.

Servings: 1. Per serving: 367 calories, 5.1 g protein, 31 g fat, 63.7 g carbohydrates, 3.1 g fiber, 107 mg sodium, 31 mg cholesterol

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†† In a 3-month clinical study at Temple University School of Medicine and published in the *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine*, Nutrisystem program participants lost an average of 18 lbs., and lowered fasting blood sugar levels from 149.5 to 115.2, compared to those following a diabetes support and education program, who lost 1.3 lbs. and lowered fasting blood sugar levels from 151.4 to 144. Not all menu items were included in the study. Study funded through an unrestricted educational grant from Nutrisystem.

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Any Way You Slice It

For a fun group activity for children and adults, why not hold your own make-and-bake pizza party? It can be as simple as using a mix or refrigerated dough or buying a premade crust, French bread or English muffins, slathering them with pasta sauce and topping with veggies, meat and cheese. Whipping up a dough from scratch costs a little less, has a bit more fiber and flavor, and gives you the satisfaction of doing it yourself. Here's a tried-and-true family favorite for a soft-crust pizza:

HONEY WHOLE-WHEAT PIZZA DOUGH

- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons rapid-rise yeast
- 2½ cups all-purpose flour, divided
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- ¼ cup olive oil

Pour about 1 cup very warm water (about 110 degrees) into bowl. Add honey and salt. Stir until dissolved. Stir in yeast and allow to proof (bubble up) for 5 minutes. Add 1 cup of all-purpose

flour and oil and mix until smooth and lump free. Add remainder of flour and mix until you can form ball with dough. If too dry, add water, 1 tablespoon at a time until achieving right consistency. If too wet, add 1 tablespoon flour at a time. Place dough ball on floured board and knead for about a minute. Put dough in sealed plastic bag or covered bowl and allow to rise in warm spot until doubled, about 45 minutes. Punch down dough, then let rise until doubled again.

On well-floured board, form dough into flat ball (divide in two for smaller "personal"-size pies). Pressing from center of dough outward, form dough into flat disc, turning it as you go. When dough has been flattened to about half an inch in thickness, use a rolling pin to flatten it further. Puncture dough several times with fork and put it on baking stone or lightly greased pizza pan. Form a rim of dough around the edge. Cover with sauce and toppings of your choice. Bake at 400 degrees for 12 to 15 minutes, or until golden brown.

Invite young party guests to help mix together this simple pizza dough.



Servings: 8. Serving size: 1 slice (dough only). Per serving: 277 calories, 7.3 g protein, 7.1 g fat, 46.2 g carbohydrates, 3.5 g fiber, 148 mg sodium

COOK'S TIP: You can make this dough ahead of time and freeze it after the second rise. Allow plenty of time for it to come to room temperature before shaping.

TO TOP IT ALL OFF

You can easily find jarred or canned sauces or make your own.

Pizza sauce is easy to make: Simmer a 15-ounce can of tomato sauce with a clove of minced garlic, a half teaspoon each of dried oregano, dried basil and red pepper, a quarter cup of Parmesan and salt to taste.

SPECIALTIES OF THE HOUSE

Whether guests are building their own pizzas, or the chef is in control, consider going beyond pepperoni. Try one of these themed pizzas with fun combinations of ingredients, or use them as inspiration to create your personally perfect pizza.

BIG TEX

Sauce: Half tomato, half barbecue

Layers: Thinly sliced red onion, smoked brisket, pickled jalapeños

Cheese: Colby Jack

MEXICAN FLAG MARGHERITA

Sauce: Pesto, light pasta or none

Layers: Thinly sliced plum tomatoes (overlap slices if not using sauce), fresh basil leaves (omit if using pesto)

Cheese: Queso Oaxaca (Mexican mozzarella)

GULF CATCH

Sauce: Alfredo

Layers: Minced garlic, cooked shrimp, lump crabmeat

Cheese: Mozzarella and provolone

OVER THE BORDER

Sauce: Green enchilada

Layers: Sliced white onion, chopped green pepper, chopped cooked chicken

Cheese: Mexican-blend cheese

HILL COUNTRY SMOKEHAUS

Sauce: Pasta

Layers: Sliced smoked sausage, ham, crumbled cooked bacon

Cheese: Smoked Cheddar or provolone



MILLIE KIRCHOFF *Nueces Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Pizza Dip**

This month's Fun to Make, Fun to Eat contest brought a cornucopia of convivial concoctions, with many yummy desserts and appetizers to please both the young and the young at heart. These recipes combined the joy of cooking with the fun of eating something delicious, even if not the most nutritious.

Of all the creations that made their way to our offices, the Pizza Dip sent in by Millie Kirchoff of Orange Grove rose to the top with its creamy, party-friendly take on a pepperoni pizza.

PIZZA DIP

- 24 ounces (3 packages) cream cheese, softened
- 2 or 3 green onions, finely chopped
- 1 small jar (14 ounces) spaghetti or pizza sauce
- 1 small can (2 1/4 ounces) sliced black olives
- 1 jar (4 1/2 ounces) sliced mushrooms
- 1/4 cup finely chopped green bell pepper
- 8 ounces shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 small package (3 1/2 ounces) pepperoni slices

Spread cream cheese in bottom of 13x9-inch casserole dish. Scatter green onions evenly over top and spread pizza sauce. Top with olives, mushrooms and bell pepper, then cheese. Top with pepperoni. Bake at 325 degrees for 20 minutes. Serve with breadsticks, crackers or chips.

Servings: 24. Serving size: 1/4 cup. Per serving: 167 calories, 6.1 g protein, 13.3 g fat, 3.9 g carbohydrates, 0.6 g fiber, 293 mg sodium, 40 mg cholesterol

PRETZEL SALAD

- 12 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 1/4 cups sugar
- 2 2/3 cups pretzels, broken into small pieces
- 2 sticks butter or margarine
- 1 large tub (12 ounces) whipped topping
- 6 ounces pineapple juice
- 1 package (6 ounces) strawberry gelatin
- 2 small packages (1 pound) frozen strawberries

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cream the softened cream cheese and sugar, set aside. Place broken pretzel pieces in the bottom of a 13x9-inch casserole dish. Cut the butter or margarine into small chunks and dot across the top of the pretzels. Bake 15 minutes, then cool

slightly before pouring off excess liquid. Spread cream cheese mixture over lukewarm pretzels. Spread whipped topping over cream cheese layer. Bring pineapple juice to a boil and dissolve gelatin in juice. Stir in frozen berries. Allow to thicken until almost congealed. Spread on top of the whipped topping and refrigerate. Before serving, you can top gelatin layer with another layer of whipped topping.

Servings: 24. Serving size: 1/4 cup. Per serving: 336 calories, 4.6 g protein, 16 g fat, 43.4 g carbohydrates, 1.2 g fiber, 426 mg sodium, 35 mg cholesterol

BILLIE BRANDENBURG

CoServ Electric

TO DIE FOR CAKE/PUDDING

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/2 cup cocoa powder, divided
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 teaspoons melted butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup brown sugar, packed

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease an 8x8-inch glass baking dish or a shallow 2-quart casserole bowl. Combine flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, cinnamon

and 1/4 cup cocoa. Stir in milk, butter and vanilla until smooth. Pour batter into dish. In separate bowl, mix brown sugar and remaining cocoa and sprinkle evenly over batter. Pour 1 1/2 cups boiling water over mixture, but do not stir. Bake 30 minutes. (Batter will separate and make one cake layer and one pudding layer during baking.) Cool pan on wire rack and serve warm with ice cream and several tablespoons of nuts or sprinkles.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1/2 cup. Per serving: 258 calories, 3.2 g protein, 2.1 g fat, 59.8 g carbohydrates, 24 g fiber, 282 mg sodium, 4 mg cholesterol

JIMMIE DEE CONNER

Sam Houston Electric Cooperative

DISH PAN COOKIES

- 12 eggs
- 2 pounds brown sugar
- 4 cups white sugar
- 2 tablespoons vanilla
- 1 tablespoon corn syrup
- 1 pound M&M candies
- 1 pound chocolate chips
- 3 pounds peanut butter
- 8 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 18 cups oatmeal

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place all ingredients in a dish pan. Mix well with hands. Drop onto cookie sheets (6 to a sheet) with ice cream scoop; flatten slightly. Bake for 12-15 minutes, being careful not to overbake. Cool on wire rack.

Servings: 5 dozen. Serving size: 1 cookie. Per serving: 421 calories, 10.9 g protein, 16.8 g fat, 59.5 g carbohydrates, 4.3 g fiber, 354 mg sodium, 43 mg cholesterol

JOLENE TURNER

Bowie-Cass Electric Cooperative

Past recipes are available in the Recipes Archive at www.texascooppower.com.

RECIPE CONTEST

May's recipe contest topic is **Filling the Picnic Basket**. Eating outside is fun if you have the right food. Send us your recipes for picnic favorites that are portable and tasty. The deadline is January 10.

Send recipes to Home Cooking, 1122 Colorado, 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.texascooppower.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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Free armored safes being doled out to public

Armored Safe giveaway ends public worry for those who rush to buy up hoards of brilliant, never-circulated U.S. Gov't issued coins that will never lose their cash value



■ **HELP IS ON THE WAY:** This never-before-seen photo captures the rapid shipment of free Bankers Armored Safes (left) that are now being shipped to U.S. citizens all across the country. The World Reserve is also making available the larger Bankers Grand Armored Safes (right) free to the general public who beat today's published deadline to buy up the newly released Collection of never-circulated U.S. Gov't issued coins and currency. Those who get through by calling the National Delivery Hotline at 1-866-964-2951 and beat the 7 day order deadline will get the Armored Safes for free.

By Shawn Oyler

UMS - Imagine finally getting something that will never lose its value.

Sounds too good to be true?

Well, it's true and word is quickly spreading about the free handout of Armored Safes that are being stocked full of never-circulated U.S. Gov't issued coins and currency that by law will never be minted again.

These free Armored Safes are being turned over to the general public who make it in time to beat the order deadline for their share of the hoard of brilliant, never-circulated U.S. Gov't coins and currency before the 7 day shutoff.

"The frantic demand for U.S. Gov't coins has caused the U.S. Mint® to officially halt the sale of many of its most valuable coins," said lead consultant for the World Reserve Thomas C. Harris, Retired Deputy Director of the U.S. Treasury Bureau

of Engraving and Printing.

"Today, the World Reserve began to release this hoard of U.S. Gov't coins and currency in a free Armored Safe to the general public. Having valuable U.S. Gov't coins serves as an economic life raft. This valuable Collection will never, never, never lose its face value. You will always have something worth a lot of money," said Harris.

Here's the best part, among the U.S. Gov't issued coins and currency that everyone gets is the highly sought after American Eagle 1-ounce silver bullion coin made from solid .999 fine silver, 250 of the first liberty engraved Westward Journey Nickels, a banker's stack of historic \$2 bills and a full vault tube of the Presidential Golden Dollar Coins.

Here's why that is so important. Just think if you would have saved the same number of never-circulated Eisenhower Dollar coins from 1974. Remark-

ably, they would now be worth 500% more in collector value.

This gives you a hint that these are not the same grade as the coins found in loose change, or from the local bank. In fact, these coins remain in brilliant, never-circulated condition if left sealed and untouched.

U.S. Gov't Savings Bonds used to be a favorite way to keep money safe and popular to give as gifts. But no one can take a Savings Bond and go buy something with it.

That's why this hoard of valuable coins gives everyone the comfort of having full control of their money. No matter what, they will never lose their U.S. cash value.

If times ever get really tough any coin in the hoard could be used to buy anything. But unless it is a good reason, only a fool would do that because this personal hoard of money is already worth so much more

in collector value.

"So many people are buying up these coins. Even for those people who give away some of their collection as gifts, they are keeping the Armored Safe for themselves," said Robert Anthony, Director of the private World Reserve Monetary Exchange.

"This Safe is one of the absolute best places to keep valuables and important papers. People will now have a safe place to store their wills, guns, jewelry, antiques, keys, coins and even cash," Anthony said.

"The only problem the Safe creates is when it's time to read your Will. You need to make sure everyone knows who you want to leave it to," he said.

"When Americans get their hands on this Safe and their very own personal hoard of U.S. Gov't Coins, they'll really do a double take. Everyone will feel like they just won the lottery," he said. ■

How to get the free Armored Safes

All those who beat the 7 day order deadline for each personal hoard of U.S. Gov't issued coins and currency from the World Reserve Collection will actually be awarded the Bankers Armored Safes absolutely free.

Eligibility: Certain restrictions apply: Open to the public only, sorry no dealers. Those who miss the 7 day deadline will be turned away from this free offer and required to wait for future announcements, in this or other publications. The entire World Reserve Collection must be obtained to get the safe free. For more information about the larger Bankers Grand Armored Safes please call.

TO GET THE FREE SAFES USE THIS

**FREE CLAIM CODE:
US 7866**

**AND CALL 1-866-964-2951
BEFORE THE 7 DAY ORDER SHUTOFF**

Terms & Conditions: To receive delivery of your free Armored Safe and the first shipment of coins, you'll only need to cover the first installment for as little as \$149, then cover the difference for the remaining shipments to complete your entire collection of U.S. Gov't coins. The No-Worry guarantee ensures that refunds be granted for all items properly returned, less shipping for 90 days from the day you receive your safe and first shipment. That means, cancellation will require the return of the free armored safe. Failure to do so will require remittance for the safe of four hundred and thirty six dollars. THE WORLD RESERVE MONETARY EXCHANGE, INC. IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT, A BANK OR ANY GOVERNMENT AGENCY. THE INCREASE IN COLLECTIBLE VALUE OF CERTAIN PRIOR ISSUES OF U.S. COINS DOES NOT GUARANTEE THAT CURRENT ISSUES WILL ALSO INCREASE IN VALUE. OH AND FL RESIDENT TRANSACTIONS REQUIRE THE REMITTANCE OF APPLICABLE SALES TAX. SORRY NO SHIPMENTS TO VT AND MA RESIDENTS. ADVERTISEMENT FOR WORLD RESERVE MONETARY EXCHANGE, INC. 8000 FREEDOM AVE., N. CANTON OH 44720.

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■ **LIKE WINNING THE LOTTERY:** Everyone gets the personal hoard consisting of 267 never-circulated U.S. Gov't coins and currency including 12 Presidential Golden Dollar Coins in a sealed Vault Roll, a heavy vault brick containing 250 of the first liberty engraved Westward Journey Nickels and, best of all, a solid .999 fine silver American Silver Eagle and a banker's stack of 4 historic \$2 bills. If times ever get really tough, any coin in this collection could be used to buy anything. Keep it as long as you can because this hoard is already worth so much more than face value.



■ **NO MORE WORRIES:** Carolyn Ford of Perry Town, OH thought she hit the jackpot when her free Bankers Armored Safe was delivered. "I already have some old coins, but I wanted this whole hoard of U.S. coins as a nice nest egg. I'll also set aside some of my hoard for my Grandchildren. Now I don't have to worry where to keep my important papers and my Grandfather's gun since I have my new safe," she said.



7 Smart places to stash your cash

By Aaron Robinson

So you're still hiding money under the mattress or in the bread box?

Well, you're not alone. Ever since financial institutions have been dropping like flies, millions of Americans have stopped relying solely on their banks.

1. Be sure your bank is insured. Over 100 banks have failed so far this year. So, if you're not sure if your bank is insured, find out right away.

2. Start and grow a coin collection. Coin collections are tangible assets that will always keep their face value, instead of just owning stocks that could depreciate or lose you money.

3. Keep some cash safe at home. Cash is King. Believe it, but remember not to keep it in a thief's favorite spot; like in the bread box or the mattress. These will never have the protection that a quality home safe can provide.

4. Savings Bonds, an old favorite. Savings Bonds are an easy way for your money to stay safe in the future. However, if lost or stolen they could be difficult to replace unless the serial number was kept in a safe place.

5. Gold and silver still shine. If you own gold or silver, great, hold on to it. But if you don't, one of your best bets is to try to get as many U.S. Gov't issued gold and silver coins as you can.

6. Hold on to real estate. With interest rates at historic all-time lows the market is sure to recover and property values will once again bounce back. So those who hold on to their homes for the long term will likely reap the benefits of these investments.

7. Buy a good safe. Home safes become an absolute necessity during economic turmoil. But, because of the huge spike in recent sales, safes may be hard to come by.

With all this you'll be much safer, just in case your bank is the next to fail. ■

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Amish mantle and miracle invention help home heat bills hit rock bottom

Miracle heaters being given away free with orders for real Amish fireplace mantles to announce the invention that helps slash heat bills, but Amish craftsmen still under strain of winter rush force household limit of 2

Save money: turn down your thermostat and never be cold again

By MARK WOODS
Universal Media Syndicate

(UMS) Everyone hates high heat bills. But we're all sick and tired of simply turning down the thermostat and then being cold.

Well now, the popular HEAT SURGE® miracle heaters are actually being given away free to the general public for the next 7 days starting at precisely 8:00 a.m. today.

The only thing readers have to do is call the National Distribution Hotline before the 7-day deadline with their order for the handmade Amish Fireplace Mantle. Everyone who does is instantly being awarded the miracle heater absolutely free.

This is all happening to announce the HEAT SURGE Roll-n-Glow® Fireplace which actually rolls from room-to-room so you can turn down your thermostat and take the heat with you anywhere. That way, everyone who gets them first can immediately start saving on their heat bills.

Just in time for winter weather, portable Amish encased fireplaces are being delivered directly to the doors of all those who beat the deadline.

These remarkable fireplaces are being called a miracle because they have what's being called the *Fireless Flame*™ patented technology that gives you the peaceful flicker of a real fire but without any flames, fumes, smells, ashes or mess. Everyone is getting them because they require no chimney and no vent. You just plug them in.

The *Fireless Flame* looks so real it amazes everybody because it has no real fire. So what's the catch? Well, soft spoken Amish craftsmen who take their time hand building the mantles have a process that forces a strict household limit of 2 to keep up with orders.

"We can barely keep up ever



■ **GENUINE AMISH MANTLES MADE IN THE USA:** Everyone wants to save money on heat bills this winter, so entire Amish communities are working from the crack of dawn to finish. These fine real wood Amish made fireplace mantles are built to last forever. The oak mantle is a real steal at just two hundred ninety-eight dollars because all those who beat the order deadline by calling the National Hotline at 1-866-815-7004 to order the fireplace mantles are actually getting the imported hi-tech *Fireless Flame* HEAT SURGE miracle heaters for free.

since we started giving heaters away free. Now that it's really cold outside, everyone's trying to get them. Amish craftsmen



■ **JUST ANNOUNCED:** The Heat Surge miracle fireplace has earned the prestigious Good Housekeeping Seal. The product has earned the Seal after evaluation by the Good Housekeeping Research Institute.

are working their fingers to the bone to be sure everyone gets their delivery in time to save a lot of money," confirms Frederick Miller, National Shipping Director.

"These portable Roll-n-Glow Fireplaces are the latest home decorating sensation. They actually give you a beautifully redecorated room while they quickly heat from wall to wall. It's the best way to dress up every room, stay really warm and slash your heat bills all at the same time," says Josette Holland, Home Makeover Expert.

And here's the best part. Readers who beat the 7-day

order deadline are getting their imported hi-tech miracle heaters free when encased in the Amish built real wood fireplace mantles. The mantles are being handmade in the USA right in the heart of Amish country where they are beautifully hand-rubbed, stained and varnished.

You just can't find custom made Amish mantles like this in the national chain stores. That makes the oak mantle a real steal for just two hundred ninety-eight dollars since the entire cost of the miracle heater is free.

This free giveaway is the



How It Works: The HEAT SURGE miracle heater is a work of engineering genius from the China coast so advanced, you simply plug it into any standard outlet. It uses only about 9¢ of electric an hour on the standard setting. Yet, it produces up to an amazing 5,119 BTU's on the high setting. So watch out, a powerful on board hi-tech heat turbine silently forces hot air out into the room from the vent so you feel the bone soothing heat instantly. It even has certification of Underwriters Laboratories coveted UL listing. It also comes with a limited full year replacement or money back warranty less shipping plus a 30-Day Satisfaction Guarantee. OH and FL resident transactions require the remittance of applicable sales tax. Sorry no shipments to MA residents.



best way to slash heating bills and stay warm through the dead of winter. The HEAT SURGE Roll-n-Glow Fireplace gives you zone heating and all the beauty and warmth of a built-in fireplace but rolls from room-to-room so it can also save you a ton of money on heating bills.

Even people in California and Florida are flocking to get them so they may never have to turn on their furnace all

winter. And since it uses only pennies of electricity an hour on the standard setting, the potential savings are absolutely incredible.

"We are making sure no one gets left out, but you better hurry because entire communities of Amish craftsmen are straining to keep up with demands. For now, we are staying out of the large national retail stores in order to let readers have two per household just as long as

How to get 2 free heaters

The National Toll Free Hotlines are now open. All those who beat the 7-day order deadline to cover the cost of the Amish made Fireplace Mantle and shipping get the HEAT SURGE miracle heater free.

A strict limit of 2 per household has been imposed. Since some home woodworkers want to build their own mantle piece, they are letting people get the imported miracle heater alone for just \$249. Or, with the Amish made mantle you get the miracle heater free.

Use the map below to locate the weather zone you live in and call the Hotline number for your zone.



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■ ON THEIR WAY: Winter rush orders have turned country roads into pipelines to the big city delivery system. Everybody wants a fireplace that comes fully assembled with a handmade Amish mantle in oak or cherry finish and gets delivered by truck right to your door. All you do is plug it in.

they call before the deadline," confirms Miller.

It's a really smart decision to get two right now because for only the next 7 days you get both miracle heaters free. That's like putting five hundred bucks right in your pocket and you can save even more money on your monthly heating bills.

"Everyone's calling to get one but those who really want to save a lot of money are surprising the whole family by

getting two. So when lines are busy keep trying or log onto amishfireplaces.com. We promise to get to every call. Then we can have a delivery truck out to your door right away with your beautiful Heat Surge Roll-n-Glow Fireplace," Miller said.

"You'll instantly feel bone soothing heat in any room. You will never have to be cold again," he said. ■

On the worldwide web:
www.amishfireplaces.com

Rolls anywhere to throw an instant heat wave with no chimney, no vents, no wood and no smoke



■ EASILY ROLLS ANYWHERE: This is the portable Roll-n-Glow® Fireplace that easily rolls from bedroom to living room to keep you warm. No vents, no chimney and no tools. Just plug it in.



■ SAVES ON BILLS: Everyone can get low bills and stay warm and cozy. The Roll-n-Glow Fireplace saves a ton of money and makes your front room look like a million bucks.



■ SAFE FLAME: The Fireless Flame looks so real it fools everyone but there is no real fire. That makes the flame window safe to the touch under the watchful eye of a parent. It's where the kids will play and the cat and dog will sleep.



■ FREE: Get this \$249 miracle heater free. It is being given away free to all who beat the 7-day order deadline for your choice of the oak or cherry finish Amish Mantles. The free heater comes already encased.



▲ It was hard to escape the ominous beauty of this shot sent in by Houston County Electric Cooperative members **Tommy** and **Penny Kincaid**. This cold snap hit the Grapeland area in 2003.



◀ When a freeze hit Blanco County, Pedernales EC member **Carol Schlachter** had to grab her camera to snap a photo of this well-known plant normally associated with hot and dry conditions.

► “If you don’t like the weather in Texas, wait five minutes!” said Comanche EC member **Mary Beth Mazurek**. Just 24 hours prior, she had taken this same shot of her daughter Carly in the bluebonnets—only it was a bright, sunny day.

▼ “We don’t get much snow, so when we do, we take full advantage,” Bandera EC member **Kim Malone** said of this little guy her mom, **Shirley Albrecht**, also a Bandera EC member, made by scraping the snow off her deck railing in Pipe Creek. “She is still a kid,” she added.

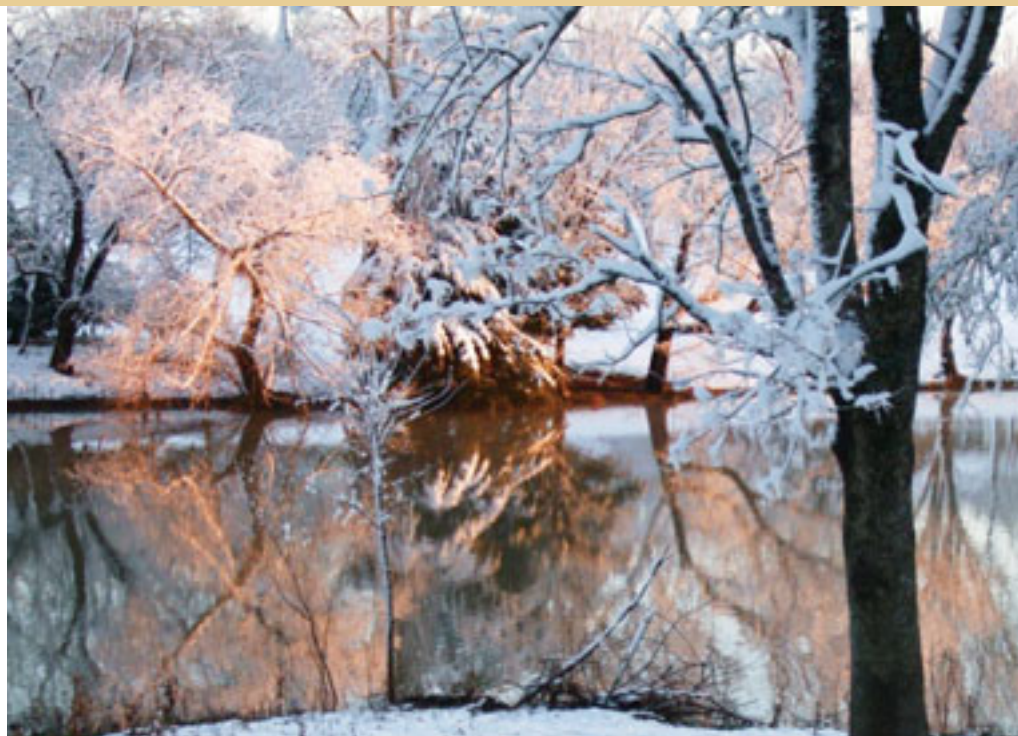


SNOW DAZE

Brrr! For much of the state, snow falls once in a blue moon. And when that rare snow day does come along, Texans are quick to grab their cameras. Whether a postcard-perfect scene or an unfortunate snow-in, your photos sent heartwarming shivers up our spines.

—ASHLEY CLARY





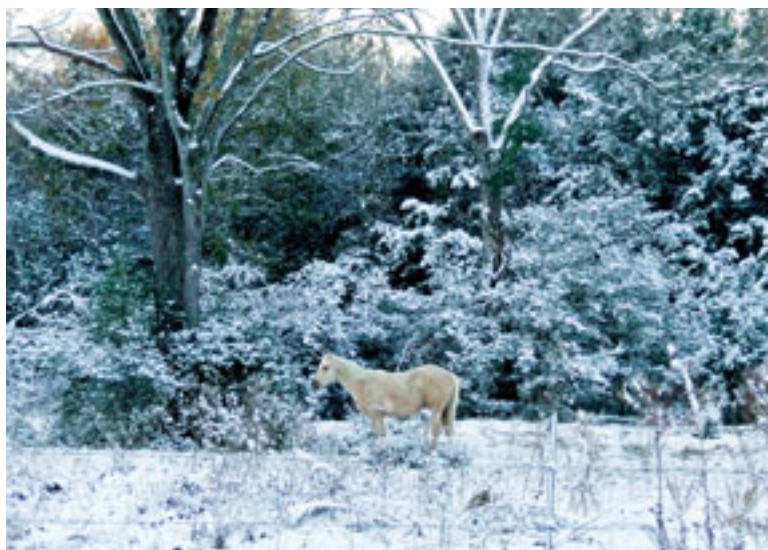
◀ **Christine Stromberg**, a Grayson-Collin EC member, witnessed this minute-long serendipitous moment after a 2008 surprise snowstorm hit Anna. “The sun came up over our small lake and created this amazing pink world,” she said.



▲ When a March 2008 snowstorm hit Grayson County, Grayson-Collin EC member **Skip Hill** saw something not seen every day—his neighbor **Ben Wible** lending a unique helping hand to a school bus having a little trouble along its route.



▼ Bryan Texas Utilities member **Debbie Prince** captured this shot of Gus, her father-in-law **John Prince**’s horse, braving winter’s chill on a December 2008 day.



▲ Wood County EC member **Rita Matthews** sent us this photo of then-2-year-old grandson **Keller Haynes** enjoying a taste of his first big snow.

◀ Comanche EC member **Beverly Harrell** captured this male cardinal “chilling out” on her property just outside of Eastland.



Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Mar	Backyard Gardens	Jan 10
Apr	Barnyard Babies	Feb 10
May	Farmer’s Bounty	Mar 10
June	Only in Texas	Apr 10
Jul	Beat the Heat	May 10
Aug	Birds	June 10

BACKYARD GARDENS is the topic for our **MARCH 2010** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to Backyard Gardens, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, before **JANUARY 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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- 08 STEPHENVILLE** [8-10, 22-24]
Chicken House Flea Market, (254) 592-6674
- 09 STEPHENVILLE** [9-12]
Erath County Jr. Livestock Show, (254) 965-5313

- 09 BUFFALO GAP**
Chautauqua Learning Series, (325) 572-3365

ABILENE [9-10]
Texas Gun & Knife Show,
(830) 285-0575

BRENNHAM [9-10]
Winter Antiques Show,
(979) 865-5618

15 KINGSLAND [15-16]
Celebrating Winter Thru Quilts Show,
(325) 388-5225

16 ANDICE
Market Days,
(254) 793-2565

FREDERICKSBURG [16-17]
Hill Country Gem & Mineral Show,
(830) 895-9630,
www.fredericksburgrockhounds.org



16 ROUND TOP [16-17]
Winter Antiques Show,
1-888-273-6426,
www.roundtoptexasantiques.com

18 ABILENE
Martin Luther King Dinner,
(325) 676-0138

SEGUIN
Martin Luther King Jr. Walk, 1-800-580-7322,
www.visitseguin.com

20 SEGUIN [20-23]
Youth Livestock & Homemakers Show,
1-800-580-7322,
www.visitseguin.com

21 KERRVILLE [21-22]
Ballet Folklorico de Mexico, (830) 896-9393,
www.kpas.org

22 BRENNHAM
Wine Dinners with the Vintner, 1-877-690-0676,
www.murskihomesteadbb.com

23 SCHULENBURG
Art, Wine & Music Walk,
1-866-504-5294

KERRVILLE
Symphony of the Hills Pops Concert,
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Hearts & Roses Ball,
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9 ABILENE
Texas Gun & Knife Show



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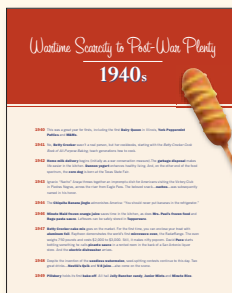
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SHINER [23-24]
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Dinner Theatre,
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30
FREDERICKSBURG
Indian Artifact Show

24 AUSTIN
3M Half Marathon &
Relay, 1-888-364-3577,
www.3mhalfmarathon.com

25 PORT ARANSAS
Port "A" Merchant's Dine
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www.portaransas.org

26 KERRVILLE [26-28]
Berlin Philharmonic
Wind Quartet,
(830) 896-9393,
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29 ABILENE [29-31]
World of Wheels,
(325) 698-7654

30 FREDERICKSBURG
Indian Artifact Show,
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Club Seafood Lunch
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30 ROUND TOP
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Institute Music Series,
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www.festivalhill.org

ROCKPORT
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Quilt Guild Show, (361)
345-4559, www.piece-makersbythebay.com

FEBRUARY

13 ANDERSON
Stagecoach Days,
(936) 873-2633,
www.birthplaceoftexas.com

20 ANDICE
Market Days,
(254) 793-2565

25 PORT ARANSAS [25-28]
Celebration of Whooping
Cranes & Other Birds,
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Denton is just the right size for a weekend visit, offering something for everyone. On one hand, with a population of 109,500, it has a small-town atmosphere with a vibrant courthouse square. On the other hand, Denton has not one but two renowned state universities, the University of North Texas (UNT) and Texas Woman's University (TWU).

The town is 35 miles north of Dallas and Fort Worth.

THE COURTHOUSE SQUARE

Thanks in part to UNT's strong music program (Norah Jones and four members of the Brave Combo world-music quintet studied here), Denton is a hub for a variety of live music. UNT had the first jazz studies degree in the nation, and the program is always top ranked. Contact the Convention and Visitor Bureau for a schedule of concerts in the historic courthouse square. Dozens of locations lure visitors and college students to indoor performances downtown and in a nearby warehouse district.

Several restaurants beckon the hungry. I try **THE CHESTNUT TREE GARDEN TEA ROOM** (107 W. Hickory St.) and the impressive **HANNAH'S OFF THE SQUARE** (111 W. Mulberry). There is simply no room left over to indulge in a soda or sundae at **BETH MARIE'S OLD FASHIONED ICE CREAM & SODA FOUNTAIN** (two locations, 117 W. Hickory St. and 2900 Wind River Lane).

The square provides a variety of shopping, including several dress and accessory stores, some catering to the college crowd and others to classic tastes. Someone rents both display windows at the **DOWNTOWN MINI MALLS I AND II** on Locust Street to hawk an armory of medieval replicas. Swords, maces (war clubs), trident spears and crossbows crowd the front windows. A clerk said there is great demand for the merchandise when the **SCARBOROUGH RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL** is in residence near Waxahachie, south of the Metroplex.

Moving down Locust Street and crossing at Oak Street, one finds another

JUST RIGHT

Classy Denton is not too big and not too small.

BY KAYE NORTHCOTT



scroungers' paradise: **RECYCLED BOOKS RECORDS CDS** encompasses 17,000 square feet in a three-story purple building, and it's open from 9 to 9 every day. This could be a vacation in itself!

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

TWU is ideal for a stroll and a couple of museum exhibits. Start at the **LITTLE CHAPEL-IN-THE-WOODS**, a tall, graceful nondenominational chapel. Famed architects O'Neil Ford and Arch Swank designed the building that was painstakingly constructed by college students and Civilian Conservation Corps and National Youth Administration laborers. The chapel, which is the most popular site for small weddings in the area, is decorated with stained-glass windows dedicated to such themes as literature, music and dance.

It doesn't take long to walk across the beautifully landscaped campus to the **ADMINISTRATION CONFERENCE TOWER**,

where one can view 17 gowns donated by Texas' first ladies (the ones on display vary). In between the chapel and administration building, the **MARY EVELYN BLAGG-HUEY LIBRARY** has a treasure trove of collections relating to women. My favorite is the 15,000-title cookbook collection. I also could stay all day being thankful I don't have to follow the rigid rules in old etiquette books.

So many options and so many things left undone. I haven't gotten to cool off at the 17-acre **WATER WORKS PARK**, which is open all summer, or walk around The University of North Texas campus. It would take at least another half day to do the **NORTH TEXAS HORSE COUNTRY DRIVING TOUR**. It's best to take the \$35 Saturday motor-coach tour on which ranches open their gates to show visitors some of the finest horseflesh in the world. The next one is scheduled for March 6.

THE WILDWOOD INN

It's time to settle in for a last night of luxury at **THE WILDWOOD INN**, a modern, two-story boutique hotel with hints of European grand style (www.denton-wildwoodinn.com). Before dinner, I cool off in a nicely landscaped pool area adjacent to draped pillars standing in wait for a couple holding a wedding party here.

This is the night to splurge on a fine meal (served by reservation only Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights). I quickly learn I could have gotten by on an appetizer alone. A friend and I split crabmeat in a bed of avocado and delicate greens and a heaping pile of grilled quail with pineapple. Not stopping there, of course, we also have salads and split a huge rib-eye with caramelized onions, over silky mashed potatoes and asparagus.

Once again, no room for dessert. Convention and Visitor Bureau, (940) 382-7895, www.discoverdenton.com

Kaye Northcott is editor of Texas Co-op Power magazine.

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