

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

MARCH 2010

COUNT ME IN!

BUILDING SAND CASTLES

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

## SEEDS of CHANGE

FARMER FINDS NICHE





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By Staci Semrad

*2010 census data will determine how more than \$400 billion per year in federal funding is distributed to local and state governments.*

### 10 Seeds of Change FARMER FINDS NICHE

Story and Photos by Jody Horton

*Part two in our three-part series about Texas farm families*

### 16 Sand Dollars

By Eileen Mattei

Photos by Brad Doherty

*Sand Castle Days on South Padre Island and Texas SandFest in Port Aransas lure champion sand sculptors from across the United States.*

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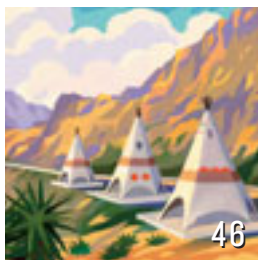
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## TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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

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# letters

## SOLD ON TEXAS CO-OP POWER

We are fairly new residents in Austin County. We love your magazine. Guests in our home always pick it up and peruse it. Now we leave copies in the guest room for their reading enjoyment. Texas Monthly could learn something from you!

**TERRI SMITH**

*San Bernard Electric Cooperative*

## LINEMAN TO THE RESCUE

On December 24 at 11:30 a.m., my power went off. This was right in the middle of what the weatherman called a 50-year snowstorm. I called lineman Bryan McKee because the J-A-C Electric Cooperative office was closed for Christmas, and his number was listed as on call. I explained my problem and tried to get ready for a

# POWER TALK

cold spell.

Thanks to great service, my electricity cut on again at 1:50 p.m. Then the phone rang. It was Bryan calling to make sure I was back in power.

It was funny that on December 28 I got an ad from another electric company wanting me to change service. All I could think was NEVER, NEVER would I want another electric service.

**PATRICK SMITH**

*J-A-C Electric Cooperative*

## RECIPES REQUEST

Recently, my mom experienced some severe health

issues resulting in her moving into my home for daily living assistance. Along with my mom came her forwarded mail. Much to my surprise, I discovered your magazine in her mail. The recipes are wonderful. I have tried several of them with each one being outstanding. They have renewed my joy of cooking again.

I would like to make one request of your publishers: It would be wonderful for the recipe pages to be printed on one side only. This would allow your readers to cut out the recipes for proper filing and future use.

**LU DANIEL**

*Sam Houston Electric  
Cooperative*

*Editor's note: We try not to print recipes on the reverse side of a page, but if there are three pages of recipes, this is not always possible.*

## MIGHTY CUTE MITES

Reading the story about the Mighty Mites football team by Jim Dent in the December 2009 issue ("The Mighty Mites: The Orphans Who Could") brought back many fine childhood memories. I grew up in the Poly area of Fort Worth, and my father, John Waddell, worked at the Masonic Orphans Home for a while. On many Sundays, my dad would go over to the home and pick up some of the boys, many of whom played football, and bring them over to our house for a meal. My mother usually made fried chicken and

cherry cobbler.

This was in the late '50s and early '60s when my sister and I were entering our teen years, and we thought those guys were so handsome. I was especially smitten by one, Kermit Smith. I have often thought of those days, of Kermit and of where he is today. Thanks for the trip down memory lane.

**JANE WADDELL ROSAMOND**

*Bandera and Nueces  
electric cooperatives*

## MOVIE IN WORKS

The article and cover photo on the Mighty Mites were wonderful. The story is currently in the process of being made into a movie (see [www.12mightyorphans.com](http://www.12mightyorphans.com)), and we are posting the latest news that we can announce there. Stay tuned for the rest of the story.

**ANN MORTON**

*Director of Communications,  
12 Productions*

## STAY AWAY FROM CONTROVERSY

I, and many folks I've spoken to, are extremely disappointed that you would publish such a one-sided article in the December 2009 issue on the Rio Grande border fence ("Borderline: When It Comes to the Texas/Mexico Wall, No One's Sitting on the Fence"). OUR government has chosen to erect the border fence for OUR protection, both physical and economic. Although some disagree with parts or even all of it, it isn't the mission of OUR magazine to blatantly attack or downgrade every aspect of this effort.

**AL SCHWERMAN**

*Pedernales Electric Cooperative*

# INQUIRING MINDS



The watermelon that farmer Shelby Johnson hoisted on the cover of the January 2010 issue weighed 135 pounds. The guys who hang out at a feed store in Bartlett Electric Cooperative territory were especially interested in its weight. We suspect there was some wagering going on.

—Kaye Northcott,  
Editor

We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, Texas Co-op Power, 1122 Colorado, 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, or e-mail us at [letters@texas-coop.org](mailto:letters@texas-coop.org). Please include the name of your town and electric coop. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and will be printed as space allows. Read additional letters at [www.texascoopower.com](http://www.texascoopower.com).



## HAPPENINGS

Let it blow, let it blow, let it blow March 7 at the **ZILKER PARK KITE FESTIVAL** in Austin. With spring just a strong breeze away, spirits will soar as high as the thousands of kites filling the sky.

Contest categories include highest angle (flying directly overhead), steady flying, strongest pulling, most unusual, and smallest and largest kites. Anyone flying a home-made kite may compete.

Admission is free, and leashed dogs are welcome. For more information, call (512) 448-5483 or go to [www.zilkerkitefestival.com](http://www.zilkerkitefestival.com).

## WHO KNEW?



The encyclopedic Handbook of Texas, published by the Texas State Historical Association, now runs to six volumes. But topics from Texas history to culture are easily searchable online. Just go to [www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online).



JOSEPH A. MARCUS/LADY BIRD JOHNSON WILDFLOWER CENTER

## THE AGGRESSIVE AGARITA

Agarita is preceded only by mistletoe in the annual blooming cycle of bee plants in Texas. Its flowers are also unusual in having stamens with touch-sensitive bases, which, when triggered, strike the nectar-seeking bee on the head, covering it with pollen.

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

## check it out

Texas State University in San Marcos lays claim to having the “largest human power plant in the world.” The university has retrofitted 30 elliptical machines in the student recreation center to convert human exercise into electricity that is fed to the campus’ power grid. The technology sold by ReRev, a Florida-based company, captures the kinetic energy of aerobic exercise, converts it to direct current and then into alternating current, the kind used in businesses and homes.

According to the company, a typical 30-minute workout will produce 50 watt-hours of clean, carbon-free electricity—enough energy to power a laptop computer for one hour or a desktop computer for 30 minutes. This is the largest such project for ReRev, which has installed similar exercise machines at other universities and private organizations in other states.

## Calories to Kilowatts

Texas State officials hope the project will encourage students to become more energy efficient. A university news release states, “We want the Texas State community to gain a better understanding of how much energy it takes to power simple devices we use on a regular basis.”



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# Count Me In!

*To help your community snag federal dollars, fill out the 2010 census form: It's confidential, and it's easy.*

By Staci Semrad

**D**isaster often punctuates the importance of participating in the U.S. census that's conducted every 10 years.

In 2005, Hurricane Rita blew

through southeast Texas, uprooting trees and tossing them onto roofs, destroying many homes and leaving many scared and injured people in its wake. "Hardin County had about

14,000 homes damaged in the county, and we only had 19,000 to begin with," said County Judge Billy Caraway, who estimated total losses to property and forestland in his county at about \$100 million. Hardin County ended up with about \$7 million in federal disaster relief just for helping people with housing repairs. The money, in the form of community development block grants (CDBGs), was distributed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to affected counties based on census population.

"This got them back into a place where they could live, which was their home originally," Caraway said.

Likewise, the devastation in neighboring Jasper County was "phenomenal"—more than \$100 million in losses to property and forestland, according to County Judge Mark Allen. As in Hardin County, CDBGs were distributed in Jasper County based on its population in the 2000 census. The county was allocated about \$6 million to help improve and repair damage to public roads and public infrastructure caused by Rita. "If in 2000 we had not had the support we needed to give an accurate census count, we could have received much less (aid) than we did," Allen said.

The funding, Allen said, made a real difference to people in his county, who otherwise would have had to use local money for repairs. "They went from complete despair to gratitude and just a feeling of relief," he said.

The census affects individuals' representation in local, state and federal governments. Census data also determines how much money local and state governments are allocated from more than \$400 billion in federal funds distributed across the country each year. The money goes toward transportation, education, health, emergency services, disaster relief and more. By participating in the census, you help ensure that your community gets its share.

Population is almost always in the formula for federal community grants of any kind, not just those for disaster relief, Allen said, adding, "I'm encouraging all of our people to get out there and be counted for the 2010 census."

Curious how it all works? Kyle Mence and Ivonne Espada-Simeon, East Texas and Central Texas partnership specialists, respectively, for the



U.S. Census Bureau, fielded questions from Texas Co-op Power and explained what to expect with the 2010 census.

#### Why is there a census?

**Ivonne:** Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution mandates that every resident of the United States participates in a census in every year ending in 0. The first census was taken in 1790.

#### Why do you say "resident" and not "citizen"?

**Ivonne:** If you reside here in the United States during the time of the census, you are going to be counted. It's just a snapshot of what the United States of America looks like at the time, regardless of citizenship. The census is used to allocate major federal and other funds to be distributed to communities every year for the next 10 years. The reality is, regardless of residency status, people residing here use public roads, public services, hospitals, schools and the like, all of which need funding.

**Kyle:** And also, the number of seats in the House of Representatives each state has is based on census figures. That's what originally brought about the census in 1790, so that each representative would be representing approximately the same number of people.

#### How will the census this year differ from the one in 2000?

**Kyle:** In the last census, most households received the short form, containing 10 basic questions. But one in six households received a longer form.

**Ivonne:** This time, everybody is mailed a questionnaire with just 10 basic questions relating to such factors as age, gender, race, ethnicity and if you're a property renter or owner, for example. It does not ask about citizenship. It is shorter and easier to do than the long form some people received in 2000. However, a longer questionnaire is sent by the American Community Survey to one in six households every year, so some homes will receive both a census form and an ACS form this year.

#### Why should rural residents participate?

**Ivonne:** The big concern is that people are migrating to more urbanized areas, so you're losing population, you're losing youth, you're losing people who are able to uphold the local economy. Residents of rural areas can apply for so many federal programs to help sustain their communities. These

can improve their farm-to-market roads and cooperative extension programs and provide financial aid for students to attend rural or agricultural university programs, to name a few. For every person who participates in the census, their community gets more and more dollars for those kinds of needs. So for rural Texans, participating in the census is a huge deal. The more people who participate, the more it ensures that the rural way of life continues.

#### What are the challenges of getting an accurate count in rural areas?

**Ivonne:** We don't deliver the census to P.O. boxes, so the census has to be hand delivered to some rural homes.

**Kyle:** Some other hurdles are low population density in rural areas, a lot of space between houses, and of course, locked gates, which present a problem not only to electric companies but to census workers. And there are language and literacy barriers, and also fear of the government.

#### How does fear relate to the census?

**Ivonne:** There are many people residing in the United States who have a fear of government in some shape or form. Examples include concerns about immigration and deportation, tax evasion, delinquent child support, arrest warrants and so many other concerns. These represent a general mistrust of government. However, we as Census Bureau employees are sworn to protect the identities of everyone who participates in the census.

**Kyle:** We do not share information that is personally identifiable with any other agency—federal, state or local.

#### Does the census even ask for personal information?

**Kyle:** No census worker will ever ask for Social Security numbers or for banking information, period.

**Ivonne:** The form asks for a name and phone number, and the reason we ask for that is just for quality check. We do checks to make sure we're not getting two or three instances of the same person being counted.

#### What if people cannot read in English?

**Ivonne:** The form is printed in five languages other than English. If you live in an area that is Spanish speaking, you'll get a bilingual questionnaire. But there are many other languages spoken in Texas, and we can accommodate people by phone this year in 59 lan-

### TEXAS POPULATION

Statehood: December 29, 1845

Population by Decennial Census

2000	20,851,820
1950	7,711,194
1900	3,048,710
1850	212,592

The projected Texas population for 2030 is more than 33 million.

### RURAL POPULATION OF TEXAS

	Urban %	Rural %
2000	82.5	17.5
1950	62.7	37.3
1910	24.1	75.9
1900	17.1	82.9
1850	3.6	96.4

### RACIAL MIX OF TEXAS IN 2008

	Percentage
White*	82.4
Black	11.9
Asian	3.5
Persons reporting two or more races	1.3
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.8
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.1

Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin	36.5
White persons not Hispanic	47.4

\* The U.S. Census Bureau divides the racial category "white" into Hispanic and non-Hispanic ethnicities; persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

guages other than English.

#### What can people do to help ensure their community gets a complete count?

**Kyle:** Forms will go out in mid-March. Census day is April 1. We hope all of the forms would be mailed back by that time. Part of our grassroots effort is getting neighbor to help neighbor through word-of-mouth. We would like people to look for the census forms, help their neighbors who have some sort of barrier, language or otherwise, reach out to shut-ins to help them get counted, and encourage your neighbors, family and friends to cooperate with census authorities.

For more information, go to [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

*Staci Semrad is a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.*



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**All online applications must be received by midnight on March 10, 2010.**





As harvest time nears, Cliff Bingham rigorously inspects his grapes.

## **SEEDS** *of* **CHANGE**

### **FARMER FINDS NICHE**

WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JODY HORTON

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the second in our three-part series on redefining the family farm for the declining number of Texans who choose to make their living off the land. 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 this special series, "Seeds of Change—Texas Family Farms," we meet three Texas farmers whose stories offer a glimpse of what it takes to run a family farm in 21st-century Texas.



**I**T'S MID-AUGUST, AND HARVEST COULD BE ANY DAY now—even today. Cliff Bingham has called viticultural consultant Bobby Cox to the vineyard for an inspection. They walk into a row of Vermentino. The grapes are heavy and full on the vine, and the men are giddy like children. They rush from one section to the other and pull back leaves to inspect the fruit. Bobby occasionally bursts into a sudden peal of laughter from pure joy.

Cliff plucks a grape and rolls it on his palm to separate the meat, seed and skin. He explains that each can be studied to determine ripeness. “When the seed is brown, the grape has reached maturity, and it tastes nutty,” Cliff says, then crunches a seed.

Bobby squeezes the juice from one grape onto the end of a small metal cylindrical instrument called a refractometer. He holds this up to the sun and looks through an eyepiece at the other end. Sugar level, counted in Brix, is measured by the angle of refraction of light passing through the juice. After a few tests it's determined that sugars are just under the optimum threshold along the row. “Just a few more days,” Bobby concludes.

Here on the High Plains near Meadow, 30 miles southwest of Lubbock, farming is about as good as it gets in Texas. Semi-arid and 3,333 feet above sea level, the growing season is less brutal than in many other regions in the state. Mornings are often cool, and temperatures can dip into the low 60s, even in August. Low humidity also means little possibility of fungus for crops and a reduced chance of insect infestation. But the lifeblood of the region is the Ogallala Aquifer—a vast underground water table that stretches from here to South Dakota and supplies about 30 percent of the groundwater used for irrigation in the United States.

A view from a plane above Meadow during the growing season would reveal a characteristic patchwork of circles, most one quarter to half a mile wide, formed by center-pivot irrigation systems that pump and turn almost continuously. But even with all of the natural advantages that the High Plains has to offer, running a family farm is no easy prospect. Economy of scale is everything, Cliff says, noting what he sees as two basic choices: Run a large farm that's finely tuned in efficiency or enter a niche market. His family, he says, is doing a little of both.

“God has blessed us,” says Cliff, a member of Lyntegar Electric Cooperative. “But in business terms, I think our success has been through good marketing. We are always trying new things and have been lucky to find some niche products.”

More prepared than many for modern farming, Cliff, now 50, earned a degree in business and a minor in entomology from Texas Tech University before he started co-managing the family farm with his father, Eddie, in 1982. “I knew I wanted to farm, and a farmer needs to know business,” Cliff says. But he jokes that his real lessons in business came in his first year.



**TOP PHOTO:** Viticulturist Bobby Cox, right, checks the grapes' sugar level with a refractometer while Cliff Bingham studies a grape's meat, seed and skin for ripeness. **BOTTOM PHOTO:** Bingham gets down on ground level to scout organic cotton leaves for overall plant health and any nonbeneficial insects.

“We found ourselves \$15,000 in the hole,” Cliff explains. Since then, his patient and deliberate manner and long-term vision have helped Bingham Family Vineyards & Farm anticipate trends and prosper.

**C**LIFF’S GREAT-GRANDFATHER NOAH BELL WAS ONE of the first to settle the region. He staked claim to his homestead around 1900 and soon grew cotton, wheat and sorghum as cash crops. Today, Cliff and his family still work some of the same land. The bulk of their 2,000-acre family operation is planted in organic cotton, followed by organic peanuts, organic sesame and, most recently, grapes.

Day-to-day operations are handled by Cliff, his wife, Betty, other family members and three full-time employees.

Over the years, the Bingham family have experimented with a variety of crops and planting ratios. In 1991, the farm made the transition to organic production—a decision that was part business and part stewardship.

“I’m a conscientious capitalist,” explains Cliff. “I need to make a good profit but also want to do what’s good for the soil.”

This move to organics has helped keep income per acre high and maintain a workable scale for the farm.

“Margins for chemical cotton production are very small,” Cliff explains. “We would need to farm three times the acreage to realize the same profits.” Unlike cotton, organic grapes don’t demand a premium, so for now, Cliff has not sought an organic designation for his vineyards.

Not content to be completely at the mercy of market forces, Cliff helped found the Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Cooperative—an affiliation of roughly 25 farmers from the region—and served as president from 1993-2003. After years of collective effort to develop a market for organic cotton, profits have been strong in the past eight years.

But even as his goals for establishing a price point for organic cotton were being realized, Cliff was looking to the future. What he saw was grapes.

“Pumping levels from our wells fall year after year,” Cliff explains. “We are at about 50 percent of the capacity we had 30 years ago. We looked for a commodity that would bring in better income for the water used.” Considering water use alone, Cliff estimates grapes are 10 to 15 times more profitable than any other cash crop he could grow.

Morning offers the best chance for photographing Cliff, Betty and most of their 11 children. Only the elder three, who are grown but still live on the farm, are missing.

**Cliff Bingham, his wife, Betty, and eight of their 11 children. All 11 siblings, three of whom are grown and live independently, work together on the Bingham Family Vineyards & Farm.**



**Bingham repairs a sprinkler head nozzle on the center pivot irrigation system in an organic cotton field. Water is a precious commodity on the High Plains.**



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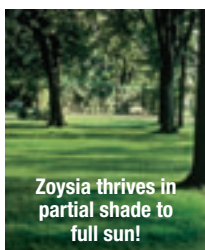
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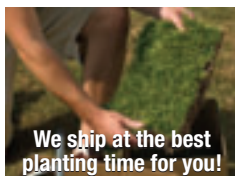
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## The Grape State of Texas

Due to increased consumer interest and a string of changes in local and statewide rules, the Texas grape and wine industry has experienced rapid growth in the past several years. According to the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, there were 43 wineries in the state in 2000. Today, there are almost 190.

The industry's future "is very promising," says Tim Dodd, director of the Texas Wine Marketing Research Institute at Texas Tech University. He points out that currently only about 40 percent of wine made in Texas comes from Texas grapes. "They (state wineries) want Texas grapes, but we just don't grow enough ... yet," he explains.

By identifying the best practices and bringing experienced and new grape growers together, the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association (TWGGA) hopes to change this shortfall. "We're really focused on minimizing reliance on non-Texas grapes," says Gene Estes, the organization's president.

In 2005, the Texas Legislature voted to allocate \$2 million annually for marketing, education and research for the industry. By making efforts like those of the TWGGA possible, this support has boosted growth while helping to ensure the industry's future. In 2007, the economic impact of the Texas wine and grape industry was estimated to be \$1.35 billion, an increase of 35 percent in just two years.

In considering the future of the Texas wine and grape industry, Dodd points to two more statistics: 1. Only 5 percent of all wine sold in Texas is from Texas; and 2. Texans lag behind the national average in wine consumption—ranking 32nd per capita. Dodd and others in the Texas wine and grape industry hope to change both figures.

"We have a lot of ability to grow the in-state market," he says. "It's a very exciting time for grape and wine producers in Texas."

### Testing an Italian varietal at lunch.

Everyone else is in and around the kitchen at 7:30 a.m., but it is surprisingly orderly. Cliff and Betty have just returned from Dallas from a "Twitter wine tasting"—an event where the participants send out their impressions via Twitter to selected wine buffs after each new wine is sampled. Betty talks about the family blog site ([www.binghamfamilyvineyards.com](http://www.binghamfamilyvineyards.com)) and their desire to promote Texas wines and organic crops. "People who enjoy wine often enjoy seeing pictures of the grapes growing," says Betty. "There is such a void of knowledge between urban and rural areas. The site lets us share a slice of country life with city people."

Though the first vines were planted only six years ago, grape growing has quickly become a passion for Cliff and Betty alike. Now at 75 acres, the vineyard will add another 45 acres this year. The Bingham family has found that unlike their other crops, tending the vineyard is a year-round occupation—and preoccupation. "Having a perennial is much more personal than a seasonal plant," says Cliff. "When you walk out into the vineyard in the middle of summer and see clusters of grapes hanging down—there is something romantic about that."

Cliff and Bobby have worked together to plan and grow Bingham Family Vineyards & Farm using "The Bobby Cox Method"—a comprehensive cultivation plan that includes planting rows at a precise angle to the path of the sun to maximize sugar production but avoid scorching.

We are now back at the house for lunch, and a few wines have been sampled. This is work for grape farmers. At the kitchen table, Bobby talks passionately about the potential for grape growing in the region. He explains how the aridity, the daily swing in temperature and the soil makeup in this part of the High Plains combine to make it ideal for growing grapes. He and Cliff are slowly, but surely, determining which grape varieties flourish here. Bobby describes a large swath in West Texas defined by rural highways. His movements are animated, his voice rising.

"If that were all cultivated," he says, squinting one eye, "Texas could produce more wine than all of California."

Cliff grabs a calculator and crunches the numbers. "You're right," he says, smiling.

---

*Jody Horton is a freelance writer and photographer and a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.*

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# Sand Dollars

KEEPING CLOSE WATCH ON THE TIDE,  
SAND SCULPTORS CREATE FLEETING—  
AND LUCRATIVE—WORKS OF ART

BY EILEEN MATTEI  
PHOTOS BY  
BRAD DOHERTY

**A** fairy-tale castle embellished with towers and guarded by a dragon rises in front of the waves surging to the South Padre Island seawall during Sand Castle Days. Intent on building fantastic but fleeting works of art, amateur and professional sand sculptors dig in at this October competition and also at Port Aransas' Texas SandFest in April.

"It's simple to get started: Get a shovel, dig down until you hit water, widen the hole, and jump in," says Lori Darlin', who gives free sand castle classes at South Padre's annual beach festival. Shaded by a battered straw hat, Lori kneels in a puddle of seawater and demonstrates how to use both hands as a scoop, pulling the wet sand toward you and quickly transferring it to your castle site. She stacks the sand, smoothing off the top quickly and repeating the process until she makes what looks like a tall stack of pancakes. Several stacks in a line make a wall. Her tools are simple: disposable plastic knives (to cut stairs and pointed towers) and spoons (to scoop out windows and balconies).

Adopting Lori's stacking, slicing and scooping techniques, amateurs within 30 minutes are crafting castles to be proud of, masterpieces that last until the tide surges in. Amy and Levi Hardy of El Paso bring their children, Summer, 8, and Sterling, 6, to Sand Castle Days every year. At home, the kids have transferred most of the family's silverware to their sandbox, their mother says. She adds that on their next trip here, she'd like her children to get private lessons with Sandy Feet, a professional sand sculptor who is competing in Sand Castle Days. Feet, whose real name is Lucinda Wierenga, is author of the tell-all book *Sandcastles Made Simple: Step-by-Step Instructions, Tips, and Tricks for Building Sensational Sand Creations*.

Years of experience and commitment separate week-on-the-beach amateurs from Sandy Feet and the 23 other master sculptors invited to participate in Sand Castle Days' Masters of Sand contest, a South Padre Island event with single and duo divisions that's just one stop on a round of international competitions and exhibitions for the pros. Port Aransas' Texas SandFest ranks as the largest Texas



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** This, uh, revealing sculpture of a shark attacking a pirate won a People's Choice award for team sand sculpting at Sand Castle Days. **ABOVE:** Puss in Boots paying court to a medieval beauty won in the solo sculpture category and also earned a People's Choice award.

sand competition with 29 masters and more than 200 amateurs. At both events, the pros first work together on a showpiece demonstration of sand. Then for three days they concentrate on building short-lived masterpieces that draw public admiration—and official prizes for both pros and amateurs totaling more than \$10,000 at South Padre and more than \$7,000 at Port A.

On South Padre, between 8 and 12 tons of sand, strengthened by a clay and water mix, are mounded up for each of the pros. Sturdy, flexible, plastic fabric restrains the lower sections of the mounds to enable the artists to work from the top down.

Pro Christy McDonald compares sand sculpting to cooking: "Everybody has different recipes and techniques. I have a theme and just go free-form." She chooses a serving spoon to hollow out eyes for the skulls surrounding her pirate castle. Her trowel cuts out pie-

shaped wedges for noses. She sprays a solution of Elmer's Glue and water, known as windscreen, over her finished arches (a trademark, given the McDonald name). Windscreen is like the hard coating on an M&M, Christy explains. It keeps the sand from melting or blowing away.

Christy, part of a sand-sculpting dynasty, knows her sand. Her father is "Amazin' Walter" McDonald, the Grand Poohbah of the Sons of the Beach who help run the South Padre Island event. Amazin' Walter, who tops his long white hair with a pith helmet and whose Santa Claus-like beard flies in the breeze, heads a committee that decides which sand pros will enliven the South Padre contest. "We review photos and sort out who we want to invite to compete," he says. "The sculptors come because we have a reputation for being fun." Sand Castle Days nurtures new talent with the Texas State



Visitors to Sand Castle Days keep it simple as they sculpt their own memories.

Championship for amateur sand sculptors. “We’re hoping to breed future masters,” he says.

**L**aunched 22 years ago, Sand Castle Days is one of five U.S. qualifying events for the World Championship of Sand Sculpting, according to Suzanne Altamare, a championship coordinator. This year’s event, scheduled from September 7 through October 3 in Federal Way, Washington, will bring together 76 competitors, including solo, doubles and team. Port Aransas’ Texas SandFest, which celebrates its 14th year in April, is a qualifying event, too, chosen because of the excellence of its competitors and hospitality. “Once you reach a certain level, sand sculptors are paid to show up and compete for prizes,” Suzanne says. Many are full-time artists who sculpt in ice, wood or metal and compete in about six sand events a year.

Meanwhile, hustling between South Padre’s emerging castles, Dennis Barrett describes himself as a sand slave, a volunteer at the beck and call of the sand masters. “None of the glory and all of the work,” he says, grinning. Dennis identifies the short, antenna-like wires sticking out of the sand sculptures’ highest points: “They keep gulls from perching on top and collapsing the whole thing.”

The sand masters work steadily, far enough away from the spectators to discourage casual conversation. The competition is on the clock, and the sculptors need the full allotment of 22 hours spread over three days. “Typically it’s a scramble to finish in time,” says Matt Long. He and duo partner Andy Gertler had built a scale model of their twinned castles sculpture before leaving New York. It never comes out exactly as planned, Matt admits.

Sand carvings of castles and of

human faces exert an undeniable appeal. That’s apparent from the crowds that linger or even park a beach chair on the seawall to observe art in action. Canadian Karen Fralick, a three-time world champion, considers sand sculpting an out-of-control hobby that became a full-time job that pays her to play in the sand on beaches around the world. Her fabulous sculpture of a medieval beauty with a Puss in Boots character, titled “Wanted: Ye Catcher of Mice,” wins the solo category and a People’s Choice award at Sand Castle Days. A Dutch couple wins the team event with a dreamy mermaid, while a humorous sculpture of pirates and a shark captures the team People’s Choice.

Over at the amateur contests, set closer to the incoming tide, Vickye Lambdin and the San Marcos Suns team are fighting storm-driven waves and high winds. Their Great Wall and terra-cotta warrior sand sculptures have fallen victim to Mother Nature. “You have to go with the flow,” says Vickye, who has been an amateur participant for 20 years. “No kids come with us anymore, but we can still play.”

Tom Danczek’s multi-towered castle wins him a second Texas State Championship because he knows what the judges look for: “The more you carve, the better. You’re judged on cut-throughs, height and amount of detail.”

Follow the experts’ advice on your next trip to a Texas beach: Have fun, build it and watch the tide come in.

*Eileen Mattei wrote about the Southwest Border Fence in the December 2009 issue of Texas Co-op Power.*

#### WHEN TO GO

**Port Aransas’ Texas SandFest**, set for April 9-11, celebrates the unique art of sand sculpting. In addition, the festival educates people about beaches and promotes environmental efforts in the Coastal Bend. Come earlier in the week to watch international sand masters carve a sculpture from 300 tons of sand. Go to [www.texassandfest.com](http://www.texassandfest.com) for amateur applications and more information or call (361) 749-5916.

**South Padre Island’s Sand Castle Days** is slated for October 21-24. For more information, call (956) 433-9909 or go to [www.sandcastledays.com](http://www.sandcastledays.com).



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Sitting on power lines: Safe for birds, not for people.

## Power Line Facts and Myths

If birds can touch electrical wires, are they safe for people, too? If you're not on a metal ladder, are you clear of danger from power line electrocution?

Know for sure before you take a chance with your life.

**First, the facts:** Electricity is always looking for the shortest and easiest path to the ground, a path that can include people and objects that touch or come too close to power lines. Electricity is fast—it travels at the speed of light in a vacuum—and it can cause severe burns or death if it flows through the human body. Take power line safety seriously. Read on to find the facts on the following myths:

**MYTH:** Wires must be safe to touch if birds can land on them.

**FACT:** Birds don't represent a direct path to the ground, giving electricity nowhere to go but back to the wire. It's easier for the current to simply stay in the wire. So touching a power line is not safe for humans.

**MYTH:** Power lines are safe to touch because they're insulated.

**FACT:** Most lines are insulated only to protect against slight tree contact, but not enough to prevent human injury. Don't touch them!

**MYTH:** It's safe to rest nonmetal ladders on a power line.

**FACT:** Anything that can get wet can conduct electricity, and many nonmetal ladders still contain metal parts. Keep your ladder away from power lines, no matter its construction.

**MYTH:** Ladders are safe near power lines as long as they don't touch them.

**FACT:** Electricity can "jump," especially when a good conductor like a metal ladder comes close. Keep a safe distance of at least 10 feet.

**MYTH:** Trimming trees close to power lines is safe if I don't use a ladder.

**FACT:** Metal isn't the only thing that conducts electricity—the moisture in the tree also can. If a tree comes into contact with the line while you're trimming, it has a direct path to the ground through the tree, your pruning tool and you. Call your electric cooperative when it's time to trim trees near power lines.

## Change the Clock; Change a Lightbulb!

We spring forward this year at 2 a.m. March 14, kicking off months of extra sunlight in the evening. These extra daylight hours help people save electricity by letting them turn the lights on a little later in the evening.

This year, make those energy savings go even further. When you set your clock forward one hour, change a lightbulb in your home from an incandescent bulb to a more efficient compact fluorescent bulb. That single lightbulb would pay for itself many times over in lower energy bills by next March, as the bulbs offer a similar quality of light but use significantly less energy.

The change to daylight saving time is also a good time to put fresh batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and then test them to ensure they work.

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# Dress up Your Home—and Cut Energy Costs—with Landscaping

**DEAR JIM DULLEY:** We just built a house, and it needs a lot of landscaping. I want to plan and plant it all myself. I've heard proper landscaping can impact my utility bills. What are some basic efficient landscaping tips? — *Janice S.*

**DEAR JANICE:** People tend to appreciate landscaping for its aesthetic value, but proper landscaping also impacts the energy efficiency of your house. From an overall environmental standpoint, good landscape design also minimizes the need for mowing and other lawn care. In addition to increasing the efficiency of your home, wise landscaping can reduce the need for watering.

Proper landscaping includes the use of ground cover, dwarf and full-size shrubs, climbing vines and trees. Ground cover is typically some type of plant, grass or gravel. The selection you make depends on your climate and specific house. Within the same neighborhood, a combination that works best for one house may not be the best for a home just one street away.

In general, try to use low-growing ground cover plants or gravel instead of grass. Other than some unique types of grass, most common species of grass require maintenance. Grass is still the best choice for areas of your yard where children play or pets roam, but try to keep it to a minimum.

In all but the most humid climates, placing low-growing ground cover plants near your house helps keep it cool during summer. The leaves block the sun's heat from being absorbed into the ground, and they give off moisture. This evaporation of water from the leaves, called transpiration, cools air near the home—similar to when we perspire.

In hot, humid climates, gravel that is shaded from the sun can be more effective than ground cover plants. Using gravel also eliminates the need for watering, but it may increase the air temperature around your house. The thermal mass of the gravel stores the afternoon sun's heat, causing the heating effect to last into the evening. Though not helpful during summer, gravel provides an advantage during winter.

When selecting ground cover plants, consider their specific characteristics (mature size, water needs, propagation, foliage density, etc.) To minimize the watering requirements, group the plant types based on their watering needs.

Dwarf shrubs are ideal for energy-efficient landscaping because they remain small at maturity (2 to 3 feet high). Plant some near the house foundation and some farther away for windbreak ramps. Since they stay small, they require little care and little watering.

In addition, dwarf shrubs can cut your utility bills year-round. The sill plate, the bottom frame along a home's foundation, remains one of the greatest air infiltration pathways into many houses. Planting dwarf shrubs near the house, especially evergreen varieties, can block the force of cold winter winds and reduce the amount of air leaking in.



**This combination of ground cover plants and dwarf shrubs near the foundation saves energy and water.**

As a windbreak ramp, dwarf shrubs can be planted to the northwest side of taller shrubs and trees. These smaller plants begin directing the cold winds upward toward the tops of taller trees. The upward wind path continues over the top of your house, not against it.

Planting climbing vines on a trellis can create effective shading to reduce the heat buildup on a wall during summer. In most climates, locate the trellis close to the house to also take advantage of transpiration cooling. In humid climates, locate the trellis a little farther away from the wall. This allows the airflow to carry the moisture away but still provides good wall shading.

Climbing vines are often more effective than trees for shade because you can target specific windows and areas of your house where heat produces the greatest problem. Deciduous vines, which lose their leaves during winter, are best so the winter sun still reaches the house. One with a robust stem structure can help disrupt the force of winter winds.

Trees have perhaps the greatest effect on your utility bills. The actual landscaping details vary for different climates, but some general concepts apply to all. Evergreen trees are effective for the northwest across to the northeast side of a house to block the winter winds. During winter, the sun does not shine from those sides. Deciduous trees planted on the other sides provide summer shade but allow the winter sun through. You may want to leave a small gap to the southwest to allow summer breezes to reach your home.

ANDERSON

# Fanthorp Inn

*Historic stagecoach stop provides feel for rigors of travel in 19th-century Texas*

**By Elaine Robbins**



With the fast clatter of horses' hooves, our stagecoach swings into the driveway of the Fanthorp Inn State Historic Site in Anderson, near Bryan/College Station. We step down out of the cherry-red reproduction 1850s coach and walk toward the whitewashed clapboard inn. Although its rooms are silent now, it is easy to imagine the flurry of activity in the early days of Texas travel as stagecoach passengers arrived for the night.

In 1834, English immigrant Henry Fanthorp built this dogtrot cedar log cabin—later expanded into a two-story clapboard inn—for his young wife, Rachel. After he was appointed postmaster, weary travelers arrived by stagecoach along with the mail and slept on pallets on the floor. He added a second floor in 1846, and in 1850, the structure officially became an inn with rooms to rent.

A popular stagecoach stop on a busy east-west highway, the Fanthorp Inn attracted such notable guests as Sam Houston, Anson Jones, Zachary Taylor and Robert E. Lee. Although Anderson is a sleepy town today with about 280 residents, it was the fourth largest town in Texas during the fast-forward period from the Republic era through statehood and the Confederacy. “Whether you were coming by land (from Nacogdoches) or sea (from Galveston), you came through Anderson,” says historic site manager John Lindon. “That crossroads was so important that a town sprung up here.”

Travelers arrived exhausted and hungry after a long day of lurching over muddy, potholed roads. A stagecoach could cover 15 to 20 miles a day; when it got stuck in knee-deep mud, second-class passengers had to climb down from the roof and push. For \$1.50 a night, guests received a bed and meals. At a time when most inns served a ubiquitous corn gruel punctuated with bits of pork or wild game, the Fanthorp was known for its high-quality food. Supper usually consisted of beef or pork with mashed potatoes or grits, peas or beans, cornbread to sop up the gravy and sweet potato or apple pie. Men were encouraged to smoke during the meal to keep bugs away, and a servant would pull the “shoofly” flaps suspended over the dining room table to keep flies off the food.

In the evening, guests would clamber upstairs to sleep three or four to a bed with strangers. (Private rooms were reserved for the occasional female traveler, coach drivers and higher-paying guests.) Since most of their bedfellows wouldn't have bathed in months, they'd also share the accommodations with fleas, lice and bedbugs. Not that hygiene wasn't considered: A shared cup, towel and toothbrush were thoughtfully provided at a washbasin in the hallway.

Although the accommodations strike the modern visitor as uncomfortably rustic, the Fanthorp Inn provided a welcome relief from the rigors of travel in 19th-century frontier Texas. Jane Beardsley, who boarded at the inn with her husband until their new home was ready, wrote in a journal entry: “It took us two days to come from Houston to Anderson & the worse ride I ever had in my life. The first day it was so dry and dusty that we were nearly choked (sic) with dirt. The second

we had a thunder shower for two or three hours & I never saw it rain faster in my life ... It was quite cold two of the first days we were here ... We are boarding for the present at Mr. Fanthrops Hotel, have an excellent boarding place, as good probably as the South affords. We have a very pleasant Landlady & a house full of servants.”

Despite its discomforts, stagecoach travel was a luxury that few could afford. The five-day journey from Houston to Austin, for example, cost \$150 to \$200 in today's currency. Most travelers slogged down muddy roads on foot or horseback. Newcomers walked alongside slow-moving, ox-pulled wagons piled high with their possessions. Rivers frequently flooded, making ferry crossings treacherous.

Accommodations were sporadically located, forcing most travelers to camp in the woods or approach a log cabin and ask to spend the night. Settlers along popular routes received so many uninvited guests that, like the Fanthorps, they often became innkeepers “in self defense,” as Marilyn McAdams Sibley points out in her book *Travelers in Texas: 1761-1860*. “[F]ew travelers ever considered that their requests for food and lodging were an imposition,” she writes. “Most ... could appear uninvited, ask a weary woman with a child at point of death to prepare a meal, and then, when she slapped a piece of cold corn pone down before them, complain of her sullen manner and the poor food.”

By contrast, the Fanthorp Inn offered a convivial, comfortable atmosphere. In the men's sitting room off one side of the dogtrot breezeway, men swapped stories, smoked, drank whiskey and played dominoes. Women entertained on the front porch or in the guest rooms. The inn's annual San Jacinto ball drew more than 100 guests dressed in their finest clothes.

The Fanthorp Inn closed after Henry and Rachel died of yellow fever in 1867, but family members continued to live in the house until 1976. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department purchased the property the following year. Because the building was continuously occupied, it has been well maintained. The original pine floors and some original furniture contribute to an authentic atmosphere that's rare in historic inns.

Although one can't spend the night at the inn, tours are available. After our tour, we step into my boyfriend's Acura, crank up the AC and hit the road. We'll be back in Austin in less than three hours, stopping for a fresh seafood dinner. Like most modern travelers, we take such comfort and convenience for granted. But now it comes with a new appreciation for the hardships endured along the way.

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*Elaine Robbins is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.*

## GETTING THERE

The Fanthorp Inn State Historic Site is in Anderson, about 30 miles southeast of Bryan/College Station. The inn is open for tours Wednesday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. At Stagecoach Days, held on the second Saturday of each month, visitors can ride in an authentic reproduction 1850s horse-drawn stagecoach. For more information, call (936) 873-2633 or go to [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us).



# Spread the News

*As any Texan knows, pimento cheese is ordinarily something special.*

BY JUDDI MORRIS

**T**exans take pimento cheese for granted, but my family recipe has given me some small fame along California's Central Coast where I live. People here consider themselves hip about good food, but they're ignorant about pimento cheese.

I know this sounds incredible to any self-respecting Texas woman who whumps up a batch of pimento cheese while she's cooking breakfast, soothing a crying baby, shooping a husband off to work and shuffling two snail-moving kids out to the school bus. After she gives it a taste test, she spoons it into a crock, shoehorns it into the fridge and begins her day.

All this without breaking a sweat or before she shifts into her I am W-O-M-A-N mode. No biggie, she says, pimento cheese is nothing special.

That's the way I felt growing up in Texas, where the women in my family made pimento cheese at least once a week. It was just always in the fridge. My sister and I ate it as an after-school snack smeared on Club crackers; it was my dad's favorite midnight refrigerator raid; and the family ate it for Saturday lunch, whatever, whenever.

But now I say that homemade pimento cheese is special. Even our 39th president is a big fan and mentions pimento cheese sandwiches in one of his books, *Christmas in Plains: Memories*. Jimmy Carter remembered that when he was a kid, if his family didn't have Christmas dinner with relatives, his mother, the feisty Miss Lillian, made pimento cheese sandwiches for that meal.

Until I married a Californian and moved west, I took pimento cheese for granted. Imagine my surprise to find that these people who were not from Texas or the South had never heard of pimento cheese. They thought it was that stuff in little bitty jars on the grocery store shelf.

This became clear to me when the library in our little California town held a fundraising literary tea. We decided to offer the standard afternoon tea fare, including sandwiches. The food chairwoman told us volunteer sandwich makers that the sandwiches should be attractive but filling, since men would be there. Those of us who'd read Barbara Pym's British novels already knew that if MEN were present, food should be substantial.

When Madam Chairwoman asked each of us what kind of sandwiches we would bring, I said pimento cheese. She looked less than thrilled, and I realized she thought I'd be smearing that stuff from those little bitty jars on bread and that my sandwiches would look meager with the bread dried out and faintly curling at



the edges. You know the kind—tacky choke sandwiches.

Well, imagine her surprise when on Tea Day, I plopped down a large silver tray of my beautiful, bountiful, golden cheese sandwiches, flecked with red pimiento, chopped green onions, minced darker green olives and tiny capers, all bound with Hellman's, a squeeze of fresh lime juice and a pinch of Tabasco and no crusts. Pym would have loved them, and my Texas grandmother, my mother and aunts would have beamed their approval.

My sandwiches were the first to go.

After that, everyone wanted me to bring pimento cheese sandwiches to book club, church suppers, the poker group, all potlucks and PTA meetings. They still do.

This fall, my pimento cheese fame moved up the coast to the San Francisco Bay area. I took that old Texas classic—a huge white platter of pickled jalapeños stuffed with pimento cheese to a tailgate picnic before a 49ers game. People went ape over them. By now I had learned to simply say “Thank you,” not “Good heavens these old things, why, down home we serve these at every goat roping, barrel race, piano recital and sweet sixteen party from Galveston to El Paso.”

And the cheese beat goes on. Last week, I folded a half cupful of pimento cheese into my twice-stuffed baked potatoes—big hit. Pimento cheese on rounds of grilled bread is my version of bruschetta. Next week, I'm making a beautiful pimento cheese pizza for my book club. I'll sprinkle on grated Cheddar or longhorn cheese, strips of pimiento and bell peppers, chopped green olives and onions, then drizzle olive oil over the top and bake.

Hey, I didn't say the pizza would be authentic, but it's gotta be as Italian as that ham and pineapple pizza they sell at the franchise pizza joints. Mine'll be gorgeous, too.

So please don't take pimento cheese for granted. It is special, and every Texas woman has her own twist to the family recipe. I love 'em all, even the ones with Miracle Whip. And in a pinch, I'd even go for some of that stuff in the little bitty jar spread on a saltine at midnight.

*Juddi Morris never calls it pimento cheese spread—she thinks that sounds too tea-roomish. She's waiting for Texas Co-op Power's great food editor to run a pimento cheese recipe contest. Morris, who may be contacted at [juddi@charter.net](mailto:juddi@charter.net), would love reading how co-op members make their own pimento cheese.*

#### JUDDI'S PIMENTO CHEESE

- 1 pound grated longhorn or mild or sharp Cheddar cheese
- 6 ounces chopped pimiento
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 1/2 cup chopped green olives
- 3 teaspoons capers
- 2/3 cup Hellman's mayonnaise

Use the following ingredients to your taste: drops of Tabasco, squeezes of fresh lime juice, minced, pickled jalapeño peppers or other peppers of your choice.

Mix all ingredients and add anything else you think would be tasty.

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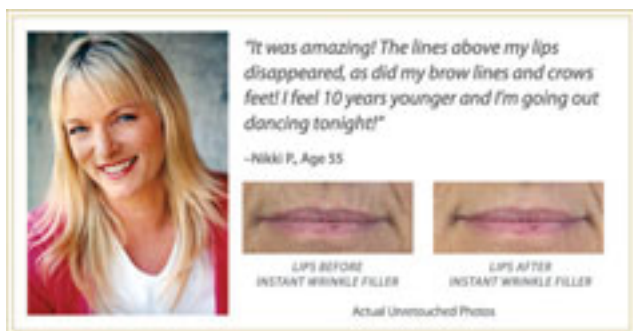
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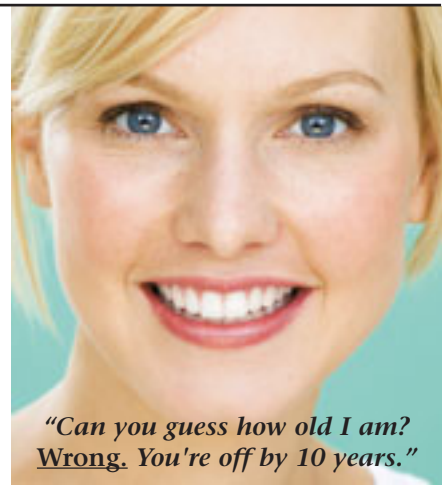
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# Moses Rose Didn't Budge

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

Of the many mysteries surrounding the battle of the Alamo, one of the most enduring and endearing centers on the line that Texas commander Lt. Col. William Barret Travis supposedly drew in the sand with his sword. According to the story that's been passed down, Travis drew a line in the sand of the Alamo courtyard and asked any man willing to stay and fight with him to step across the line.

Oddly enough, the story of this line in the sand reportedly comes from the one man who chose not to step over it, a Frenchman and veteran of the Napoleonic Wars named Moses Rose. Rose was 51 at the time and his action, or inaction as the case may be, has been justified on the grounds that Rose had witnessed enough slaughter with Napoleon's army that he wanted nothing more to do with such martyrdom. Asked later why he chose not to stay at the Alamo, Rose reportedly replied, "Because I did not want to get killed, by God."

From that story, history has often tagged Moses Rose as "the coward of the Alamo." Those who stayed perished at the hands of the Mexican army on March 6, 1836. While we might imagine that Rose hated the story of Travis' line in the sand, that is not the case. In fact, the story comes to us courtesy of Rose, who told it often after he decided to get while the getting was good. Although the story of the line in the sand is doubted by some historians and scholars, the fact that Rose originated the story, portraying himself as something less than heroic in the process, adds a certain credibility.

Rose demonstrated some maturity and common sense in his escape from the Alamo. To the east of the Alamo was a dense mesquite thicket, which looked like the best way to get out, but Rose correctly surmised that such thickets would be thick with Mexican soldiers. Instead, he headed west, right through the heart of San Antonio, which was deserted, its citizens hiding behind locked doors. He saw not a single person on his way through town. He followed the San Antonio River south for about three miles, then turned east and made his way across the prairie toward Nacogdoches.

Rose stopped in Grimes County for a while and found shelter with the Abraham Zuber family. Mrs. Zuber picked cactus thorns from his body while he told her the story of Travis' line in the sand. "Travis' speech is burned into my soul," he told her.

Had the story stayed with Mrs. Zuber we might not know anything of it today, but she repeated the story to her son, William Zuber, who had been with Sam Houston's army when the Alamo fell. Zuber published the story in the 1873 Texas Almanac and later repeated it during an address to a Texas historical society in 1907.

According to Zuber, Moses Rose was with Napoleon's



army during its invasion of Russia in 1814 and fought gallantly enough to be named to the French Legion of Honor. He left France and ended up in Nacogdoches, where he was living when the Texas Revolution erupted.

Rose dedicated himself to the Texans' cause, selling or mortgaging all his possessions to fight against the Mexicans—hardly the actions of a coward. He participated in the siege of Bexar and was present when Mexican Gen. Martín Perfecto de Cos surrendered. According to Zuber, Rose and Jim Bowie were close friends.

Moses Rose remains one of many enigmatic figures involved in Texas history, but the story he circulated about Travis' line in the sand has seared its way into the American consciousness as a symbol of courage and patriotism. That story is the cornerstone of the Alamo legend itself.

J. Frank Dobie saw Travis' line in the sand as more important than any discussion of whether or not it actually happened. "It is a line that not all the piety nor wit of research will ever blot out," Dobie wrote. "It is a Grand Canyon cut into the bedrock of human emotions and heroic impulses."

The man who first told the story went back to Nacogdoches and operated a butcher shop. He often testified on behalf of heirs of Alamo defenders trying to secure land grants for services rendered during the revolution. Whether or not people considered him a coward is not documented, but Rose moved to Logansport, Louisiana, in 1842 and died there in 1851.

Though Rose never married and left no direct heirs, a descendant of his brother Isaac presented Moses Rose's musket to the Alamo museum in 1927. Rose might have used that musket at the Alamo but not, we are sure, for the entire 13-day siege.

*Clay Coppedge is a regular contributor to Footnotes in Texas History.*

# A Guide to Cooking Green

**BY KEVIN HARGIS** By now, most of you have probably heard about the concept of your “carbon footprint,” which refers to the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere based on certain activities you perform in your daily life.

Author Kate Heyhoe has given thought to a specific type of carbon footprint, what she calls your “cookprint,” which includes everything you buy and do to feed yourself and your family. In her book *Cooking Green: Reducing your Carbon Footprint in the Kitchen the New Green Basics Way* (De Capo Press, 2009), she examines all aspects of food preparation and offers suggestions on how you can improve efficiency in the kitchen. Appliances, she writes, account for 30 percent of the total energy consumed in our homes.

The book includes lists of tips for reducing your cookprint, which will save you money on your energy bills to boot.

Some of these cooking methods will take you time and experience to perfect, but if you can get the hang of it, you should start to see some benefits when bill time comes around.

Here is a recipe from the book that combines several fuel-efficient methods to cut in half the cooking time of a traditional lasagna.

## SHORT-CUT PASSIVE LASAGNA

- 9 lasagna noodles
- 3 to 4 teaspoons olive oil, divided
  - 1 carton (15 ounces) ricotta cheese (preferably whole-milk ricotta)
  - 1 large egg
  - 1 large clove garlic
  - 1 teaspoon dried marjoram or oregano
  - 1 jar (12 ounces) roasted red peppers, drained
  - 1 can (4.25 ounces) chopped black olives, drained
  - 1 jar (12 ounces) quartered marinated artichoke hearts, drained
  - 1 cup (5 to 6 ounces) crumbled feta cheese
  - 1 jar (24 ounces) prepared pasta sauce, or home-cooked sauce
- 8 ounces sliced or shredded provolone cheese (about 2 cups)

Bring about 6 cups water to a boil (use electric kettle for most fuel-efficient boiling). Arrange noodles in 13x9-inch glass baking dish, in three stacks. Pour water over to cover, jiggling pan so noodles don't stick together. Cover with larger baking dish to help hold in heat. Soak 25 to 30 minutes or until almost al dente (soaking a bit longer while you prep is OK). Separate noodles once while soaking so they don't stick together. Remove noodles to colander to drain. Drain water from dish and wipe dry. Oil bottom and sides of dish with about 1 teaspoon of olive oil.

While noodles are soaking, beat ricotta and egg together with fork until smooth and slightly fluffy. Pour remaining olive oil in separate microwave-safe mixing bowl. Mince garlic and drop into bowl. Crumble marjoram or oregano and stir into oil. Microwave on high about 30 seconds to soften garlic. Remove bowl. Shred peppers with fingers or chop into large bites and add to bowl. Stir in olives, artichoke hearts and feta. Start layering: Spread thin coat of pasta sauce in bottom of dish (about a quarter of the jar). Top with layer of three noodles. Spread all of ricotta mixture over noodles. Spoon on another sauce layer (another quarter of jar), gently pushing it over entire ricotta surface. Add second layer of three noodles. Spread pepper mixture evenly over noodles. Add final layer of noodles, spread on remaining sauce, and top with provolone. Loosely cover with foil.

Place lasagna in cold oven and turn heat to 400 degrees. Bake 25 minutes. Remove foil, rotate pan and bake 5 more minutes. (Lasagna will not look done; the top cheese will be soft but not brown, sauce will show hints of bubbling around edges.) Turn off heat and allow to passively bake 15 minutes, until the top browns and the sauce bubbles. (Use the oven light and window to check lasagna at this point. Do not open the door.) If top still isn't brown enough, move to a top rack, flip on the broiler, and broil for 1-2 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to rest 5 to 10 minutes. Slice and serve.

Serving size: 1 cup. Servings: 6. Per serving: 570 calories, 30.8 g protein, 28 g fat, 49.3 g carbohydrates, 906 mg sodium, 120 mg cholesterol





## **PATSY COPELAND HENDERSON**, *Central Texas Electric Co-op*

Prize-winning recipe: **Easy Ribs**

Slow cookers are among the most efficient kitchen appliances, allowing you to cook an entire meal for pennies. They are also among the most convenient. You can load one up and start it when you leave for work and come home to a hot meal in the evening. But recipes for Crock-Pots aren't limited to soups and stews, as these delectable ribs prove.

To see how one couple cooks using only the power of the sun, go to [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com).

### EASY RIBS

- 2½ pounds baby-back pork ribs
- 2 teaspoons Cajun seasoning mix
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 1 cup ketchup
- ½ cup packed brown sugar
- ⅓ cup orange juice
- ⅓ cup cider vinegar
- ¼ cup molasses
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon barbecue sauce
- 1 teaspoon stone-ground mustard
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon Liquid Smoke (optional)
- Dash salt
- 5 teaspoons cornstarch

Rub ribs with Cajun seasoning. Layer ribs and onion in 5-quart slow cooker. In a small bowl, combine ketchup, brown sugar, orange juice, vinegar, molasses, Worcestershire and barbecue sauces, mustard, turmeric, paprika and garlic powder. Add Liquid Smoke, if desired, and salt. Pour over ribs. Cover and cook on low for 5½ to 6½ hours, or until meat is tender. Remove ribs and keep warm. Strain cooking juices and skim fat; transfer to a saucepan. Combine cornstarch with 1 tablespoon water and mix until smooth; stir into juices. Bring to boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Serve with ribs.

Serving size: 2 ribs. Servings: 8. Per serving: 405 calories, 28.3 g protein, 15.4 g fat, 34.7 g carbohydrates, 0.5 g fiber, 1,083 mg sodium, 104 mg cholesterol

### CROCK-POT COBBLER

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 2 cans (21 ounces each) pie filling (your choice of pineapple, apple or cherry)
- 6 ounces dried apricots, snipped into small pieces
- ½ cup orange juice

- 1 can (17½ ounces) ready-to-bake cinnamon rolls

Lightly coat slow cooker with nonstick spray. Combine pie filling, apricot pieces and orange juice in cooker, cover and cook on high for 1½ hours or until mixture is bubbly. Stir mixture. Cut each cinnamon roll in half. Place roll halves on top of fruit mixture, cinnamon sides up. Cover and cook an hour or until rolls are fluffy throughout. Remove crock from cooking element, if possible, or turn cooker off. Let stand, uncovered, about 30 minutes to cool before serving. Spread roll icing that's included in the can over top.

Serving size: ½ cup. Servings: 12. Per serving: 225 calories, 1.9 g protein, 0.8 g fat, 49.2 g carbohydrates, 1.9 g fiber, 189 mg sodium, trace cholesterol

**ELLA'D PERRY**

*Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative*

### CROCK-POT CHICKEN WITH WINE AND STEWED TOMATOES

- 6-7 pieces cut-up chicken
- 1 can (15 ounces) stewed tomatoes
- 1 can (4 ounces) mushrooms
- ½ onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- ½ cup white wine
- Salt & pepper to taste

- 6-7 white Cheddar cheese slices

Place chicken at the bottom of Crock-Pot. Add remaining ingredients, except cheese. Cook on high for four hours or low for six to eight hours, until chicken is no longer pink. Remove lid and place cheese on top of chicken. Replace lid and let cook until cheese melts, about 10 to 15 minutes.

Serving size: 1 piece of chicken with sauce. Servings: 6. Per serving: 187 calories, 24.2 g protein, 4.1 g fat, 8.4 g carbohydrates, 1.2 g fiber, 571 mg sodium, 56 mg cholesterol

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### GREEN COOK'S TIP

Do not open the oven door unless absolutely necessary. Every time you open the door, the interior temperature drops 25 degrees.

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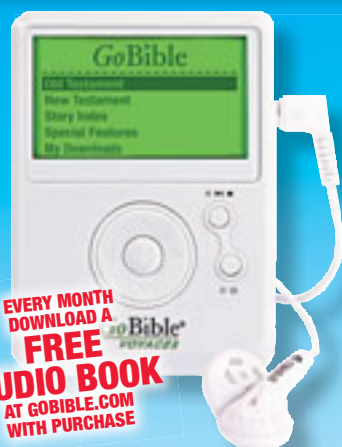
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## BACKYARD GARDENS

Green thumbs abound in Co-op Country! So much so that it was very difficult to decide whether to showcase beautiful flower beds or massive vegetable harvests. In the end, we chose to show the gardens themselves, in all stages, and how a little time and attention really brings forth the fruits of your labor.

—ASHLEY CLARY

◀ Grandpop—Pedernales Electric Cooperative member **Joe L. Banda**—enjoyed helping his grandson **Brice** and Harley the pup plant seeds in Banda's thriving garden in Spicewood.



► Flower Mound resident and CoServ Electric member **Pepper McCarty** said the chickens are always willing to lend a scratch as she and her husband, **David**, get their garden ready.

◀ **Jeannie Ferrier**, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member for almost 20 years, sent us this colorful shot of a bottle tree decorating her garden in Austin.



### Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
May	Farmer's Bounty	Mar 10
Jun	Only in Texas	Apr 10
Jul	Beat the Heat	May 10
Aug	Birds	Jun 10
Sep	At the Fair	Jul 10
Oct	Eeek!	Aug 10

**FARMER'S BOUNTY** is the topic for our **MAY 2010** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Farmer's Bounty, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701**, before **MARCH 10**. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We regret that Texas Co-op Power cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. Please note that we cannot provide individual critiques of submitted photos. If you use a digital camera, e-mail your highest-resolution images to [focus@texas-ec.org](mailto:focus@texas-ec.org), or submit them on our website at [www.texascoopower.com](http://www.texascoopower.com).



▲ Thanks to a trustworthy guard over their Comanche County ranch, a bountiful crop of vegetables is on the way for **Brenda** and **John Murphy**, Tri-County Electric Cooperative members since 1996.

► If you want okra, just ask Bandera Electric Cooperative members **Weldon** and **Glenda Dunn**. Even on a ladder, Weldon is still shorter than his 10-foot-2-inch-tall okra stalks in his Boerne garden.



# AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

## MARCH

**02 SEGUIN** [2-3]  
Showcase Seguin,  
(830) 379-6382,  
[www.seguinchamber.com](http://www.seguinchamber.com)

**05 LAMPASAS** [5-6]  
Needle Art & Quilt Show,  
(512) 556-2224

**CANTON** [5-7]  
Lewis Auto Swap,  
(903) 567-2991

**06 DRIPPING SPRINGS**  
Sculpture Challenge, (512)  
858-5665, [www.sculpturechallenge.com](http://www.sculpturechallenge.com)



**12 SWEETWATER**  
Rattlesnake Round-Up



**7 INEZ**  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church's  
Oyster/Catfish Luncheon

**06 LAGARTO**  
Community State  
Championship Cook-Off,  
(361) 265-0509

**WIMBERLEY**  
Market Day,  
(512) 847-2201

**07 INEZ**  
Emmanuel Lutheran  
Church's Oyster/Catfish  
Luncheon,  
(361) 782-3646

**12 SWEETWATER** [12-14]  
Rattlesnake Round-Up,  
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**13 WECHES**  
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**WEST** [13-14]  
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**13 WECHES**  
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**14 BURTON**  
American Legion Birthday  
BBQ Lunch & Games,  
(979) 289-4109

**19 LILLIAN**  
3rd Friday Bluegrass,  
(817) 929-8391,  
[www.ntbbbluegrass.com](http://www.ntbbbluegrass.com)

**20 BANDERA**  
Wild Hog Explosion, (830)  
796-4447, [www.wildhogexplosion.com](http://www.wildhogexplosion.com)

**ROUND TOP**  
Artists Changing  
Tomorrow, (979) 249-  
4119, [www.act4art.org](http://www.act4art.org)

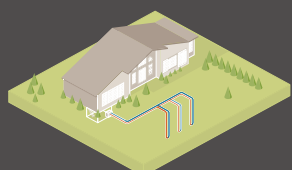
**26 TYLER** [26-27]  
Azalea Quilt Show,  
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**27 CHURCHILL**  
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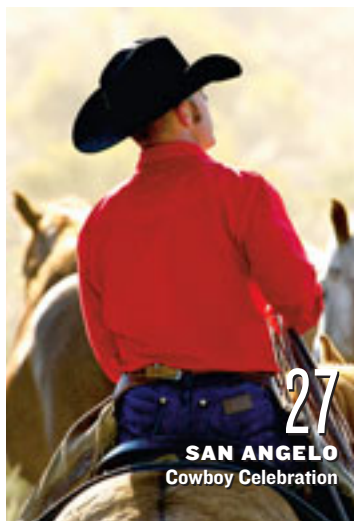
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0699, [www.ecmga.com](http://www.ecmga.com)

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5313, [www.stephenvilletexas.org](http://www.stephenvilletexas.org)



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**WASHINGTON** [27-28]  
True Texas Women, (936)  
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**BURTON** [27-4/3]  
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**APRIL**

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**08 BONHAM** [8-11]  
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09

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Wild Horse & Burro Program

We drove to the end of the blacktop, where FM 170—*El Camino del Rio*, or the storied River Road—abruptly stopped on the northern edge of Candelaria, a dusty village that lies forgotten in the Chihuahuan Desert of far West Texas.

For roughly 120 miles, the pavement's two yellow stripes seem to flick like a snake's forked tongue, testing every sharp curve and every steep climb as the two-lane road slithers through mountains, canyons and desert in one of the most rugged and remote parts of Texas. FM 170 starts in Study Butte, where it intersects with State Highway 118, and heads west before cutting northwest through Big Bend Ranch State Park, hugging the Rio Grande between Lajitas and Presidio and making its final run on a desolate stretch guarded by roadrunners and spiny-fingered ocotillo plants.

Breathtaking. Stupendous. Spectacular. Adjectives come so easy, yet seem so inadequate in describing a road that “may well be the prettiest drive in America,” National Geographic declared in 1985. On the River Road, known as **MUERTE DEL BURRO** (Death of the Burro) before it was paved, it's one stomach-dropping postcard scene after another.

On the last leg of our journey, between Ruidosa and Candelaria, a herd of javelinas galloped across the road with two babies in tow. So take it slow on this road of S-shaped curves where some rises are so severe it's impossible to tell where the pavement's going next.

## THE ROAD BEGINS ...

Once an old trailhead used by the likes of smugglers and banditos, the River Road has also been known as Treasure Trail, Smugglers' Trail and Last Frontier. Construction on what is now known as FM 170 began shortly after World War II, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) completed it in 1961, christening it with the winning entry in a local school contest: *El Camino del Rio*.

Nobody—whether you take State

# EL CAMINO DEL RIO

*Far West Texas' River Road just might 'be the prettiest drive in America.'*

BY CAMILLE WHEELER



Highway 118 south from Alpine or U.S. Highway 385 south from Marathon and into Big Bend National Park (\$20 entrance fee) to reach Study Butte—arrives at this road by accident. If you drive the River Road and never get out of the car, you've missed the boat.

Our day started five miles west of Study Butte (pronounced “Stoody Byoot”) at the **TERLINGUA CEMETERY**, which, along with the old mining town of Terlingua, is on the National Register of Historic Places. Every November 2, locals celebrate Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos*) at the cemetery, a sacred setting of wooden crosses and rock-covered graves, some bearing homemade markers, lovingly placed beer bottles and small Buddha statues.

Twelve miles later, my companion and I toured the **BARTON WARNOCK ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER**, the eastern entrance to **BIG BEND RANCH STATE PARK**. A \$3 one-day pass purchased here and at the **FORT LEATON STATE HISTORIC SITE**, the park's western

entrance four miles southeast of Presidio, covers park entrance.

Over the next 15 miles, we wandered down to the river at the old Contrabando movie set and checked out the landmark **TXDOT TEPEE PICNIC AREA** that lies at the foot of *La Cuesta*—The Hill—whose 15 percent grade is a severe test for trucks and RVs. Park at the top and get out for an incredible view: Texas' Bofecillos Mountains to the north,

Mexico's Mataderos Mountains to the south, the Rio Grande rolling through Dark Canyon some 600 feet below.

Six miles later, it was an easy, quarter-mile hike from a dirt parking lot to **CLOSED CANYON**. It's safe to walk about half a mile on the smooth, water-worn canyon floor—and then, slick, treacherous footing at an 8-foot pour-off prohibits further passage.

Beyond Presidio the road curls some 35 miles into tiny Ruidosa where the ruins of the **SAGRADO CORAZON DE JESÚS (SACRED HEART OF JESUS) CHURCH** are being restored. According to the Texas Historical Commission, the church was constructed in the early 20th century, and its rounded, graceful arches—rare features in adobe construction—are probably the largest of their kind remaining in the state.

Twelve miles later, the pavement ends in Candelaria where a mysterious dirt road named **CHISPA DRIVE** is marked with a green street sign in the middle of the desert. All-terrain vehicles are best suited for this rough and rocky public road that stretches some 50 miles to U.S. Highway 90, northwest of Valentine, and closes when the Rio Grande floods. For road conditions, contact the Presidio County sheriff's office.

**Big Bend Ranch State Park**, (432) 358-4444, [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)

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

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