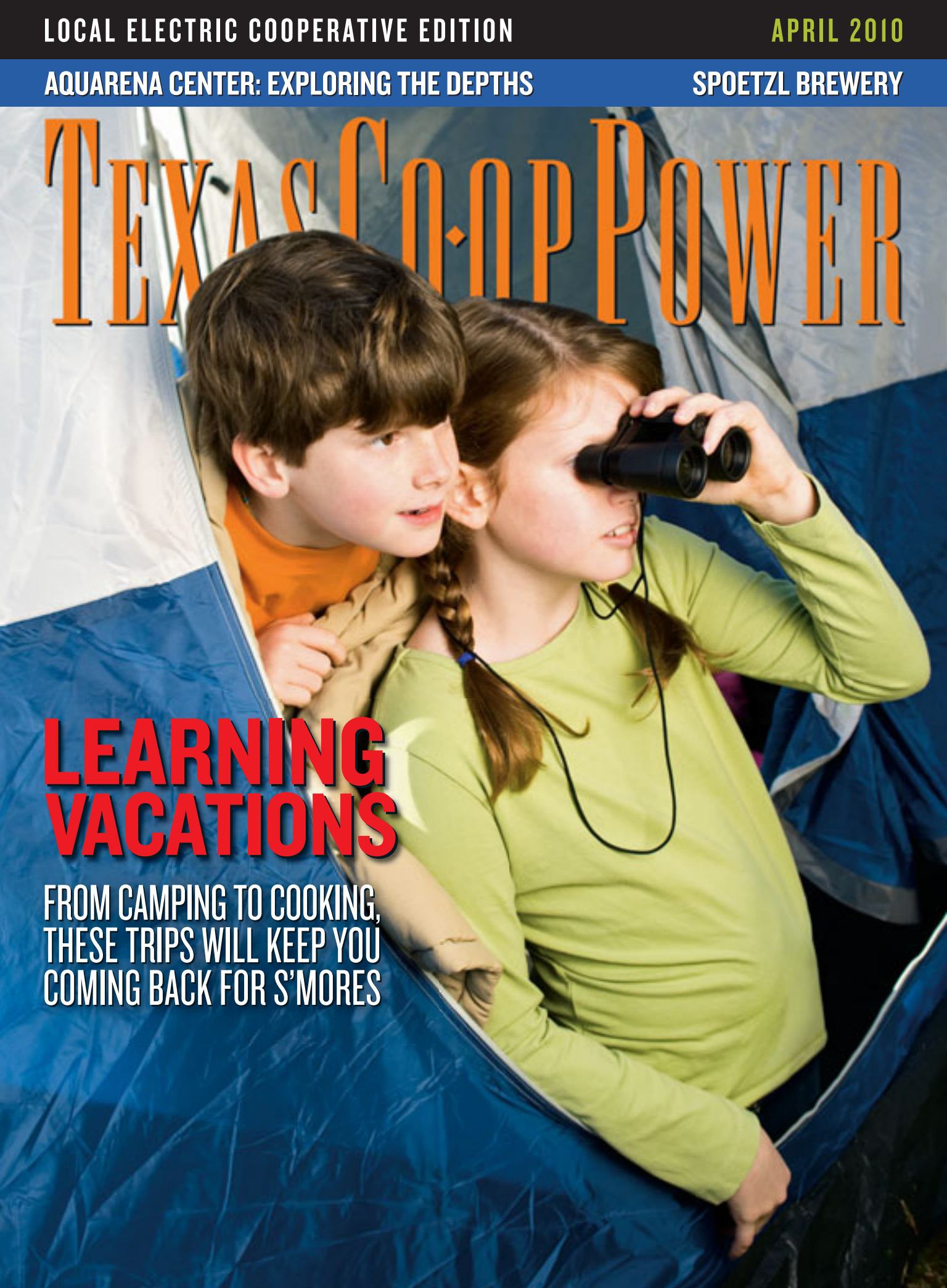


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FEATURES

10 Learning Vacations

By Melissa Gaskill

From camping to cooking to photography, these trips will keep you coming back for s'mores.

16 Exploring the Depths

By Camille Wheeler

Photos by Will Van Overbeek

Ralph the swimming pig, clowns and Aquamaids are gone. But at this magical place called Aquarena, life springs eternal.

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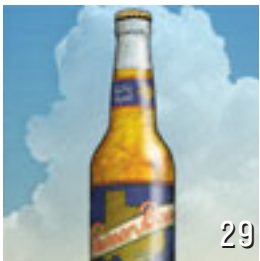
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TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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

CALL A LICENSED ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR

I have noticed that many of your articles about electrical safety tell people to get a “licensed” electrician. Many people in Texas don’t realize that just having a journeyman license does not give the license holder the right to perform work.

The correct thing for people to do if they suspect a problem is to call a licensed electrical contractor. A licensed contractor will have the company name as well as a TECL (Texas electrical contractor’s license) number on the side of company vehicles and any related ads or company letterhead. This protects the homeowner because if the contractor has these numbers, that means he or she is licensed by the state of Texas and has the insurance

POWER TALK

that the state requires contractors to carry. Check out www.license.state.tx.us/ELECTRICIANS/elec.htm for more information.

LANCE ASKEW
*Jasper-Newton
Electric Cooperative*

NO NEED TO BUY SEED

Thank you for the article regarding the work of J. David Bamberger and the staff of the Selah Bamberger Ranch Preserve (“Water from Stone,” February 2010). As a volunteer in the education programs there, I have great regard and respect for the vitally important work Mr. Bamberger has inspired, led

and facilitated generously with his resources. However, there is one aspect of your article that is incorrect.

You raise the question about whether restoration and conservation of Hill Country—or other land—really is for everybody, given the \$20,000 David Bamberger spent on native grass seed.

When Bamberger tells this story, he notes that he now considers it “Bamberger’s Folly.” After scouring not just Texas but the nation for native grass seed and spending that sum, he discovered the money and effort had been an unnecessary waste.

You see, that seed is already present in virtually all areas once covered by our native short grasses. Even on the ruined land that is today Selah, those seeds were in the soil, waiting for the sun and moisture that removal of juniper allows.

The moral of Bamberger’s story is this: A chain saw and a good pair of loppers are all a landowner needs—along with some favorable weather—to see the prairie flourish on his or her land, once again.

DAVE COLLINS
Pedernales Electric Cooperative

Editor’s note: Bamberger did not mention to us journalists that he decided purchase of seeds was not necessary, but that’s good to know.

TURKEY FEATHER DANCE

On an occasion when I was playing and flopping (dancing with) turkey feathers, my mother inquired what I was representing. I pointed to a large (Texas Centennial) poster plastered on the side of the neighboring garage and replied “I am Sally Rand,” as there she was portrayed with all her beautiful feather fans (“Sally Rand: Barely There,” Footnotes in Texas History, February 2010.)

We received passes to attend the comedy/burlesque show. I never got to meet Sally Rand, fans or no fans. My best memory was meeting entertainer Kate Smith. After the show in her dressing room she taught me the ditty “The Little Spider” and sang other songs with us kids.

NEDRAH S. MAGNAN
Burnet

VIETNAMESE DESERVE RECOGNITION



The February 2010 issue had a great article on the Vietnamese in Texas (“From Surviving to Thriving: Vietnamese Now Woven Into Texas’ Community Fabric”). We lived in Rockport several years and were always very impressed with the work ethic of these people. They had a difficult beginning but gradually earned the respect they deserved.

Ollie Winfrey Evinger
Meridian

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



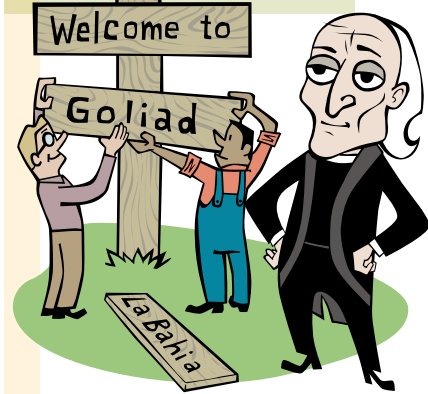
HAPPENINGS

Watch from the shore, paddle your own canoe or kayak, or brave the rapids during **SPRINGS FEST 2010**, which shows off San Marcos' crown jewel: the crystal-clear, spring-fed San Marcos River.

Springs Fest, scheduled for April 9-11 at Rio Vista Park, offers demonstrations, hands-on classes and the ultimate test: a whitewater rapids slalom race. But don't fret if you're worried your paddling skills aren't there yet—the rapids formed below the river's dam are rated Class 2, meaning they're gentle enough for novices.

For more information, call (512) 203-0093 or go to www.kayakinstruction.org.

WHO KNEW?



Goliad, which originated as one of the oldest Spanish colonial municipalities in Texas, was established in 1749 as La Bahia, a settlement that grew around a presidio of the same name. In 1829, the town's name was changed to Goliad in honor of Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, who ignited the Mexican War of Independence against Spanish colonial rule in 1810. Goliad, minus the "h" in this case, is an anagram—the rearranging of the letters of a word or phrase—of the name Hidalgo.

RANDY HEESCHILDY BIRD, JOHANSON WILDFLOWER CENTER



BE READY WITH A BREATH MINT

The most obvious thing to do with a wild onion is eat it. Wild onions tend to be much stronger in taste than domesticated onions, and a few can go a long way. Historically, their value as food lay more in their abundance than in their quality, and they were likely eaten in large amounts only when little else was available, though cooking significantly reduces their pungency.

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

check it out

Domes for Haitian Homeless

Many folks driving north on Interstate 35 through Ellis County have noticed curious concrete domes snaking through the fields.

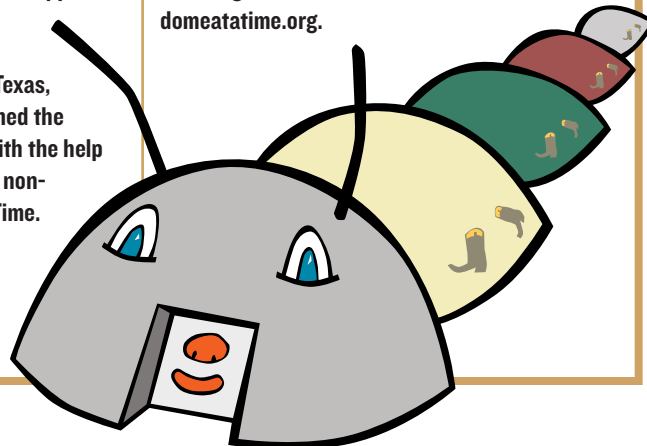
The domes represent the dreams of a North Texas businessman who's gearing up for one of the biggest projects of his life: building new homes for Haitian families left homeless by the fierce earthquake on January 12 that crippled the country.

David South, president of the Monolithic Dome Institute in Italy, Texas, south of Fort Worth, actually launched the home-building project in October with the help of Haitian rap artist Won-G and the non-profit organization One Dome at a Time. But, now, in the wake of the earthquake, the team wants to build a 500-unit village that includes a school, a medical clinic and a

community hall.

South touts the family domes—each about 18 feet in diameter, or 300 square feet—as hurricane- and earthquake-proof “ecoshells.”

After a massive earthquake in 2006, One Dome at a Time helped erect a 100-unit village in Indonesia. For more information about the domes, go to www.monolithic.com or www.one domeatime.org.



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Bigger, Better Batteries

Storing electricity is still a challenge.

By Scott Gates

Electricity remains tricky to manage. When it's created, it must immediately be moved to where it can be used. When it's needed, it must be instantly on hand. Yet there's no sure-fire way to store it, unlike water or natural gas.

Due to this “use it or lose it” factor, engineers have long sought methods to “stockpile” electricity. In recent years, the need for energy storage has grown—from supplementing renewable energy sources like wind farms to powering hybrid electric vehicles. All of this has sparked new efforts to find the better battery.

To date, large-scale battery arrays haven't offered a good energy storage option for electric cooperatives—they're expensive, don't hold a charge for long and can have short life spans. But as technology improves, many experts see the “better battery” as a major breakthrough waiting to happen.

Batteries used for large-scale energy storage range from glorified lead-acid versions (what's in your car) to more advanced nickel-cadmium batteries (such as those running a cordless drill). A recent Cooperative Research Network (CRN) study analyzed these and other battery types to find the best for co-op use.

“We looked at all of the different options out there,” explains Dale Bradshaw, a CRN consultant. “The head-and-shoulders winner, with the lowest up-front cost, longest life, acceptable efficiency and low environmental impact, appeared to be the zinc-bromide battery.”

The battery can be viewed as an electroplating machine. During charging, zinc is electroplated onto conductive electrodes, while at the same time bromine is formed. The batteries are in the development stage.

CRN plans to put zinc-bromide bat-

teries to the test through a proposed research project with four electric co-ops. Each co-op would demonstrate how the batteries could be used in different ways, in different parts of the country.

Central Electric Power Cooperative, a generation and transmission (G&T) co-op based in Columbia, South Carolina, would use the batteries to, among other things, flood the power grid with stored energy when outages occur. The co-op could also supply electricity to the grid during times of highest electricity demand. Trimming the “peak” requirements reduces demand charges and thus avoids the need to switch on expensive natural gas-fired generators for short terms.

Seminole Electric Cooperative, a G&T based in Tampa, Florida, plans to use the batteries to store solar power. The co-op's photovoltaic solar array typically provides the most power at noon or 1 p.m. By storing that energy at noon, the G&T can put it to use later in the day when more electricity is needed, but clouds have moved in.

Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative and Kotzebue Electric Association, which respectively serve parts of Hawaii and Alaska, would deploy the batteries to manage the intermittency of renewable solar and wind generation. If wind energy were stored at night, that power could then be used during the day—when there's a bigger demand for electricity but breezes may not cooperate. These far-flung co-ops could also use the batteries to ensure service reliability, feeding power to consumers when parts of the system experience outages. As a result, both co-ops will significantly reduce the use of expensive oil-fired generators during periods of high demand.

“We think this could be one of the biggest breakthroughs of the last 20 years,” Bradshaw says. “What we're doing now could have a major impact on co-ops in the future. It's one of the rare opportunities where we can begin to stabilize the price of electricity, hopefully slowing down increases in rates.”

Scott Gates writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Virginia-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.



Wish you were **HERE.**

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Learning Vacations

BY MELISSA GASKILL

FROM CAMPING TO COOKING,
THESE TRIPS WILL KEEP YOU
COMING BACK FOR S'MORES



CAMPING



COOKING



PHOTOGRAPHY



HISTORY

Sometimes you want to spend a vacation lazing in a hammock or basking on the beach. But other times, you want something more, such as acquiring a new skill or exploring a historical site. In other words, you might want to roll up your sleeves and take a learning vacation, like one of these.

1

LEARN TO CAMP LIKE A PRO

Some of my best family memories involve camping. The idea might daunt those who didn't grow up with it, though ... all those poles and stakes, stoves with flammable fuel, inflatable things and wild critters. Fortunately, Texas Outdoor Family Workshops (TOFW) come to the novice camper's rescue.

These events, hosted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at various state parks throughout the year, help ensure a good experience by teaching basic camping skills.

I packed up my 16-year-old daughter, Bridget, and two of her friends, Ellen and Lauren, both camping newbies, to test the approach at Lake Somerville State Park & Trailway. Nine families gathered on a Saturday morning in October for the first lessons from TOFW coordinator Dan Hayes and two rangers. While this was the first campout for most of the group, one family had returned for a second workshop (participants may attend three). Hayes says people often come back. "The first time, everything is so new you don't really absorb all the information," he says.

RIGHT: Dan Hayes, a Texas Outdoor Family Workshops coordinator, starts a fire with bark tinder and a hot coal. BOTTOM: Campers use GPS devices in a high-tech treasure hunt called geocaching.

"The second time, you get more comfortable."

Our first order of business: putting up a tent. After assembling one, with coaching from Hayes, everyone in the group succeeded in pitching their own. Stoked with this success, we were ready to tackle the afternoon activities. Depending on the park, these can include things like canoeing, fishing, Dutch oven cooking, hiking or wildlife watching. Our agenda listed learning to kayak and fish in Lake Somerville and geocaching, which turned out to be my favorite.

Geocaching, a high-tech treasure hunt, involves using a GPS device to track down hidden caches, or contain-



TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT



TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

ers, such as camouflaged coffee cans, ammunition boxes or even a hollowed-out coconut with a clasp and hinge. At the minimum, the caches contain a written log, or a piece of paper, that geocachers sign to show they were there. There are nearly a million of these caches around the world—searchable by zip code at the official website, www.geocaching.com—including in a number of Texas state parks. Some parks hold special events such as geocache challenges. You can find GPS coordinates for existing caches online or place your own coordinates. Just ask first, as some sites are off-limits.

Hayes showed us how to key in on the caches he'd hidden, and we headed down the road. I felt pretty cool and high-tech following a little line on my GPS through the park. But even fancy technology gets you within only 10 to 30 feet of the actual cache—then, old-fashioned powers of observation rule the day. We ended up collaborating with other participants to locate all the caches. A side benefit of the workshop: a built-in extended family to play with.

The afternoon wrapped up with instruction on fire building, crucial to any successful camping trip. We used our campfire to make s'mores, of course, which we ate while listening for owls, frogs, crickets and other night creatures. We would have recognized them had we heard them, thanks to a presentation by Hayes that matched photos with recorded sounds. But the only critters we heard were two bold raccoons trying to make off with our Hershey's bars and marshmallows. After convincing Ellen and Lauren the 'coons wouldn't eat us, we doused the fire and crawled into our sleeping bags.

In the morning, the group reported for a quick lesson on breaking camp, apparently having survived the night quite well. I counted our outing a success when, on the drive home, the girls started planning their next campout.

Texas Outdoor Family Workshops: \$55 fee per family covers basic equipment, such as tent, camp stove and pots and pans for up to six people. Registrants receive a list of groceries and personal items to bring. (512) 389-8903, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/outdoorfamily

Other camping workshops: REI stores periodically offer classes on camping, outdoor cooking, kayaking and related topics. Check events cal-

enders for a store near you at www.rei.com.

Geocache challenges in Texas state parks:

Coordinates for existing caches: http://tpwd.state.tx.us/geocaching/txgeo_coordinates.pdf

2

LEARN THE CHEF'S SECRETS

On Greer Farm west of Daingerfield, Maine-Anjou cattle graze in lush pastures around a restored circa-1850 Texas home. Guinea hens bob around the herb gardens, and goats mow grass near four guest cabins overlooking a stocked lake.

This working farm makes a perfect setting for Cooking with Chef Eva, aka Eva Greer, a graduate of the Art Institute of Houston's Culinary Arts program whose work reflects a Belize upbringing, European parents and world travels with her husband, Sid. A recent class focused on roasted meats, which attracted Bob Hewes, his son Greg and son-in-law Jay Boerner. They spent the weekend at the

Chef Eva Greer, left, teaches Kristie Keller some tricks of the trade while Eva's husband, Sid Greer, carves the roast.

farm's guest cabins, where their wives and children relaxed during the midday class. The attendees also included two women from Dallas celebrating a birthday and several repeat customers from nearby towns.

During the whirlwind three-hour class in the spacious, well-lit kitchen, we watched Eva prepare beef roast, lamb chops, pork loin, butternut squash soufflé, potatoes, mint sauce, gravy, roasted fruit and toasted pound cake. She handled this complex dance with practiced ease, even managing to involve us in pureeing, seasoning, turning, beating and mixing. Delectable smells permeated the kitchen, and we dug appreciatively into the finished dishes. Chef Eva made it fun and had us convinced that we could cook like this ourselves. And while I likely won't tackle such a complex menu at home often, if at all, Eva shared general cooking tips in addition to teaching specific recipes. Placing the roast on a rack inside the pan, for example, keeps it out of the drippings for more even cooking. Kosher salt's larger grains make it easier to tell how much you've applied. (And Chef Eva uses a lot of salt and pepper,

rubbing it into the meat with her hands, which she washes constantly.)

Besides, with her enthusiasm, the hands-on opportunities, easy banter among the students and delicious food, it felt more like an afternoon with friends than a cooking class. The only thing better than heading home inspired to upgrade my cooking would have been the chance to stroll across the green lawn, through the shade of tall trees, and onto the porch of one of the cabins to digest a wonderful meal while watching the breeze ripple the pond.

The Hewes family got to do that and apparently left the next day suitably inspired as well. "On our way home, we got a call from our daughter, who was at the grocery store buying a roast," Bob Hewes says. "We had it that Sunday night, and it turned out great. Then Greg made the pork loin and squash soufflé for his in-laws when they came to visit."

Cooking class students can work off their homework by visiting area attractions such as the Daingerfield and Caddo Lake state parks or Los Pinos Ranch Vineyards in Pittsburg, which offers tours and live jazz in the dining room on weekend nights.



HEALEYGRISHAM

Greer Farm: 1444 CR 1125, west of Daingerfield. Classes range from \$60 to \$75 per person. Cabins are \$135 a night for two people, \$10 a night for each additional person. Can sleep four adults, includes kitchenette. For a schedule and directions, call (903) 645-3232 or visit www.greerfarm.com for more information, including about pick-your-own berries.

OTHER COOKING CLASSES

Blair House Inn: 100 W. Spoke Hill Road, Wimberley. Themed classes and two-day classes, (512) 847-1111, www.blairhouseinn.com/cooking-school.html

Lake Austin Spa Resort: 1705 S. Quinlan Park Road, Austin. Culinary Experience, second week of each month, available only to overnight guests. 1-800-847-5637, www.lakeaustin.com/culinary-experience.php

3

SHOOT THE PHOTO WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Taking an amazing photograph often requires extreme effort along the lines of crouching in a blind, kneeling in the bushes or lying flat in wet grass, sometimes for hours.

I learned this on a recent outing with Larry Ditto, who offers instructional photo tours and workshops through Larry Ditto Nature Photography. I also learned that, while lenses as long as your arm, packs of filters and lots of other pricey equipment produce great images, so can a mid-price-range digital camera, with a little of the aforementioned effort and a few tricks. On instructional photography outings, Ditto teaches some of those tricks and demonstrates the required effort. I attended a workshop at the Block Creek Natural Area, which is made up of two adjoining ranches between Comfort and Fredericksburg owned by Myrna and David Langford and Sharron and Larry Jay.

The owners installed photo blinds in strategic spots and have an intimate familiarity with what photogenic wild creatures show up where and when. They can place shutterbugs right where they needed to be for a shot of, say, a Belted Kingfisher, Painted Bunting or gray hairstreak butterfly. Creeks, water features and feeders around the property attract a variety of wildlife, and careful land stewardship means plenty



LARRY DITTO

of wildflowers, trees and scenic vistas. Workshop participants lodge in the historic ranch house and two nearby cabins, with family-style meals included.

Our group of four rose before the crack of dawn, the better to be ready when the first rays of sun painted the landscape in soft, warm light. We spent part of the morning crouched behind a concrete spillway on a pond populated by geese and worked by a kingfisher, while Ditto and Larry Jay did their best to herd the geese into sunlight. The two men also pointed out dramatic angles of the sun through trees and spotted frost-edged sycamore saplings in the tall grass. I would never have noticed those, much less realized how dramatic they would look in a photograph. The results were worth lying on the cold ground.

Over lunch, we downloaded photos and discussed the results while Ditto offered feedback and suggestions for improving specific images. It struck me how different a scene can look when photographed at slightly changed angles by several photographers. Ditto dedicates some time during his workshops to using software such as

Kandace Heimer is a frequent student in Larry Ditto's Nature Photography classes.

Photoshop, but the real emphasis is on taking pictures, which suited me fine. We spent the afternoon shooting scenic views, close-ups of plants and lots of butterflies. As the sun worked its way lower in the sky, we added creek reflections and waterfalls to our memory cards and ended the day shooting star trails in the dark, something I'd always wanted to do. Then it was time to hit the hay to rest up for another early morning. Time really flies when you're taking great pictures.

Larry Ditto Nature Photography: Three-day workshop, \$645; for additional costs, such as lodging and ranch access, contact Ditto. (956) 682-3251, www.larryditto.com

Block Creek Natural Area (Kendall County): (830) 995-4174, <http://blockcreeknaturalarea.com>

OTHER PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS

The Expedition School: photography workshops in far West Texas. (512) 626-6282, www.expeditionsschool.com

Cibolo Creek Ranch, Marfa: Spring and fall photo

tography seminars with Wyman Meinzer. 1-866-496-9460, <http://cibolocreekranch.com/events/calendar.htm>

REI, free photography clinics: Visit www.rei.com for events scheduled at a store near you.

4

GO BACK IN TIME

What better way to learn Texas history than by walking where it happened? Washington County, aka the birthplace of Texas, contains a wealth of historic sites and museums that make it easy for families to turn vacation into a living history lesson.

At the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, 293 acres of rolling hills and tall trees on the banks of the Brazos River, stroll through the remains of the town of Washington, including a replica of Independence Hall. In this nondescript wooden building, a ragtag collection of delegates signed the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836, creating the Republic of Texas, while a blue norther raged outside. Sitting in the drafty building gave me a renewed appreciation for those hardy souls. Guided tours refresh those vague on their seventh-grade Texas history or

Interpreters in period dress enjoy a musical moment at the Barrington Living History Farm.

inform those who—gasp!—never learned it.

Interactive exhibits in the adjacent visitor center trace events subsequent to that memorable March day, and walking trails lead to the river and a pecan-shaded picnic area, a great place to contemplate how things have changed since this spot bustled with river-borne commerce.

In the middle of the park, the Star of the Republic Museum's star-shaped, 10,000-square-foot building holds thousands of artifacts that bring to life early 19th-century Texas. Definitely worth a stop for museum buffs, but this outdoors girl couldn't wait to get next door, where the Barrington Living History Farm recreates the homestead of Anson Jones, last president of the Republic of Texas.

Architecturally accurate outbuildings such as a barn, smokehouse and slave quarters surround his original 1844 home, moved to this site in 1936. Interpreters in period clothes—love those bonnets and suspenders—use Jones' records to properly plant crops, care for livestock and keep house. Depending on the season, they may be plowing fields with a pair of enormous oxen, drying vegetables or feeding the piglets. Not just any piglets, either; these are Ossabaw Island (Georgia) hogs, descendants of animals brought here by the Spanish 400 years ago. Visiting the farm leaves me admiring our forebears and feeling thankful for

modern conveniences.

A self-guided walking tour in the nearby town of Independence covers a wide range of history, from Sam Houston's homesite and a home owned by his wife, Margaret Lea; to the state's oldest continuously active Baptist church; and to the first site of Baylor University and a number of early 1800s structures.

The Brenham Heritage Museum houses a lamp collection spanning 200 years, items from Houston's home and what it claims is one of three remaining steam-powered fire engines in the U.S. The Burton Cotton Gin & Museum covers all things related to cotton and ginning, including in early 1900s Texas, when cotton was king. National Register and Texas historical markers dot the county, including on Brenham's historic railroad depot and the Stagecoach Inn in Chappell Hill. The birthplace of Texas clearly takes pride in its offspring.

Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site: (936) 878-2214, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/washingtononthebrazos

Independence walking tour: <http://independencetx.com>

Washington County Chamber of Commerce: (979) 836-3695, <http://brenhamtexas.com>

STAY AT

Southern Rose Ranch Bed & Breakfast: 8580 Dairy Farm Road, Chappell Hill. (979) 251-7871, <http://southernroserranch.com>

Ant Street Inn: 107 W. Commerce St., Brenham, 1-800-481-1951, <http://antstreetinn.com>

EAT AT

Bever's Kitchen and Gifts: 5162 Main St., Chappell Hill, (979) 836-4178, [www.beverskitchen.com](http://beverskitchen.com)

Volare Italian Restaurant: 102 S. Ross St., Brenham, (979) 836-1514, <http://volareitalianrestaurant.com>

MORE TEXAS HISTORY LESSONS

Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, the Story of Texas: 1800 N. Congress Ave., Austin. (512) 936-8746, www.thestoryoftexas.com

San Jacinto Museum of History: One Monument Circle, La Porte, (281) 479-2421, www.sanjacinto-museum.org

Melissa Gaskill is a freelance writer living in Austin. She is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.



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Timeless glass-bottom boats still glide over Spring Lake and the San Marcos Springs, the turquoise jewel of what now is the Aquarena Center.

EXPLORING THE DEPTHS

Ralph the pig, clowns and Aquamaids are gone. But at Aquarena, life springs eternal.

BY CAMILLE WHEELER
PHOTOS BY WILL VAN OVERBEEK

The young girl's megaphone-esque announcement jolted us upright on the glass-bottom boat.

"A shark!" she joyfully shrieked, peering through the glass and into the depths of Spring Lake at the Aquarena Center in San Marcos.

All the adults onboard laughed, of course, some of us remembering our first wide-eyed rides on the magical glass-bottom boats at what was then called Aquarena Springs. And then, entertaining the notion that there really might be something scary down there, we again rested our forearms on the wooden handrail and gazed down, down, down into the cold, crystal-clear water, our imaginations set ablaze by the fanciful thinking of a child.

There are, of course, no sharks—there have been alligators, though, and everybody knows about Ralph the swimming pig—in the freshwater San

Marcos Springs that bubble up out of the Edwards Aquifer, forming Spring Lake and the headwaters of the San Marcos River. But when you look deep—really deep—into the history of these springs, what emerges is evolution at its best: It's a spellbinding story of prehistoric discovery, archaeological recovery, environmental awakenings and breathtaking entertainment courtesy of an aquatic theme park that was years ahead of its time.

Here, it's what's beneath the surface that counts, from the remains of two old submarine theaters to the eight endangered or threatened aquatic species sheltered in the river and springs. And even though the Aquarena Springs theme park no longer exists, a master plan being developed for this 90-acre property on the Texas State University (TSU) campus is so grand in scope it would make any nature-based entity green with envy.

But don't wait for the makeover: There's plenty to do and see now at the Aquarena Center, an environmental education division of the River Systems Institute at TSU. Through the bottom of the boats, you'll see springs so violently active they look like a sandstorm underwater. You might spy spotted gar or moss-covered turtles that seem to wear green backpacks. You can study skulking Yellow-crowned Night Herons and other wading birds from the wetlands boardwalk. Or, you can check out the aquarium and endangered species exhibit that showcases such rarities as the Texas blind salamander—the most advanced troglolitic, or cave-dwelling, salamander known in the world today.

Heck, you can even paddle your own glass-bottom kayak. You get the picture: There's plenty here now for visitors to grab hold of—like the kayak paddles that even beginners can learn to gracefully dip into the water.

"There is so much for them to see and do," said Lennie Archer, the center's glass-bottom kayak coordinator. "We know even more about it now."

What researchers know about Spring Lake, a federally declared critical habitat, is that it and the river are home to other sensitive species, such as the San Marcos salamander, which is found nowhere else in the world. They know that the springs have never stopped flowing in recorded history. And based on archaeological findings, including bones from extinct species, many researchers believe this is the oldest continually inhabited site in North America.

In 1978, archaeologist Joel Shiner began a decade-long excavation of the site. The volume of his findings and the superb condition of the artifacts, such as artfully made spear points, indicate that early Native Americans, or Paleo-Indians, weren't just nomadic tribes passing through some 12,000 years ago. Instead, seduced by the spring-fed waters of the San Marcos River, they established permanent communities along its banks.

Now, as part of a wetlands restoration project, a different set of bones will be extracted: those of the old theme park, including the two submarine theaters, built in 1950 and 1972; and the Swiss Sky Ride and Sky Spiral, which

went up in 1963 and 1979. The glass-bottom boats and the historic hotel that houses the Texas Rivers Center, home of the River Systems Institute, will stay put.

Five of the original 10 handmade wooden boats remain; one now runs on solar power, and there are plans to install solar panels on the other battery-powered boats as well. But it's expensive to maintain the aging fleet. To that end, author Doni Weber is dedicating all sales money from her book *Images of America: Aquarena Springs* (Arcadia Publishing, 2009) to a glass-bottom boat endowment.

In the book, Weber tells the story of her great-grandfather, Arthur Birch (A.B.) Rogers, and his son, Paul Rogers, the visionaries of a water wonderland. Aquarena traces its beginnings to 1929 when the elder Rogers opened a resort hotel overlooking Spring Lake—the hotel that now houses the Texas Rivers Center. Now, with Weber's fitting gesture, the family is still watching over this magical place, helping keep its signature attractions afloat.

Meanwhile, the demolition of the old park, under the direction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, could be completed by spring 2011, with restoration possibly taking another two years. Ultimately, city, university and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials envision a world-class aquatic environmental education center with hiking trails, a state-of-the-art visitor center and a 500-acre nature preserve.

"It's an astonishing, globally significant site, and restoring it is an immense privilege," said Andrew Sansom, executive director of the River Systems Institute. "There's no other campus in the world that has this kind of resource on it."

AND WHAT A DREAM IT WAS

Even though Aquarena Springs closed 14 years ago, two years after TSU bought the theme park property, its legend lives on. "People still walk in and say, 'What time is Ralph swimming, and what time will the mermaids be dancing?'" Archer said.

It's hard to let go of a theme park that created treasured memories for so many Texans (here's betting many readers will remember the underwater wedding in 1954). And only those who



PHOTO ENHANCEMENT BY WILL VAN OVERBEEK

Many Texans remember their first rides on the magical glass-bottom boats. The first version, in 1946, was a canvas-covered rowboat. Author Doni Weber says her great-grandfather and grandfather didn't know the word 'ecotourism' when they envisioned a playground here: 'They just thought, "Well, it's a beautiful river. Let's let people ride around in boats and look at what's underneath."'

have explored the depths of Spring Lake can fully appreciate its mysteries. Performers like the Aquamaids and clowns who swam in *The Show*—the reverent name for Aquarena Springs' main event—and the pig trainers, who, even when Ralph refused to swim, had one mantra: *The Show* must go on. And it did, from October 3, 1950, to February 25, 1996.

Describing *The Show* is like recalling the weirdest of dreams: *Glurpo the clown and his assistants Bubllo and Scrubllo assisted beautiful women called Aquamaids who performed synchronized ballet, daintily consumed underwater picnics of celery and bottled soda pop and fed canned cat food to curious fish. Audiences watched the drama unfold through the windows of a submerged theater as the performers sipped air from underwater hoses that trailed down beside them like umbilical cords. Oh, and there's this swimming pig ...*

THE BIGGEST HAM OF ALL? RALPH, OF COURSE

By the 1960s, a decade after the park opened, thousands of visitors were pouring into what was now called Aquarena Springs. And who were they coming to see? Ralph the swimming pig, who by this time was even hamming it up on TV. In 1967, he appeared on Charles Kuralt's segment of Walter Cronkite's CBS "Evening News" show, and in the early 1980s, he performed his famous swine dive on the TV show "That's Incredible."

Ralph wasn't always Ralph. In the mid-1950s, Aquarena introduced the swimming pig phenomenon, and early names included Missy, Magnolia and Little Mister. But by the mid-1960s, Ralph was an institution who, well, hogged the show.

As much as some people want to believe there was only one Ralph, it's just not true: More than 700 pigs performed through the years, and the final Ralph delivered the final swine dive on February 25, 1996.

There were always three pigs in rotation at Aquarena Springs: Big Ralph, medium-sized Ralph and little Ralph, the innocent baby who, in the process of being weaned, was the most

likely to dive in and swim across the lake, enticed by a bottle of milk held by a trainer or Aquamaid. The pigs began training when they were only a few weeks old and were performing at the age of 2 or 3 months.

But Spring Lake is cold—about 72 degrees year-round, which is chilly for anyone, including pigs. If Big Ralph didn't want to swim, no one could make him, said Marvin Lee, who performed in The Show from 1973-75. "He ran amuck a lot," said Lee, now a mechanical engineer in San Antonio who graduated from Southwest Texas State University (now TSU). Once Big Ralph was out of his pen and saw an escape route—such as the doors to the performers' dressing rooms inside a fiberglass volcano—he'd take it at full gallop, Lee said, mowing down anybody in his way on the catwalk to avoid entering the cold water.

While Ralph was entertaining the masses, Aquarena Springs' menagerie of animals, including an unbeatable tic-tac-toe playing chicken, never failed to impress. And the 24 alligators kept in Texana Village became part

of theme park lore when a May 1970 flood washed them out of their enclosure and into Spring Lake and the San Marcos River. At the request of Aquarena Springs officials, reptile expert Tom Allen, a star on the TV show "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom," flew to San Marcos to help recapture the gators.

Allen, theme park President Don Russell and Scott McGehee, the park's attractions supervisor, set out in a 12-foot aluminum jon boat to find the fugitive reptiles. After the search, McGehee was asked if all the gators were accounted for. "Yes," he said. "Plus one."

The 25 gators—McGehee's best guess is there was an extra gator because someone bought one and then dumped it in Spring Lake when it got too big—were then moved to the theme park's Hanging Gardens, high on the hill above the lake, to prevent another such escape.

The gators, McGehee wrote in an e-mail, were caught one at a time, with their mouths taped shut and legs tied behind their backs: "From there, it was a short truck ride and some serious hauling by hand."

Submarine theaters, sky rides ... and Ralph the swimming pig, who performs his famous swine dive off a fiberglass volcano. Somehow, it all fit together at Aquarena Springs, where even alligators made a big splash.



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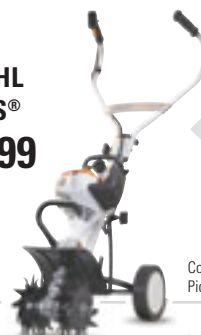
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Aquamaids Margaret Russell, left, who developed the submarine theater underwater show, and Shirley Rogers, daughter and granddaughter of the theme park's founders, exemplified the look of Aquarena Springs: ethereal, surreal ... and oh so real.

Ethereal, yes. But a dream? No. Jeff Reynolds of Hotchkiss, Colorado, was a Seguin High School student when he swam at Aquarena Springs from 1970-71. He said his stories of casting spells as an underwater witch doctor, coaxing a young pig to swim across Spring Lake with a bottle of milk, and blowing air rings while lying on the bottom of the lake always draw the same response from slack-jawed listeners: “You’re kidding me.”

Because of the surreal nature of their work, Aquarena Springs performers formed unbreakable bonds. Understandably, emotions ran deep during the theme park’s first-ever reunion last November as Reynolds and other attendees pored over memorabilia and strolled the Aquarena Center grounds.

At a barbecue lunch on a sunny

Saturday afternoon, former employees stood as Aquarena Center Director Ron Coley called out their decade: 1990s, 1980s, 1970s, 1960s ... finally, there was one person standing—80-year-old Aquamaid Peggy Sparks of Blanco, who swam from 1950-53.

Attendees turned the pages through the years, laughing, crying, swapping stories and proudly getting their books autographed by Weber and her mother, former Aquamaid Shirley Rogers. Her grandfather and father, who opened the theme park, could have simply created a family gathering place, Shirley said. Instead, they chose to share the beauty of the springs.

“It was for the love of the river, the love of San Marcos,” said Shirley, who’s pictured as a young Aquamaid on the book’s cover, her long hair dreamily floating underwater. “The river’s to share, and

now it’s shared in a different way.”

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Reunion attendees came to say hello to friends they hadn’t seen in decades. And they came to say goodbye to a theme park that soon will vanish from sight, but not memory.

Former Aquamaid Vergie Jurica, a 1968 Southwest Texas State University (now TSU) graduate who performed from 1960-73, traveled the farthest to San Marcos: almost 2,000 miles from Old Saybrook, Connecticut.

“I treasure every memory,” she said, choking back tears. “It makes me really sad because those were some of the best days of my life. I appreciate the fact that they want to do education—I just wish they could still do both.”

Gift shop manager Carole McCarley was 24 when she joined the theme park staff in 1976. Now, she’s the longest-tenured employee here. She’s grateful that the springs are being protected for generations to come. But she’s saddened that the old park will be torn down.

McCarley sat on a bench near the water, greeting old friends as they walked past. She drew a deep breath and started to cry. “It’ll just always be a part of my life,” she said. “Seeing everybody, it’s like when will I ever see these people again?”

All day, a glass-bottom boat slowly cruised Spring Lake, carrying tourists and former employees who introduced themselves by title: “I was a swimmer ...” “I was a boat driver ...”

But there’s nothing past tense about this place that more than 125,000 people, mostly schoolchildren, still visit every year. The biggest thrill, of course, is riding the glass-bottom boats. Now, thanks to the ongoing vision and generosity of the Rogers family, the boats will run for years to come, opening wide the portal into the deep, tantalizing mysteries of the San Marcos Springs.

Aquarena Center, (512) 245-7570, www.aquarena.txstate.edu

River Systems Institute, (512) 245-9200, www.rivers.txstate.edu

Web Extras: To read more about the history of Aquarena Springs, go to www.texascooppower.com/webextras.

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

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Modern Recessed Lighting: Efficient, Attractive



With proper planning and installation, recessed lighting can provide energy-efficient illumination without intruding into living spaces or detracting from decor.

By Jim Dulley

DEAR JIM: I've always liked recessed light fixtures, but heard they're leaky and inefficient. Are there any new types of fixtures that are more energy efficient? Are they difficult to install?

—Mike M.

DEAR MIKE: Recessed lights have been popular for decades and remain the lighting fixture of choice for overhead lighting. As with any other product in the home, some recessed light fixtures are more energy efficient than others. Efficient options can use 80 percent less electricity than inefficient versions

that provide the same amount of light output with practically the same appearance.

Recessed light fixtures are unique because they penetrate the ceiling and are mounted in the ceiling of a room. From an energy conservation standpoint, this is not an issue when installed in the first-floor ceiling of a two-story house. However, if fixtures are installed in the second-story ceiling or the first-floor ceiling of a one-story house, a hole is created between a conditioned living area and the open, unconditioned attic area.

Without an efficient design and proper installation, a recessed lighting

fixture allows conditioned air to leak out of the house. This is particularly true during winter when the warmer air inside a home naturally rises to the ceiling.

There are new energy-efficient recessed light fixture designs that meet Energy Star standards. All of these fixtures use fluorescent light sources instead of inefficient incandescent bulbs. This alone reduces electricity consumption by 75 percent. The inside surface of the new fixtures is also more reflective than older versions. Better reflectivity increases the amount of light the fixture will emit.

For fixtures in ceilings where indoor air leakage seems likely, select a new airtight design with a sealed canister. The sealed airtight recessed fixture canister, when installed properly, forms an airtight seal between the ceiling and the fixture.

As a safety note, if you already have recessed lighting fixtures in your home, do not go up into the attic and wrap them with insulation to try to save energy. This can cause the fixture to hold in too much heat, particularly when standard incandescent bulbs are used, and become an electrical or fire hazard.

When installing recessed light fixtures yourself, first determine your lighting goals. To brighten an entire room, downlighting can be quite effective. For task lighting, a single fixed vertical fixture directly over the work area seems effective. Wall wash recessed lighting can be used to accent a painting or other wall hangings.

It's not difficult to install recessed light fixtures by yourself. For an attractive, efficient installation, cut the mounting holes the exact size recommended by the manufacturer. This makes it much easier to create a good seal between the fixture and the ceiling. Before drilling and cutting holes, make sure your fixture layout clears all the floor joists.

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Energy-Efficient Appliance Rebates Available to Texas Residents April 16-25

Is it time for that old energy-gobbling water heater or cranky washing machine to be replaced? Now may be the time to act.

Texas will use approximately \$23 million in federal stimulus funds to pay for a mail-in rebate program for consumers who purchase certain energy-efficient household appliances.

The rebate program, administered by the State Energy Conservation Office, or SECO, will only apply to those who buy an eligible Energy Star appliance and replace a functional old appliance. The purchases must be made from April 16-25, a 10-day period coinciding with Earth Day, April 22. The rebate program will not be retroactive. It will only apply to purchases made once the program officially begins April 16.

Additionally, it is suggested that those who want the rebate first reserve one by calling a toll-free number (which SECO will disclose at the end of March) or registering online at the conservation office's website, www.seco.cpa.state.tx.us. At that website, consumers can also sign up for e-mail updates on the program and view answers to frequently asked questions about the rebates.

SECO will be working with retailers and recycling facilities to create a system to help consumers replace functional old appliances and recycle them where available. There is a \$75 recycling incentive included in the rebate to encourage returns of old appliances.

Consult the accompanying chart or visit the SECO website for more specific ideas on how much money is being offered for each type of appliance.

REBATE AMOUNTS

APPLIANCE	REBATE	WITH \$75 RECYCLING REBATE
REFRIGERATOR	\$240	\$315
FREEZER	\$180	\$255
ROOM AIR CONDITIONER	\$45	\$120
CLOTHES WASHER	\$150 or \$180*	\$225 or \$255
DISHWASHER	\$110 or \$140*	\$185 or \$215
CENTRAL AIR CONDITIONER	\$600, \$800 or \$1,000*	\$675, \$875 or \$1,075
HEAT PUMP	\$1,200-\$1,600*	\$1,275-\$1,675
WATER HEATER	\$190-\$640*	\$265-\$715



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* Depending on appliance type and energy efficiency of model purchased

McKINNEY

All Abuzz

20-year-old Blake Shook brings fresh blood into honeybee business.



In 2004, Blake Shook had been keeping honeybees for only a year when he heard about a swarm in a tree on the McKinney downtown square.

Before an audience of lunchtime onlookers, Blake, then 14, managed to shake about half of the swarm into a bucket from the bees' 20-foot-high perch. He took them home and added them to his collection of hives. "He's always been fearless about trying new things," recalled Lyndon Shook. His father knew little about bees, but Blake was learning fast via a local beekeeping group.

By Thomas Korosec

Today, the 20-year-old Blake Shook has more than 500 hives, a small but growing presence on some Dallas-area store shelves for his Desert Creek Honey and enough knowledge of the beekeeping art to teach the classes he attended as a student only a few years ago. He's decided to turn beekeeping into his life's work, making this business owner a rare, youthful addition to a field that many say is getting a bit gray.

"As I was going through high school, I was thinking, 'I love beekeeping,'" said Shook, who was homeschooled. "I got excited about it because bees are absolutely fascinating. You learn you can get your own bucket of honey from a beehive, and there's nothing like tasting the honey the very first time you produced it."

By the age of 15, Shook was making as much as \$10,000 a year from his hobby and taking a big interest in the fascinating nature of honeybee colonies. "I started putting it all back in the business, and by 16 or so I started thinking this could be my job," he said.

A good student, Shook struggled with the decision to forgo college as he pursued his business interests. But Shook, who started the Desert Creek Honey Co. with two beehives, says he could always take classes online someday if he decides to obtain a degree.

The work varies with the seasons. In the winter, Shook travels among several bee yards and feeds the hives with a mix of sugar and water that works as a nectar substitute when flowers aren't in bloom. Honey typically is harvested from June through August. The work entails calming the bees by smoking the hives to cover the pheromones, or alarm scent, that the bees secrete; removing the wooden frames that hold sections of honeycombs; uncapping the cells—which means removing the wax caps from hexagonal cavities; and extracting the honey. He does his own bottling, labeling, distribution and sales and expects to hire help as his business expands.

Shook's growing operation is spread out with hives on his parents' farm in Blue Ridge, north of Dallas; a partner's honey farm 15 miles to the south; and several other bee yards in the area. The packing house, or honey house, that Shook built at Blue Ridge is already too small for his commercial ambitions, and he is joining forces with John Talbert, a 72-year-old retired mechanical engineer who has kept bees as a sideline business for 25 years.

Shook's first honey house was designed for a smaller operation in which honey moves from 5-gallon buckets into bottles and jars. As a commercial operator, he needs to be thinking in terms of forklifts and 55-gallon drums.

"You can tell from the front yard a beekeeper lives here," said Shook as he pulled his sport utility vehicle into Talbert's Sabine Creek Honey Farm in Josephine, northeast of Dallas. On this bright fall afternoon, the property is thick with bee magnets such as goldenrod, heath aster and other blooming wildflowers. In this part of southeastern Collin County, most owners of the 5- to 20-acre ranchettes keep their places mowed, making for fewer nectar targets for foraging bees.

In a spacious outbuilding stands a collection of stainless steel extractors that use centrifugal force to strip honey from the frames used in commercial hives. There are also massive tubs for storing the raw honey and an automated bottling machine. Scattered about are big blocks of beeswax, drums containing the most recent honey harvest and smaller extracting machines that Talbert uses to teach beekeeping classes.

"I have maybe \$100,000 invested here, which is a lot less than the outlays you have to make for land and equipment in most parts of agriculture," said Talbert, who has worked over the years through the Collin County Hobby Beekeepers Association to attract and educate new beekeepers.

But Talbert, a past president of the Texas Beekeepers Association, said beekeeping is in need of a youth movement. "If you look at the average age of beekeepers, they're on my end of the spectrum, not Blake's," he said.

"It's something the general public isn't interested in. Today, it's computers and such," added Shook, president of the 300-member Collin County group that gave him his start.

Following the seasonal rhythm of the business, Shook ships his hives to Southern California for six weeks in the winter to pollinate almond crops. Hundreds of hives are stacked by forklift on a semitrailer, nets are put over the top, and the bees are sent where a broker has struck a deal between grower and apiarist, or beekeeper.

Shook also sends about half his hives to Houston, where the Chinese tallow tree, an otherwise loathed invasive species, provides a heavy flow of nectar that increases honey production in the critical late-spring and early summer months.

Parasitic mites that began invading hives in the 1990s and the recent, yet-to-be-explained Colony Collapse Disorder—in which honeybees leave the hive and don't return—have challenged beekeepers like never before, and Shook has not been spared. He works to keep his bees healthy by feeding them pollen supplements and corn syrup in the winter, but he nevertheless expects to lose 20 to 30 percent of his hives each year.

There have been sufficient honeybees in Texas to pollinate the numerous commercial crops that need them—such as melons in the Rio Grande Valley and sunflowers, alfalfa and pumpkins in West Texas—according to Talbert.

But the shortages have raised honey prices and pollination fees, helping offset beekeepers' rising costs.

Nathan Sheets, owner of the successful North Dallas Honey Co. in Plano, said buying local is becoming increasingly popular and fashionable. Sheets calls Shook "a great young man" and said the 20-year-old is likely to be helped by the trend.

Shook concedes Desert Creek Honey is by no means a big operation—yet. "It is simply a small business with big plans," he said.

Desert Creek Honey Co., www.desertcreekhoney.com, (214) 886-6899

North Dallas Honey Co., www.northdallashoney.com, 1-866-497-7208

Sabine Creek Honey Farm, e-mail john@sabinecreekhoney.com

The Shook household is served by Fannin County Electric Cooperative.

Thomas Korosec wrote about fireworks in the July 2009 issue of Texas Co-op Power.



Uncle Brother Falls in Love

*Both blind, they
relied on his precise
memories to
experience the world.*

BY CELIA YEARY

W

e had an uncle called Brother, and sometimes we called him Uncle Brother. I don't know why we didn't address him by his real name.

He was my daddy's older brother and was blinded in an accident as a young man around 1930. The accident happened many years before my birth, so of course, I only remember him as my blind uncle. He was married and the proud father of a son, who now lives in California. At some point, something happened between him and his wife, and he found himself alone with no way to work because he could not see.

With no other recourse, he moved back to the family home, a small farm in North Texas. As a child, I clearly remember driving there from the South Plains with my family to visit Granny and Papa and our uncle.

The house never had running water, but it did have electricity for the Kelvinator icebox and one lightbulb on a cord hanging from the ceiling in each room. My uncle knew his way around every inch of the house, the yard, the garden, the orchard and the outhouse. He waved a cane in front of him as he walked. He milked the cows, drew water from the well and fed the calves.

Granny kept several cakes and pies in a pie safe for the large family. My uncle would squat in front of the pie safe, open the bottom doors and cut a big piece of pie or cake. Then he carried it in his big, work-roughened hands to the porch steps to eat.

Everyone loved our uncle. Even though he was big and stocky, he had a still, quiet way about him, never raising his voice. He liked to talk one-on-one with anyone who had the time to listen to a story or two.

My little sister and I enticed him to play with us, hold us and tell us stories. He had one glass eye, and he'd remove it and let us hold it. We took his hands and dragged him outside to a rusted bedstead that sat under a large tree. We had fun washing his near-bald head. He'd sit patiently, holding the dishpan of soapy water between his legs, hanging his head over it and allowing us to scrub and rinse as long as we wanted. Usually, we washed his glass eye, too, and we'd ask him if the soap hurt the eye socket or the eye that didn't work.

"Guess the color of our dresses" was one of our games. He'd finger the fabric and guess pink, blue or yellow and say the correct one much of the time. Magic! We gave him a kiss on the cheek each time he was right.

One day, the Lions Club in town approached him about the possibility of attending a school in Pennsylvania to learn Braille and get a Seeing Eye dog. If he could

accomplish this, the organization intended to give him a small newsstand in town.

Such a plan had never occurred to my uncle, but he accepted the opportunity with gratitude. Packing his suitcase and boarding a plane for the first time in his life did not seem to frighten him. While he attended the boarding school for the blind in Pennsylvania, he not only mastered Braille, he received a wonderful German shepherd named Sam.

And now ... for the rest of the story...

He met a lovely woman at the school. I believe she attended classes to train with a new dog. Blind from birth, she had never seen the world as our uncle had. With his usual way of telling a story, bit by bit, building up anticipation, he described, oh, a cow, for example, or a field of corn. She became enthralled with the tales, and yes, she fell in love with him. In return for his stories, she played the piano and sang to him.

My uncle returned to Texas to take up his new profession. Someone took him to town every day to work in his newsstand. I have no idea how long he did this. Back home at night, he wrote letters to his ladylove—in Braille. On one visit to our grandparents' home, I leaned on my uncle's worktable while he punched holes in the strips of paper. Knowing he was writing to his girlfriend, I asked, "What did you tell her then?" Patiently, he told me something, probably to appease me. And he showed me how to use the apparatus to write a few words. I've never forgotten that experience.

Eventually, Uncle Brother moved to Pennsylvania, married his sweetheart and set up a home with her and their Seeing Eye dogs, Sam and Lady. The Lions Club helped him obtain a newsstand in the neighborhood, close enough so he could walk to work. His sweet wife walked there at noon to take him his lunch and eat with him.

During my high school years, Uncle Brother and his wife flew to Texas. One day, Daddy drove them to a local farm. There, Daddy led his blind sister-in-law to a cow and helped her "see" the animal Uncle Brother had described to her. Surprisingly, she did not display any fear. He also led her through a cornfield, so she could hear the rustle of the stalks and feel the plants and ears of corn. She talked a lot about her experiences, saying her husband had not told her how big cows were.

The couple lived happily for many years. He passed away first, and she followed soon thereafter. Now, if that's not a love story, I don't know what is!

Celia Yeary, who lives in San Marcos, writes classic romance novels.





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Spoetzl Brewery: The Pride of Shiner

BY GENE FOWLER

In the summer of 2003, when the Spoetzl Brewery in Shiner was thinking about adding a light beer to its product line, the company didn't bring in any slick marketing experts. Instead, they invited folks from miles around to a sippin' social, to see what they thought of the new beverage. After all, most people in this town of some 2,000-plus and the surrounding Lavaca County countryside felt like, well, they sorta owned a little piece of the Spoetzl Brewery.

Kosmos Spoetzl wouldn't have had it any other way. Born in Bavaria, Germany, in 1873, Kosmos emigrated to the New World in search of a more healthful climate. By 1914, he'd found his way to Shiner, some 90 miles east of San Antonio. There, he found a community of Czech and German immigrants and their descendants.

These were folks who treasured Old World brewing traditions established by their ancestors. In 1909, they established the Shiner Brewing Association to honor that heritage and to make beer the way they liked it. The association only had to drill 55 feet deep to strike fine artesian water ideal for brewing, but no one in town seemed to possess that special magic for mixing barley, hops and yeast into a liquid work of art until Kosmos arrived. A jolly fellow with an ever-present cigar, Kosmos, who bought the brewery in 1915, used a family recipe that had been perfected through generations, adding his own secret ingredient. Folks around Shiner said he wore his hat tilted on his head because he kept the secret ingredient under his hat.

As part of his marketing campaign, Kosmos loaded his Model T with kegs and ice and drove through the countryside, offering refreshment to thirsty cotton farmers toiling under the Texas sun. He started using returnable glass bottles in 1916, and a cold one left on a fence post must have beckoned like an oasis on a hot summer day.

When the 18th Amendment—which had prohibited the manufacture and sale of spirited beverages—was ratified by the Texas Legislature in 1918, the brewery switched to a legal brew with less than 0.5 percent alcohol, and the

production of ice. But as noted in author Mike Renfro's book *Shine On: 100 Years of Shiner Beer* (Bright Sky Press, 2008), Shinerites joined Americans from coast to coast in winking at the law, as many locals knew that to "get some ice" at Spoetzl's meant to get some underground brew.

Caps were popped with gusto when Prohibition ended in 1933. The hard times of the Depression persisted through the rest of the decade, but those who found solace in the modest consumption of beer could now do so with full approval of the U.S. Congress.

In the 1940s, the original tin brewery building was replaced by the brick structure with the Alamo-esque parapet and the iron lettering that reads K. SPOETZL BREWERY. After Kosmos died in 1950, his daughter Cecile, known in the area as "Miss Celie," took over operations, reportedly becoming the only woman to head an American brewery at the time.

She sold the business in 1966, and it has changed hands a few times since. But each new owner has held onto what is special about what some call "the last little brewery in Texas." First, there's the Old World family formula. As Spoetzl Quality Control Manager Peter Takacs puts it, "Most breweries change recipes to fit their equipment. Here, we changed equipment to fit the recipes."

Second, and most important, it's the people, such as the family of former employee Calvin Cosmo "Cracker" Wallace. Cracker's father worked 59 years for Spoetzl, and his Uncle Joe did for 63 years. After Kosmos' death, Cracker placed a Christmas tree at his grave each December for many years.

Nonemployees share that loyalty and affection, as well. In the 2004 documentary "Something's Brewin' in Shiner," by Beef & Pie Productions of Austin, now-retired Shiner city secretary Norma Goetz explains, "We tell relatives who don't live in Shiner that our houses have three faucets. One for hot water, one for cold and one that delivers that wonderful Shiner Beer."

For information about weekday tours, call (361) 594-3852 or go to www.shiner.com.

Gene Fowler wrote "Bonehead Medicine" in the June 2009 Texas Co-op Power.



Fellowship and Food

BY KEVIN HARGIS The potluck is a venerable tradition in Texas. From church rec halls to workplace break rooms to gatherings of friends at home, the event is a great opportunity for fellowship over a meal where no one person gets saddled with all the cooking.

What participants choose to bring to a potluck can reflect their tastes, but it can also be a function of their level of kitchen prowess or a tight schedule. Planning the group endeavor can make a big difference.

A successful potluck will invariably have a ringleader, someone who keeps a list of needs—salad, paper plates, desserts—and recruits cooks to help fill the holes. Have you ever been to a potluck that wasn't coordinated, and everyone brought a dessert or there were 13 salads and no dessert?

I've been a member of a couple of supper clubs that met once a month for a potluck. The most fun and enjoyable meals were those that had themes (New Orleans Night, Dinner on the Mediterranean, Peasant Food). Those themes pushed me and the other cooks in the group to find recipes that fit.

If you're called upon to fill a niche for a potluck meal, you might keep this recipe in mind. I first enjoyed it courtesy of my then-future wife, Lisa. It was the feature of the first meal she prepared for me almost 10 happy years ago.

While it wasn't part of a potluck, this casserole has what I consider the essentials of a good potluck dish: It's inexpensive to make, simple to put together and easy to transport and keep warm. And it doesn't require meat, pleasing even the vegetarians in the crowd.

BLACK BEAN CASSEROLE

- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 can (11 ounces) cream of celery soup
- 1 can (10 ounces) tomatoes and green chiles
- 2 cups frozen corn kernels
- 18 corn tortillas
- 4 cans (15 ounces each) black beans, drained
- 2 cups shredded Colby jack cheese
- Tortilla chips (optional)

In 2-quart pot, sauté bell peppers, onion and garlic in olive oil until vegetables begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in chili powder, black pepper, salt and soup with half a can of water. Add tomatoes and chiles and corn. Open cans of black beans. If juice is thin, drain most of it off and add beans to soup mixture. If juice is thick, add all to soup mixture. Meanwhile, spray 2-quart casserole dish with cooking spray. Line bottom with six of the tortillas. Spread a third of bean mixture over tortillas. Add second layer of tortillas and spread another third of bean mixture on top. Add third layer of tortillas. Top with remaining bean mixture, then cheese. Crumble a handful of tortilla chips on top, if desired. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 45 minutes or until bubbly.

Servings: 12. Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 319 calories, 13.4 g protein, 11.6 g fat, 41.8 g carbohydrates, 728 mg sodium, 20 mg cholesterol



Black Bean Casserole

1st

SUSAN COOK, *Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Chicken Squash Casserole**

Comfort food was the order of the day when the staff of Texas Co-op Power tested recipes for our Potluck Casseroles contest. Cheese was a must-have ingredient, and so were cream soup concentrates. As always, you can use low-sodium and low-fat versions of the soups and low-fat or nonfat cheese to lower the fat and sodium profiles of these recipes.

CHICKEN SQUASH CASSEROLE

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 2 packages (14 ounces each) frozen squash with onions and red peppers, thawed and drained
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 can (11 ounces) cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup salad dressing (mayo-type)
- 1 small can (4 ounces) sliced mushrooms, drained
- 1 to 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 1 small box (6 ounces) cornbread or chicken-flavored stuffing mix
- 1/4 cup butter, melted

Combine all ingredients except stuffing mix and butter in a large bowl. Spread into a 9x13-inch pan. Top with dry crumbs from the stuffing mix. Sprinkle the seasoning packet from the stuffing mix on top of the dry crumbs. Top with melted butter. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 358 calories, 14.9 g protein, 19 g fat, 28.6 g carbohydrates, 532 mg sodium, 61 mg cholesterol

COOK'S TIP: You can substitute two 14-ounce packages of frozen squash plus 1/2 cup onion and 1/2 cup red pepper if you cannot find the squash mix for the recipe.

PEACH SWEET POTATOES

- 6 medium sweet potatoes
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 1/3 cup coarsely chopped nuts
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 can (15 ounces) sliced peaches, drained
- Butter

Place potatoes in large pot. Cover with water and bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and cook 30 to 45 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Drain and allow to cool, then peel and cut potatoes into cubes. In small bowl, combine brown sugar, nuts, salt and ginger. Put half of

potatoes in ungreased baking dish. Top with half of peaches and half of brown sugar mixture. Repeat layers, then dot with butter. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake 10 minutes longer or until bubbly and heated through. Garnish with nuts.

Servings: 10. Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 145 calories, 2.4 g protein, 2.7 g fat, 28.8 g carbohydrates, 144 mg sodium, 1 mg cholesterol

NANCY PUMPHREY

Big Country Electric Cooperative

GERMAN POTATO BAKE

- 4 cups cubed, hot, cooked potatoes
- 1/2 pound Velveeta, cubed and divided
- 2 tablespoons margarine
- 5 crisply cooked bacon slices, crumbled and divided
- 1/4 cup green onions, chopped and divided

- 3/4 cup salad dressing (mayo-type)
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1 jar (2 ounces) chopped pimientos, drained
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika

In a large saucepan, combine potatoes, half the cheese and margarine. Stir over low heat until cheese is melted. Add 2 tablespoons bacon, 2 tablespoons onion, salad dressing, sour cream, pimientos and pepper. Mix well. Spoon into 1 1/2-quart casserole dish. Top with remaining cheese, bacon and onions. Sprinkle with paprika. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or until heated through.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1/2 cup. Per serving: 297 calories, 8.2 g protein, 17.2 g fat, 22 g carbohydrates, 727 mg sodium, 36 mg cholesterol

CATHY TOWER

Hamilton County Electric Cooperative

BEEF AND MUSHROOM LASAGNA

- 1 cup sliced, sautéed mushrooms
- 1 can (11 ounces) cream of mushroom soup
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1 pound ground beef
- 2 cups spaghetti sauce (homemade or

Peach Sweet Potatoes



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RECIPE CONTEST

\$100 for the top winning recipe! August's recipe contest honors the humble pig. **Pork chops. Bacon. Ham.** The meat of the porcine variety offers a bounty of flavors and textures that can either enhance a recipe or be its main feature. Please share your favorites with us. The deadline is April 10.

Send recipes to Home Cooking, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You may also fax them to (512) 763-3408, e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org, or submit online at www.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 \$100 and a copy of 60 Years of Home Cooking and a Texas-shaped trivet. Runners-up will also receive a prize.



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from jar)
 9 cooked lasagna noodles
 1 cup mozzarella or Italian blend cheese, more if desired

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix mushrooms, soup and milk in a small bowl. Cook beef until browned, drain, then add sauce. Put layer of three noodles on bottom of 2-quart casserole dish. Top with half the beef mixture and 1 cup of soup mixture. Repeat layers, top with remaining noodles and remaining soup mixture, then cheese. Cover and bake 30 minutes or until heated through. Uncover and broil for 2 to 3 minutes until cheese is golden brown.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 353 calories, 20.8 g protein, 12.3 g fat, 35.9 g carbohydrates, 572 mg sodium, 48 mg cholesterol

KATHLEEN GORDON
United Cooperative Services

COOK'S TIP Reduce calories by using butter-flavored cooking spray to sauté mushrooms. Add 1/4 cup of chopped onion to the sauté for even more flavor.



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Winners will be featured in our December 2010 issue.

Each entry **MUST** include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Send entries to: Texas Co-op Power/Holiday Recipe Contest, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can fax recipes to (512) 763-3408 or e-mail them to recipes@texas-ec.org. E-mails must include "Holiday Recipe Contest" in the subject line and contain only one recipe (no attachments). Up to three entries are allowed per person/co-op member. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. Mailed entries can all be in one envelope. For official rules, visit www.texascooppower.com.

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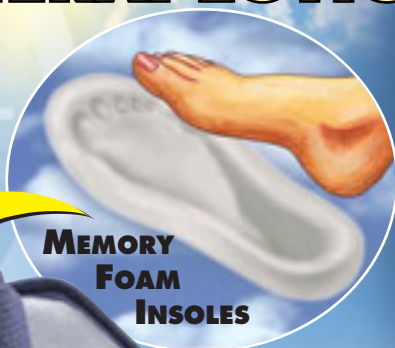
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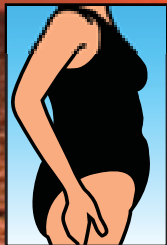
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The ONLY hair loss therapy designed exclusively for a woman's biochemistry offers new hope for those suffering in silence.

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That means 30 million women are facing the same stress, worry and embarrassment every time they look in the mirror or comb their hair. And these women are searching for a better way to regain a healthy head of hair and the self-confidence that comes along with it.

Clinically Proven Treatment

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Keranique is Unique...and For Women ONLY

Keranique is a simple yet revolutionary technology formulated especially for women who want to restore their hair with richer, fuller volume and texture while working to end the misery of ever increasing hair loss. Keranique's methodology is designed to help women who are concerned about hair loss, thinning hair and loss of texture and body. Keranique is the results of years of research by International Hair Institute and is specifically designed to work exclusively with the biochemistry of women.

Hair Loss is Not Created Equal

For years, the discussion of women's hair loss has been taboo. While the market for products dealing with men's hair loss has exploded, women struggling with their own hair loss issues were forced to suffer alone, hiding under wigs, scarves and hats...or worse.

But the number of women suffering has become so large that even the medical community is finally acknowledging this issue and as they are seeing women with hair loss at earlier and earlier ages. The problem can no longer be ignored. That is why the **International Hair Institute** was created. While balding in men is accepted as almost a genetic predisposition coupled with age, in women, the leading causes of hair loss are varied. This epidemic is so vast it has been reported that 50% of all women over 50 are dealing with some form of hair loss or thinning hair!

In clinical trials, women experienced 2.7 times the hair growth using the FDA-approved ingredient in Keranique

Visibly restores fullness, texture and body

Many women have tried popular hair loss treatments designed for men which contain 5% minoxidil. But such a high percentage concentration can cause serious side effects and is NOT recommended for use by women by the FDA. Keranique is designed to work with a women's natural body chemistry to help restore the scalp, build back the richness and fullness in hair, while reversing hair



What Our Customers Have To Say About Keranique...

"I truly love this product. My husband, who notices nothing, keeps telling me my hair looks thicker. And I can tell my roots are getting stronger!"

Results not typical

— Jodi, MO

loss and re-growing hair. Women all over the U.S. who have tried Keranique love the way it leaves their hair silky smooth and the amazing results.

Try KERANIQUE RISK FREE for 30 days!

The chemists from the International Hair Institute are so confident in **Keranique**, they're offering a **30 day Risk FREE** trial...because seeing is believing! Keranique is made in small batches by a specialty lab and includes the only FDA ingredient approved for women who want to stop hair loss now and start re-growing hair.

But supplies are limited so you must call today. To get your risk free trial of Keranique, for just a small shipping and processing fee call 888-678-5052. Your call is confidential and our operators are authorized to allow only one Keranique per household.

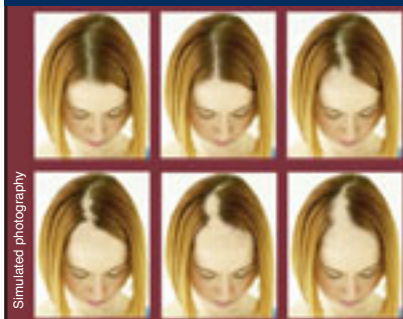
If you want to end the embarrassment of hair loss and help restore the richness and fullness to your hair you owe it to yourself to try Keranique, perhaps the greatest breakthrough in hair rejuvenation technology ever.

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Hormones: Imbalances may shrink hair follicles.

Genetics: Family history may cause hair loss.

Stress: Can lead to hormonal imbalances.

Scalp: Poor care can accelerate hair loss.

Diet: Lack of protein, iron can impede growth.

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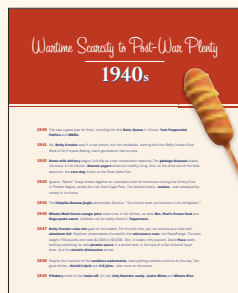
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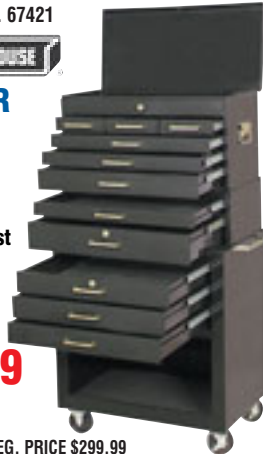
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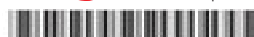
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BARNYARD BABIES

Y'all should have heard all the oohs and ahs coming from our offices as we chose our winners—with great difficulty, mind you. Spring has sprung and brought with it a new and fuzzy generation of baby animals—and while we wanted to include them all, we had some winnowing to do. Hope you enjoy these little guys that made the cut.

—ASHLEY CLARY

◀ Then 20-month-old **Ethan Jones** found a new friend when he visited his aunt and uncle's place. Ethan is the son of **Joe** and **Carrie Jones**, members of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative.

► United Cooperative Services member **Perry Cox** caught these sleepy little sheep catnapping in the sun.

▼ Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member **Judi Davis** said her Great Dane, Diva, decided to baby-sit one of their baby chicks when they had to be brought indoors during freezing temperatures this past winter.



► Pedernales Electric Cooperative member **Guru Prasadh** said this four-horned sheep was a delight to watch.



▼ Three-year-old **Baylie Macat** laughed until she cried when this chick used her shoulder as a resting place. Baylie is the daughter of San Bernard Electric Cooperative members **Matt** and **Lindy Macat**. Thanks to grandparents and Bluebonnet and San Bernard electric cooperative members **Frank** and **Marlene Macat** for submitting the photo.

Upcoming in Focus on Texas

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Sep	At the Fair	Jul 10
Oct	Eeeek!	Aug 10
Nov	Fall Leaves	Sep 10

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



AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

Web Extras: This is just a sampling of the events and festivals around and about Texas. For the complete listing, please visit www.texascooppower.com.

PICK OF THE MONTH

APRIL 22-25

HALLETTSVILLE

Texas State Championship Fiddlers' Frolics and Songwriters' Serenade
www.fiddlersfrolics.com



APRIL

03 FREDERICKSBURG [3-18]
Wildflower Celebration,
1-800-848-0078

LAMPASAS
Bloomin' Fest, 1-866-556-5172, www.lampasaschamber.org

WOODVILLE
Tyler County Dogwood Festival, (409) 283-2632, www.tylercountydogwoodfestival.org

08 TEMPLE [8-11]
Bloomin' Temple Festival, (254) 773-2105, www.bloomintemple.com

09 DRIPPING SPRINGS [9-11]
Founders Day Festival, (512) 894-3730, www.foundersdayfestival.com



09 SAN ANGELO [9-10]
Concho Valley Bluegrass Festival, (325) 651-5307

POTEET [9-11]
Strawberry Festival, (830) 742-8144, www.strawberryfestival.com

10 CHAPPELL HILL [10-11]
Official Bluebonnet Festival of Texas, (979) 836-6033, www.chappellhillmuseum.org

JONESBORO
Arrowhead Show, (254) 463-2466

15 DRIFTWOOD [15-18]
Old Settler's Music Festival, (512) 478-0578, <http://oldsettlersmusicfest.org>

16 BURTON [16-18]
Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, www.cottonginmuseum.org

CARTHAGE [16-17]
Piney Woods Quilt Festival, (903) 693-4403, www.carthagetexas.com



Scarborough Renaissance Festival

50th Anniversary

April 10 - May 31
10AM to 7PM

ScarboroughRenFest.com

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DENTON

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888/381-1818
discoverdenton.com

AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS



17

LUCKENBACH
Texas Hat Dance Fest

16

MINEOLA [16-17]
Judged Fine Arts Show & Festival, (903) 569-8877, www.mlota.org

17

EDOM [17-18]
April in Edom, (903) 852-4438

LONGVIEW
Harvest Festival & Crawfish Boil, (903) 236-8428

LUCKENBACH
Texas Hat Dance Fest, 1-888-311-8990

LUFKIN
Hoedown Festival, (936) 633-0205, <http://cityoflufkin.com/ms>

17

WIMBERLEY
Butterfly Festival, (512) 847-6969, www.emilyann.org

22

AVINGER [22-24]
Wildflower Trails of Texas Festival, (903) 562-1000

23

CAMERON [23-24]
Dewberry Festival, (254) 697-4979, www.cameron-tx.com

COMMERCE [23-24]
Cowhill Chili Fest & BBQ Cook-Off, (903) 886-1125, www.commercetx.org

D'HANIS [23-24]
Lions Club Scholarship BBQ Cook-Off, (830) 426-1968, www.dhanislionsclub.org

24

BRENHAM
Country Flavors Festival, (979) 337-7374, www.downtownbrenham.com

24

BRYAN
Wine & Roses Festival, (979) 778-9463, www.messinahof.com

CISCO [24-25]
Folklife Festival, (254) 442-3827

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

25

BULVERDE
Spring Chicken Festival, (830) 608-4914, www.bulverdecommunitycenter.com



30

ABILENE
Cinco de Mayo Festival

30

SHERMAN [30-5/1]
Youth Acoustic Festival, (903) 546-6893, www.chrystalopryhouse.com

ABILENE [30-5/2]
Cinco de Mayo Festival, (325) 672-1794

MAY

01

GAINESVILLE
Spring Fling, (940) 668-4530, www.gainesville.tx.us

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

RVOS RUN WITH THE BULLS TO BENEFIT TEXAS VETERANS.

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Fredericksburg: July 17

San Marcos: September 18

Longview: October 2

Temple: October 30



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In some ways, time stands still at the more than 400 historic, small-town dance halls in Texas. Two of them, Tom Sefcik Hall and Sengelmann Hall in Central Texas, are emblematic of the dance halls built primarily by German and Czech immigrants in the late 19th century. As described in Gail Folkins' book *Texas Dance Halls: A Two-Step Circuit* (Texas Tech University Press, 2007), these were community and cultural centers where immigrants passed their musical heritage on to the next generation.

But now, many of these dance halls are endangered, says Patrick Sparks, president of Texas Dance Hall Preservation, a nonprofit organization. Problems include building decay, lack of use and urban development. These aren't big-city hook-up bars—these are places where children learn to dance by standing on their daddy's toes. These are places worth saving. "Our mission is to get people to dance," Sparks says.

TOM SEFCIK HALL

It's Sunday night at Tom Sefcik Hall east of Temple. Downstairs, four men are sitting at the bar, their feet resting on a steel pipe rail. I can hear the dancing upstairs, directly above me. I can hear boots and shoes scuffling and sliding across the floor. I can hear the band, the music muted as though being played underwater. And I can hear the old wooden floor itself, creaking in rhythm with the dancers like the most faithful of metronomes.

Time has not diminished the character of this weatherworn dance hall. If anything, it has brought into sharper focus the faces of those who congregate here and the community they create.

A big wooden sign downstairs reads: "IF ALICE AIN'T HAPPY, AIN'T NOBODY HAPPY!"

But owner Alice Sulak is happy, and so are the patrons who flock to the dance hall her father, Tom Sefcik, built in 1923 about eight miles east of Temple in Seaton—which, surrounded by farm land, is mostly the idea of a town. From State Highway 53, turn

MAY I HAVE THIS DANCE?

At Texas' historic dance halls, it's a two-step back in time.

BY CAMILLE WHEELER



south onto Seaton Road and go one mile—the white, wooden dance hall will be on your right.

Alice, 79, has played saxophone in the Jerry Haisler and the Melody 5 band since it was formed in 1966. The band sometimes plays at her own hall, but tonight's band is from Taylor: Eddie Ray and the Polka Dots.

It's senior citizens night, and couples climb the stairs early for the 6 p.m. show, some sitting at the same tables they've claimed for years. Charles and Dorothy Newman, who've been coming here for 20 of their 33 married years, tug a red tablecloth into place, throw cushions in the chairs and display a wooden nameplate that says NEWMAN in block letters.

At 5:55 p.m., Charles slowly circles the dance floor, sprinkling dance floor wax from a can appropriately labeled DANCE FLOOR WAX.

Then, under the Christmas lights

that never come down, the couples take the floor, smiling and waving to each other as they glide through waltz, polka and two-step numbers.

Bartender David Noble hollers an order down a wooden shaft: "I need some Pepsi and Diet Dr Pepper." And up the drinks come on an electric-powered dumbwaiter. Charles and Dorothy, taking a breather, sit at their table holding hands as the dancers spin round in a seamless circle.

Tom Sefcik Hall, (254) 985-2356

Texas Dance Hall Preservation, www.texasdancehall.org

SENGELMANN HALL

It's Saturday night at this gloriously restored dance hall in Schulenburg, southeast of Austin and 17 miles south of La Grange on U.S. Highway 77. Downstairs, families and friends are eating supper together at long tables adorned with fresh-cut flowers. Marble columns from the original dance hall built in 1894 stand in place, and the mahogany bar is an exact replica of the first one.

Brothers Charles and Gus Sengelmann of Hamburg, Germany, built so much more than a dance hall: For decades, until it closed at the start of World War II, people ate here, fell in love here, got married here. Now, it's a community gathering place once more, thanks to owner Dana Roy Harper of Houston who oversaw the hall's restoration and grand reopening in June.

Upstairs, it's show time. They say this place is haunted, and people sure are acting scared ... of dancing. But Austin singer/pianist Marcia Ball and her band start peeling 'em out of their chairs with "Just Kiss Me," a sultry number that earns a long wolf whistle.

The place is warmed up now, and the old longleaf pine floor gets a good workout, its boards happily sighing with every step.

Sengelmann Hall, (979) 743-2300, www.sengelmannhall.com

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



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