

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

SEPTEMBER 2011

RIDE OF PASSAGE: CAROUSELS

SIMPLE, SAVORY SUPPERS

TEXAS CO-OP POWER



ON THE WING

When Crop-Threatening Bugs
and Diseases Descend,
Ag Pilots Soar Into Action



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FEATURES

6 On the Wing

By Camille Wheeler

Photos by Wyatt McSpadden

Who are those guys flying a few feet above the tops of crops at 130 mph? No, they're not the crop dusters of yesteryear: They're modern-day aerial applicators like Brett Whitten, a Central Texas ag pilot who stays busy tending to farmers' crops, his planes and his cattle.

14 Ride of Passage

By Clay Coppedge

Of the estimated 5,000 classic wooden carousels that were made from the 1890s until around 1935, only about 180 exist today—including five in Texas, where imaginations gallop free on fierce-looking steeds.

DEPARTMENTS

Footnotes by Clay Coppedge *Thurber: A Coal-Mining Town* 25

Recipe Roundup *Simple, Savory Suppers* 27

Focus on Texas *State Parks* 35

Around Texas *Local Events Listings* 36

Hit the Road by Camille Wheeler *Schlitterbahn* 38

ONLINE

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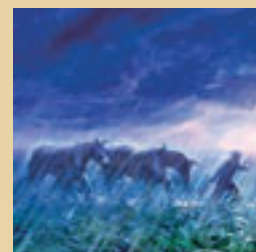
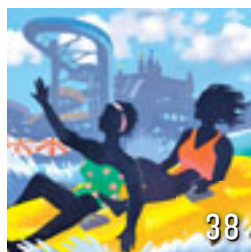
The following September stories are available on our website.

Texas USA by Wes Ferguson

Refilling Dr Pepper bottles ... and memories

Observations by Jim Steiert

High Plains weather



TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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POWERconnections

Letters from Our Readers • People, Places and Events in Texas

FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Thanks for bringing the issue of conceivable change in the way we manage our use of fossil fuels ["Plugged In," July 2011 Power Connections article about electric vehicles]. I love this state and its seemingly endless skyline, which demands a mode of travel that's quick and affordable. Fostered by our love of independence and need to cover a lot of ground, we gave up the horse/mule to assuage our needs while forging into the 20th century. Now, a new light is shining in the 21st century that demands we consider change, again, for the sake of conserving the environment and a lifestyle of which we are so fond. The alternatives available may not be the answer for all, but it is a start—and start we must.

MARJORIE LEWIS

Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative

TREE-CLIMBING BLUE LACY

In 1955, I was a 15-year-old boy who hunted wild hogs and raccoons in San Saba County. The ranchers in the area welcomed us to help eradicate their problem with coons destroying their pecan crops.

A man I hunted with, Ray Rawls, had a Blue Lacy dog ["The Official Dog of Texas," July 2011 issue] he said was given to him by a South Texas rancher. The first night we took him with us, the dog treed a ringtail cat in an elm tree. Instead of shooting the cat, I agreed to climb the tree and knock it out with a stick. I was about 12 feet up the tree when something slobbered on the back of my neck. Needless to say, I jumped out of the tree. That Lacy hound somehow had climbed that tree behind me. I didn't break any bones, but I was stove up for a week. It

was something I will remember the rest of my life.

DOYLE YARBROUGH

Navarro County

Electric Cooperative

READ MORE LETTERS

See "Letters to the Editor" in the September Table of Contents at

TexasCoopPower.com

A SALUTE TO PIGEONS

Thank you for a great article ["Off to the Races," July 2011]. It was wonderful to read what services pigeons have provided to mankind, including carrying messages and saving soldiers' lives during war. Now it's our turn to show these animals some kindness, and I hope we won't see pigeons merely as "flying rats." Can man be so kind?

NICOLE HUNTLEY

Pedernales Electric Cooperative

CALLING ALL SQUARE DANCERS

We attended the state square dance convention [Texas State Square and Round Dance Festival] you mentioned in your June 2011 Happenings.

Everywhere we went in Tyler, people would ask us if we were with the festival. I guess the outfits gave us away a little bit.

Square dancing requires lessons. Our local club usually takes 20 weeks to teach the basic set of mainstream calls. More experienced dancers help out as angels [their nickname] with the newer dancers. Square dancing is good exercise and is good for mental activity, too, because you have to hear and understand the call, react to the call and get in your position, all within a designated number of beats. It will keep you moving.

ROBERT D. BAKER

Wharton County Electric Cooperative

LETTING IT ALL HANG OUT

I have noticed that in virtually every issue of your magazine there is a column encouraging readers to conserve electricity. One method often mentioned is using an outdoor clothesline when doing laundry. However, many individuals are not able to do so because their homes are in deed-restricted communities. A scented dryer sheet is a poor substitute for the smell of sheets dried in the Texas wind and sunshine.

SARA SMITH

Navasota Valley Electric Cooperative

DIVING STORY PROVIDES HOPE

WOODY WELCH



U.S. Marine Cpl. Luke McDermott appears to fly underwater while scuba diving.

I really enjoyed your July 2011 story "Beneath the Surface" about disabled veterans and the new freedoms they find in water. I am currently serving and am at the end of my 20-year career, but have developed debilitating back pain that keeps me from even being able to walk for exercise. I have always wanted to learn to scuba dive but was afraid that would no longer be possible because of the weight of the tanks. Thanks for new hope.

Master Sgt. Dorothy Coleman

U.S. Air Force, Pedernales Electric Cooperative

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Texas Electric Cooperatives

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H A P P E N I N G S

Looking to stir things up Labor Day weekend? Then head on out to Burnet County, northwest of Austin, where the Bowl of Directors oversees the **OATMEAL FESTIVAL**—a 34-year-old event that's anything but plain.

Something's cooking on every burner at the annual festival, scheduled for September 2–3, starting with the Miss Oatmeal Pageant on Friday evening. The schedule really heats up Saturday morning, when the festival moves six miles from the tiny, unincorporated town of Oatmeal to Bertram via a trail ride. At 10:33 a.m.—events occur either three or 33 minutes after the hour in honor of the festival's sponsor, Ralston Foods, which makes 3 Minute Brand Oats—the skies, courtesy of aircraft, will rain uncooked oatmeal over the grand parade.

All proceeds go toward providing scholarships for local high school students. For more information, call (512) 228-8726 or go to www.oatmealfestival.com.

From Art shows to Zucchini festivals, you'll find hundreds of happenings all across the state at TexasCoopPower.com.

WHO KNEW?

OFFICIAL INSECT

The Texas Legislature designated the beautiful monarch butterfly as the state's official insect in 1995. These distinctive orange and black butterflies migrate from Canada through Texas every fall to winter near Angangueo, Mexico. The brilliant colors on both the adult monarch and the caterpillar warn predators to back off: The caterpillars eat toxic milkweed leaves, which makes them and the butterflies poisonous to predators—and the butterflies particularly distasteful to birds.



CO-OP PEOPLE

At Western Theme Park, Entertainment Revolves Around Pistol-Packin' Paula

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

Mosey by Enchanted Springs Ranch near Boerne and meet Paula Saletnik, a gun-toting gal who dazzles folks with her blisterin' fast fingers.

"I'm Pistol Packin' Paula," draws the 5-foot-2-inch-tall brunette, outfitted in leather chaps, scuffed boots and a wide-brimmed hat. "And I'm not packin' luggage!" Saletnik whips out two nickel-plated .45-caliber Cimarron revolvers from her low-slung holsters and spins them around both trigger fingers. Still spinning, one gun flies in the air, over a shoulder and behind her back, followed by the other one. A few more fancy twirls, then she flips both back into their holsters and bows.

The 46-year-old Saletnik, a world-champion gun spinner, is one of the main attractions at Enchanted Springs Ranch, a Western theme town, movie set, animal park and working ranch that's served by Bandera Electric Cooperative.

So how did a gal from Connecticut become a gunslinger? Saletnik sums it up: "I started out in acting, then I went to stunt school and learned how to fall off buildings. After that, I moved to

Los Angeles to be a stuntwoman, but that didn't work out. So I headed to Arizona."

There, at a Western theme park, Saletnik appeared in mock shoot-outs and fistfights, portrayed sharpshooter Annie Oakley, and cracked bullwhips and trick rode a horse as herself—Pistol Packin' Paula. The act was launched in 1990, and the stage name followed her to Texas in 2005.

She continued to hone her pistol prowess. "At stunt school, I saw the guys twirling guns, and I wanted to do it, too," she recalls. "They told me, 'Naw, your hands are too small.' So I taught myself."

Some spectators scoff when told that Saletnik's pistols each weigh 2½ pounds. "They don't think that a short, petite woman like me could spin guns that heavy," she says, grinning.

"After I hand them one, then they believe me!"

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power. Have a suggestion for a future Co-op People? Contact editor@TexasCoopPower.com.



Paula Saletnik—aka Pistol Packin' Paula—is quick on the draw at Enchanted Springs Ranch.

PHOTO COURTESY ENCHANTED SPRINGS RANCH

ON THE WING

When Crop-Threatening Bugs and Diseases Descend, Ag Pilots Soar Into Action

BY CAMILLE WHEELER • PHOTOS BY WYATT MCSPADDEN



Ag pilot Brett Whitten, a Bryan Texas Utilities customer, feels ownership of the fields he sprays. Area farmers, his friends, count on him. They're all in this together.

Prologue: Who *are* those guys flying 3 to 10 feet above the tops of crops at 120 to 130 mph? No, they're not the crop dusters of yesteryear: They're now called agricultural aviation pilots—aerial applicators, to be precise—who spray mostly liquid products for one main purpose: to help farmers maximize crop yields and produce food and fiber for a rapidly growing world. In the first of two stories about the ag aviation industry, Texas

Co-op Power examines the vital role that aerial applicators play in helping sustain Texas' agricultural economy.

No doubt, it's a high-risk occupation: Almost every ag pilot I interviewed has made an emergency landing or knows of a colleague killed in a crash. But these pilots ask the public to understand that they aren't daredevils deliberately dodging trees, power lines and communication towers for the fun of it. They are meticulous

professionals who care passionately about their work and the farmers they serve. In a career field with more and more physical obstructions going up—such as hard-to-see meteorological evaluation towers sometimes erected in a matter of hours—they can never, ever, let their guards down.

As the industry saying goes: There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots.

As a child, I knew a pilot: my mater-

nal grandfather, a Lubbock-area cotton ginner who flew a four-seat recreational plane. I yearned for the day I'd be old enough to go up with him. But in 1968, when I was 6, he was diagnosed with a serious illness and had to stop flying. My chance never came. Yet something was stirred deep inside. I kept my eyes on the sky, watching for small planes—an easy job for a farm kid growing up on the South Plains, where ag pilots zipping over green fields were a familiar sight.

About six years ago, I was driving home to Austin from Bryan on State Highway 21 one summer afternoon. Out of nowhere, there he was: an ag pilot in a tiny yellow plane flitting low across a baby-blue sky. I turned onto a two-lane country road in hot pursuit. Asphalt gave way to dirt, but still I couldn't pinpoint the plane's exact location. It kept dipping out of sight, behind trees, as the pilot swooped low for passes over an unseen field.

I pulled over and watched, spellbound. Who *are* these guys? My journalistic resolve was set: Someday, I would write about these pilots and maybe, if I could be so lucky, even ride with one. (My story of landing a demonstration flight in a two-seat ag aviation training plane is on tap for November.)

To better understand the world of aerial applicators, I visited Brett Whitten, who owns Whitten Flying Service near Snook. The first detail I learned is there's no such thing as a typical day for an ag pilot/rancher—especially during a drought that's burning up crops and drying up stock tanks.

Whitten, who took over the spraying business and a cattle operation from his father, the late Jon Whitten, is a lot like the farmers he serves: He works hard to make ends meet. But on some days, his plane never gets off the ground.

May 6, 2011. A faded orange wind sock hangs limp on a metal pole near a paved runway. Inside a hangar, a man is standing beside two airplanes, but I'm not sure whether he's Brett Whitten, the friendly ag pilot I met in January at the Texas Agricultural Aviation Association (TAAA) convention in San Antonio.

This is, after all, Brazos River Valley country, where fertile farmland traditionally is served by several aerial appli-

cation businesses in the Bryan/College Station area. I'm in the right place—County Road 270 about 1½ miles southwest of Snook—but it's possible I'm at the wrong hangar.

"Are you Brett?" I ask the man wearing sunshades and a once-upon-a-time white TAAA cap.

"Yes."

"Uh, you're expecting me, right?"

"Yes."

Long, awkward silence. Whitten's dog, a poker-faced, brown and white Australian shepherd, gives me the once-over. A young man wrestling with a small, electric pump glances up and looks back down.

"Brett, line 1," rings out the voice of Whitten's wife, Mary, over the outdoor intercom system.

"Were you lost?" Whitten finally asks, not smiling. "I saw you drive by."

I blush. "Uh, no, I just thought, well, you know, I didn't see your sign, so I kept driving to see if there was another hangar ..."

Long, awkward silence. "I didn't know you flew Air Tractors," I finally blurt out, recognizing the signature yellow and blue paint of the world's largest maker of ag aircraft.

Just like that, there it is: a Brett Whitten smile as warm as the morning sun. These are Air Tractor 301As, he explains, one of the first modern-era ag planes made by the globally renowned, North Texas-based company. One plane just got its overhauled engine back from Tulsa, Oklahoma. The other is now grounded with its engine in the same repair shop. He bought the planes used in the mid-1990s, and the ends of the wings look like they've been in a fight: Dents bear witness to scrapes with birds, such as buzzards, and small limbs protruding from the tops of trees. Across the wings, patches of peeling, yellow paint expose silvery aluminum.

Both planes have seen countless takeoffs and landings. The operable plane alone has flown about 11,000 hours.

"That's a lot?" I ask.

"That's a lot," he says.

But right now, it's largely a moot point. What's being called Texas' worst drought in more than a century has area crops in a death grip. Even some irrigated crops are being torched. Not

WHO ARE THESE GUYS? Ag pilots are highly trained professionals strictly regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency and licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration and the Texas Department of Agriculture.

When farmers need them—often suddenly, when bugs and diseases attack en masse—ag pilots soar into action, spraying fertilizers, nutrients, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides and pesticides to enhance plant growth and control crop-threatening insects, weeds and diseases. Ag pilots often can provide the fastest and most efficient crop treatment, such as when canopies are too thick for ground rigs or when fields are too muddy—remember that thing called rain?—for tractors. Ag pilots also seed rice, wheat and rye fields, combat disease-carrying mosquitoes, spray flame retardant on wildfires and aid in the growth of biofuel crops, such as switchgrass.

WHAT DO AG PILOTS FLY? Today's aerial applicators fly fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters that are built to handle 30 to 100 takeoffs and landings daily from paved, dirt and grass runways. Aircraft can range from \$100,000 to \$2 million in price and feature sophisticated equipment such as GPS—which can assure spraying accuracy within inches—geographical information systems, real-time meteorological systems and precisely calibrated spray equipment.

IN TEXAS: There are 591 aerial pesticide applicators certified and licensed by the Texas Department of Agriculture: Panhandle/West Texas (227), East Texas (129), out-of-state applicators licensed to operate in Texas (77), Central Texas (62), North Texas (53), South Texas (43).

much is growing. There's just not much to spray.

But the good news is that Whitten actually has a scheduled job today: apply insecticide on irrigated research cotton at the nearby Texas A&M University Field Laboratory, overseen by Texas AgriLife Research, where he lands regular work. And this veritable river of conversation has broken the ice. I'm officially introduced to Tank, his constant canine companion, and 20-year-old John Terilli, who's been working for Whitten since December. Terilli is dating the Whittens' youngest daughter, Dulce, and they both attend



Tank's expression says it all: He's worried that the heifers being treated for flies in a nearby pen are misbehaving. The Australian shepherd takes this pasture stuff seriously. One time, from his perch on the four-wheeler, Tank bit a cow on the ear. In a fit of rage, she turned her anger on Whitten instead.

nearby Blinn College.

Tank and Terilli keep their eyes on Whitten, anticipating his next move. Same goes for me. I met Brett and Mary at the TAAA convention, where Brett, who like his father served a term as the association's president, offered to help me find a ride in an ag plane. In that setting, dressed in a sports jacket and tie, he seemed content to sit back and relax.

Now, I'm on his work turf, and the pencil-thin, fast-moving, 53-year-old is dressed for action: long-sleeved shirt tucked into beltless Wrangler jeans with a sheathed cell phone hooked on the waistband and a Phillips screwdriver in the right back pocket. I'm quickly learning: What feel like unbearably long silences to me don't exist for Whitten. If he doesn't immediately respond, it just means he's thinking. Walk, and then talk. Keep up.

So here's how the day's shaping up: Feed the cows. Get the air conditioning running on the operable plane (the heat's stifling inside the single-seat cockpit). Spray.

Right on cue, Edward "Chooch" Macik, farm research service manager for the Texas A&M field laboratory, pulls up with an Acephate 97UP insecticide delivery for Whitten. Together, they study a map of the research fields. Whitten can start spraying at 4 p.m.,

when field workers are gone. He needs to be finished in time to make it to a surprise birthday party for his sister-in-law in College Station. "Gotta get 'er done," he tells Macik.

He'll be spraying for thrips, early-season insects that suck on cotton leaves and slow growth. Whitten pulls a pen from his shirt pocket and draws a dot on top of an Acephate box: "He's about that big."

Time to feed the cattle. Whitten draws a pasture map for Terilli on top of the same Acephate box. "Yes sir," Terilli replies, expressionless, arms folded chest-high across his black T-shirt as Whitten points out a dry creek bed that he'll need to drive across.

We head to the hay barn where Terilli's assignment is to haul big, round bales to the herd. But first, he has to outwit a recalcitrant starter on a John Deere tractor.

Whitten leaves Terilli to it, and he, Tank and I head back toward the green Kawasaki four-wheeler we rode from the hangar. I reach to pet Tank, who's sitting still as a statue on sacks of range feed cubes in the bed. He glares, and I back away. "Tank's slow to make friends," Whitten says, sliding behind the steering wheel.

We drive down the runway, toward

the pasture, and my heart pounds as I think about watching Whitten take off later today and then chasing him to the research fields. The pasture's bone dry, but live oaks stand green beside half-full stock tanks. We approach a herd of crossbred cattle.

"It's about enough to be a hobby," he says, chewing on a wooden matchstick and dryly understating the economic importance of the cattle's health and survival as baby calves scamper beside us with their tails up in the air. He slices open a bag of feed to a chorus of hungry *moos*. With cows, calves and a big, black bull on his heels, Whitten scatters the range cubes in a big, walking circle.

Hands on his knees, Whitten studies the herd. He grabs a rope from the four-wheeler, drops it over his head and left shoulder like a quiver and laces the rope's end through two back belt loops. "What are you gonna do with that rope?" I foolishly ask. "Tie a calf," he says.

He drives forward about 50 yards, stops, leaves the engine running, slips out, grabs a baby male calf by its back right leg, lowers it to the ground, lashes the rope around all four legs and swiftly castrates the calf before Mama—who's standing, head lowered, a nostril's breath away from Whitten—can do anything about it. He ear tags him, hooks a handheld scale to the rope still taut around the calf's legs and pulls up: "Can you tell me what this calf weighs?"

I squint in the harsh, midday sun. "I'm gonna call it 102," I nervously offer. Whitten doesn't question it and records the calf's weight, tag number (839), color (black with white face) and the date in a red spiral notebook.

Total procedure time: 4½ minutes. Total words spoken by Whitten: eight.

At a stock tank, Tank is allowed to leave the four-wheeler and get a drink. He wades into the brown water, lapping it up, and then happily rolls in the dirt. "Now you can pet him," Whitten says with a mischievous grin. "Tank, load up. Let's go."

At our next feeding stop, Tank eyes a cow with a little too much interest. "Hey ... hey," Whitten says quietly to him. Tank, Whitten explains, takes this pasture stuff seriously. One time, from his perch on the four-wheeler, he bit a cow on the ear. In a fit of rage, she tried to climb inside the vehicle to take out her anger on Whitten instead.

Lunchtime. With me sandwiched between Whitten and Terilli in a single-cab GMC pickup, we head to Slovaceks in Snook. The restaurant/Exxon gas station draws customers from miles around. Inside, we run into several farmers who rely on Whitten's spraying services.

Jason Wendler, who grows cotton, corn, sorghum, oats, wheat and soybeans near College Station, first hired Whitten's father three decades ago before Brett took over the flying. Wendler explains that in normal weather years, this area receives generous rainfall. When the fields are too muddy for ground rigs—and crop-threatening diseases and insects are growing like weeds—farmers turn to ag pilots like Whitten who can cover a lot of ground in a hurry.

"You have to have an applicator to get everything done," Wendler says, noting that plant-chewing pests such as stink bugs, green bugs, aphids, armyworms, head worms, the sorghum midge and three-cornered alfalfa leafhopper, which around here drills into the stems of young soybean plants, can decimate a crop within days.

Whitten and several farmers are congregated near the store's front door when his son, 26-year-old Sam Brett Jr. "Buster" Whitten, walks in. Buster, a teller at Snook's Citizens State Bank, who like his parents is a Texas A&M graduate, says hi to the group, grabs some lunch and heads back to work. His father, Terilli and I head toward the research fields. Whitten's worried I'll get lost chasing him in flight this afternoon, so he's showing me exactly where he'll be spraying.

We're driving a gravel road through the research fields and listening to the Beatles on a mixed-music CD that Whitten's oldest daughter, Cherry Whitten, made for him:

"When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be. And in my hour of darkness, she is standing right in front of me, speaking words of wisdom, let it be, let it be ..."

We're discussing Terilli's future: Right now, he's considering becoming a basketball coach. "What about flying ag planes?" I ask. He laughs. No. Staying on the ground is fine with him.

The conversation turns to Whitten:



From working on his airplanes to maintaining a healthy herd of cattle, Whitten does whatever he can to make ends meet with help from his family: His mother, Carol, for example, works the wee-hours shift during calving season. And his wife, Mary, manages the office, feeds the cows, helps deliver calves and makes supply runs. 'I do worry,' she says of her husband's flying. 'I can hear that engine from a long ways away. When he's running late, I start pacing, start listening. I entrusted him to the Lord a long time ago.'

Has he ever been frightened while flying? He smiles, wryly. Last summer, he was spraying here when an engine cylinder broke. "I set 'er down in that corn field right there," he says, pointing. "But I didn't have time to get too scared."

Terilli steals my thoughts: "I have to think my flying career would be about done then."

Whitten details another incident, some 13 years ago: The engine's whine grew louder and louder, reaching a screech ... and then ... nothing. The blower, the engine-driven air intake system, cut out, Whitten says, making a

slashing motion across his neck. The engine died, but he landed safely on a gravel road in the middle of a field.

We sit silently, hearing the engine in our minds. "Have you ever made a crash landing?" I finally ask. "Nooooo ..." Whitten replies, rapping his knuckles on his cap. He's merely had what he calls "off-airport" landings. And hitched rides home ending with him walking to the hangar, helmet in hand.

We're headed back there now. The wind is picking up, and dust devils swirl in the distance. Terilli spots the yellow plane of a local ag pilot. "Oh my



RADIAL ENGINE: Brett Whitten, top photo, makes sure the propeller blades are turning smoothly before starting the World War II-era radial engine on one of his Air Tractor 301A planes, a model introduced in 1980. The design of radial (round) engines, in which oil can seep down into cylinders, makes them susceptible to hydraulic lock.

COCKPIT: In flight, Whitten keeps one hand on the control stick and the other free to adjust the elevator trim (keeping the plane level and stable), control the engine power and turn the spray off or on—all while monitoring the gauges, the GPS swath guidance system and everything happening outside the cockpit.

MAXIMUM FLYING SPEED: 165 mph

AIRPLANE WEIGHT: Gross weight of about 7,000 pounds (including full, 350-gallon hopper, or tank).

God, it looks like he's too close," Terilli says as we watch the plane swoop down for spraying passes of normal height—about 5 feet. "That's crazy."

Whitten pulls over, and we watch

the pilot work. I glance up at the silver guardian angel, a gift from Whitten's daughter Gillian Whitten, clipped to the sun visor over his head. "Please protect and watch over this family," the inscription reads.

Miracle of miracles: Back in the hangar, Tank lets me pet him. And soon, Whitten will be taking off to spray the research cotton. My heart's racing.

A local farmer, Walter Vajdak, pulls up to buy fuel for his two-seat recreational plane. He winds up staying, trying to help solve the air-conditioning puzzle.

Whitten climbs into the cockpit, starts the engine, and the two-bladed propeller spins to life. He climbs down, onto the left wing, with the wind from the propeller whipping his shirt. I, meanwhile, am trying not to notice that the palm trees outside the hangar are starting to sway.

The 70-year-old Vajdak, wearing his cap backward so it won't blow off, approaches the temperature gauges and hoses hanging from the plane. Whitten lies on his stomach on the wing, his boots planted on the spray boom.

He and Vajdak yell at each other over the roar of the engine. Smiling and hopeful, they hook up a can of Freon and wait.

Nope. Didn't fix it. The temperature gauge needles haven't budged off hot. Step two: Change out the compressor. Whitten peers out at the wind sock. For the first time today, he expresses doubts about flying. He and Terilli start the arduous process of replacing the old compressor with a rebuilt one that Whitten has on hand. We all look out at the wind sock. It's getting a workout. "If it's stretched out, you'd better be careful," Vajdak says.

At 4:35 p.m., Whitten makes a cell phone call: Nope, not gonna fly today. The 15-to-20-mph wind would prevent him from effectively spraying. My heart sinks at the news.

Finally, after 6 p.m., the rebuilt compressor is on. Now, it's just a matter of letting a vacuum pump suck out residual moisture in the lines. But Whitten plans to knock out the spraying job in the morning, despite the status of the A/C. "If I look cool," he tells Vajdak, "it's working."

Whitten looks at his watch: 6:30 p.m. He's late for his sister-in-law's

birthday party. They're used to it, he says, smiling sheepishly. Gotta go.

Update: By late June, about half of the pasture's dozen or so stock tanks have dried up. One night, Whitten works until 11, penning more than 100 head of cattle to be driven by truck to auction the next day.

As Whitten says, he's not the Lone Ranger. Everybody's in the same boat, waiting for rain. The future holds many unknowns, such as who will take over his spraying business someday. But Whitten's proud of his four grown children and their independence. He'll help 'em on whatever path they choose. Same goes for his two part-time workers, Terilli and Jeff Cunningham, a Texas A&M senior who's considering an ag pilot or military flying career.

That's just Brett, Mary explains. Her husband of 30 years will give somebody the shirt off his back and expect nothing in return.

Mary's eyes sparkle as she describes Brett, a natural pilot who soloed at 14 and was flying an open-cockpit ag plane—an S2C Snow designed by the late Leland Snow, the founder of Air Tractor—when they met in 1980. "To this day, I get a thrill seeing him fly," she says, adding that the planes might look a little rough, but Brett takes good care of them. "That's what's kept me sane all these years."

Mary laughs. They're late almost everywhere they go because there's always one more thing to fix or one more cow to check.

Brett Whitten takes this agriculture stuff seriously. He doesn't differentiate between the days because the bugs don't. He feels ownership of the fields he sprays. These farmers, his friends, are counting on him. They're all in this together.

Camille Wheeler, associate editor

Our follow-up story will examine the biggest dilemma facing this small industry—retirement: Who will fly expensive aircraft that require high-tech knowledge and old-fashioned tail wheel, stick and rudder flying skills?

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WOOM! Watch Brett Whitten come flying straight overhead in a video shot from a cotton field. And read about licensing requirements.

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Customer Feedback

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

Little did I know when I ordered the Exercise 2000 Elite® that it would prove valuable to my wife of 62 years. I got it for the stiffness in my legs and it works perfectly to get me loosened up after playing tennis in the morning. When I come home I immediately get on the Exerciser 2000 Elite® for ten minutes and I feel great! My wife suffers from restless leg syndrome at night. Instead of walking the floor for a long period of time, she just gets on the Exerciser for ten minutes and the symptoms subside. —*Dick P.*

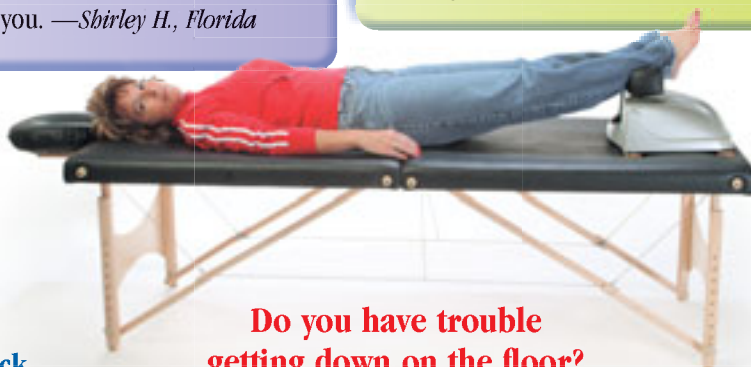
I am 76 years old, heavy, stiff with arthritis and a leukemic for the past nine years. Using your machine twice a day has made me feel ten years younger. I also have a great deal more energy. When you say that your company is in the business of "helping people feel better", it is no fib! —*Kate B.*

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

After using the Exerciser 2000 Elite® twice a day for one week the swelling in my ankles went away. It has also helped my breathing, as I can get out and walk without having to stop and catch my breath! Thank you. —*Shirley H., Florida*

I am an 88 year old woman with multiple health problems. After seeing the ad for the Exerciser 2000 Elite® I ordered it and use it daily. I can tell it has improved circulation in my legs and by doing that it has helped my balance and walking problems. To those of you that think that you can't do regular exercise anymore, try this piece of equipment and you will be amazed how much better you will feel. —*Mildred F.*

As a Chiropractor, I would say the Exerciser 2000 enables people to benefit themselves at home. It is a valuable asset in moving lymph fluid, oxygenating the blood, increasing immune system function, maintaining mobility in the spine, and freeing up a spine that had become stiff and arthritic. —*Garry G., D.C.*



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'And the seasons they go round and round ... And the painted ponies go up and down ... We're captive on the carousel of time.'

JONI MITCHELL, lyrics from *'The Circle Game'*



CHRIS BENSON

RIDE OF PASSAGE

Imaginations Gallop Free on Timeless Carousels Made of Wood

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

IN A WORLD WHERE EVEN CHILDREN'S rides seem to travel at sonic speed, there is still a place for the old-fashioned carousel. Yes, the painted ponies go up and down, and a child goes along for the ride, looking at the world go round and round with a timeless expression of wonder, delight ... and maybe a little fear. This image belies the long history of the carousel, which comes to us from the Spanish word *carosello*, or "little battle," in reference to rough games of horsemanship played by Arabian and Turkish riders in the 12th century.

For more than a hundred years, carousels have meant good times for generations of Americans.

The heyday of the carousel came early in the 20th century when America was growing up in a hurry and wanted to be amused in the process. Parks were built—amusement parks, no less—that helped fill the bill. The classic carousels from that era were handcrafted out of wood, intricately carved and painted to capture the horses, or other animals such as lions, tigers, giraffes, goats, pigs and roosters, in striking animated poses. They were made by people like father and son Gustav and William Dentzel, C.W. Parker, Allan Herschell, Edward Spillman, Charles Loeff, Daniel Muller (considered by many to be the most creative carver of carousel animals) and many others. The work they created serves as a fragment of art history and even world history, still reflecting the carousel's roots in war and jousting tournaments staged for the amusement of royalty.

Carousel animals, especially the horses, are frozen in time, galloping with legs outstretched, manes tousled, and with faces that can be fierce, regal, eager or terrified; in this way, they can match some of the faces of the young riders. The colors (many of the historic wooden carousel horses have been partially or completely repainted, but some original color schemes remain) are bold or subdued, mixed and matched at the pleasure of the builder. Shades of red and blue are matched with orange, brown and gold or silver leaf; and some are almost all one color. Some wear bejeweled armor, as they would have in

medieval times. Others prance regally, out for a Sunday ride with the squire.

Many of the remaining carousels built during the golden age of carousels, from 1900 to 1930, have active restoration or maintenance programs. Those communities having carousels in need of repair are at least aware of the treasure they have, and many are working toward preservation.

But like the song says, we're captive on the carousel of time, and that includes the carousels themselves. Of the estimated 5,000 classic wooden carousels that were manufactured from the 1890s until approximately 1935, only about 180 exist today, either as operational or in short-term storage (some for repairs), according to the National Carousel Association (NCA). Five of those still in operation are in Texas, though some run on a limited basis.

ONE OF THE BEST KNOWN IS THE Silver Star Carousel at Six Flags Over Texas, Arlington. Built in 1926, it is one of the last carousels manufactured by William Dentzel and Co. of Philadelphia. It operated at Rockaway Playland in Long Island, New York, until Six Flags Over Texas bought it in 1962 for \$25,000 and opened it to the public the following year. Mike Apple, director of operations at Six Flags, said the park opened in 1961 with a primitive, mule-powered ride called the Flying Jenny that resembled a carousel. He doesn't know what happened to that ride, which featured bench seats and no horses. "I guess the mule got tired," he said.

According to Six Flags' figures, the Dentzel carousel had been ridden more than 30 million times through 2009. That's counting three years in the mid-1980s when it was out of service for an extensive in-house restoration.

"It's a change of pace from some of the wild and woolly rides," Apple said. "People remember growing up with these things. You can bring the kids out and watch them experience the same things you did when you were their age. It's just a more relaxing ride than some of the other ones."



Ayah Wolf and Henry Schechter of Dallas take their horses for a spin on the Silver Star Carousel at Six Flags over Texas in Arlington. The 1926 carousel, one of the last built by William Dentzel and Co. of Philadelphia, has been in operation at Six Flags since 1963.



As Brenham Public Information Manager Angela Hahn will attest, the city's 1912 wooden carousel has seen its ups and downs over the years. Its Central Texas history goes back to at least 1930, when a Brenham resident found the abandoned carousel in a pasture. Hahn oversaw its restoration earlier this decade.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Saddle up and ride the 1914 William Dentzel carousel at Fair Park in Dallas, an annual fixture at the State Fair of Texas since 1971. The carousel should be in operation again at this year's state fair from September 30 through October 23. The carousel features magnificent, nostril-flaring steeds on an all-horse ride—a rarity for Dentzel, who typically included a few other animals.

IN CENTRAL TEXAS, BRENHAM BOASTS a wooden carousel built by the C.W. Parker Co. of Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1912. Where it was between then and 1930, when Brenham resident F.C. Winkelmann found the abandoned carousel in a pasture, no one can say for sure. That same year, Winkelmann bought the carousel on behalf of the Washington County Fair Association, and it was hauled to Fireman's Park in Brenham, where it pulled duty in the early 1930s at the county fair. The carousel has been in Brenham ever since, but, as should be expected with such finely handmade attractions, it has had its ups and downs over the years. In 2005, the city closed the carousel for repairs and restoration and had a grand re-opening in 2007.

Angela Hahn, the city's public information manager and a carousel enthusiast, was a natural to oversee the restoration project, which was financed through a grant and private donations. Working with the NCA, she learned that the horses probably were carved by Charles Dare—one of the earliest carousel manufacturers in America who also made toys and carved rocking horses—between the late 1890s and 1905. NCA officials believe that these were Dare's horses via one of his stylistic touches: a martingale (a strap con-

nected to the girth and reins to keep a horse from tossing its head) on the front of the wooden horses.

NCA Census Chairman Patrick Wentzel said it wasn't uncommon for Parker or Dentzel or other carousel makers to get horses from contractors, some of whom made horses in the "county-fair" style, meaning they were small and easily transported. The Dare horses fit this style.

In 2005, City of Brenham officials contracted woodworker Mark Spurrell to restore the horses. "He came and got them six horses at a time," Hahn said. "He followed specs, and now we have our old carousel back."

A 1914 DENTZEL CAROUSEL AT FAIR Park in Dallas has been a fixture at the State Fair of Texas each autumn since 1971, thanks largely to annual off-season maintenance and restoration. This year is no different: Officials expect the carousel to be in action for the fair's run from September 30 through October 23.

Wentzel notes two rare features of the Six Flags and state fair historic carousels: Both are large, four-row machines, which were more expensive to make than smaller, three-row carousels. And both are all-horse carousels.

"Dentzel carousels most always included a few menagerie animals like a lion, tiger or giraffe," Wentzel said, adding that the state fair carousel has yet another unique feature: The outside-row standing horses are one-of-a-kind carvings, probably done by Muller, who was famous for his lifelike creations.

Fireman's Park in Giddings has a 1915 Parker model that's owned by the Giddings Fire Department. According to local historians, the carousel's Giddings roots date to around 1920 when a traveling carnival couldn't pay its bills. As the story goes, carnival officials left the carousel as collateral ... and never came back to get it.

The all-horse carousel is showing its age, city officials say, and is open for riding only twice a year: the third weekend of May and July 4, during an

annual fire department fundraiser. Only children may ride the horses. Adults are allowed to ride on the carousel's benches.

Kiddie Park in San Antonio has a 1918 Herschell-Spillman carousel that, by some accounts, was in Miami for many years and then was taken on a carnival tour. In 1935, it found a home at Kiddie Park, which opened in 1925 and is recognized by the National Amusement Park Historical Association as the oldest children's amusement park in the country.

TEXAS' HISTORIC WOODEN CAROUSELS preserve a moment in time. Like the painted ponies of the carousel, the young riders are as frozen in time as the horses they ride, because we spend such a short time on the merry-go-round. Soon we move on to the faster, scarier rides, leaving our memories of carousels to note a particular time before we were ready for the roller coasters and tilt-a-whirls of the world. But the carousels are still around, because so many people cherish that memory and want to share it with subsequent generations.

Apple said he and the Six Flags staff realized what these old carousels can mean to people about 12 years ago, when the park began hiring senior citizens for certain jobs at the park. One of the new employees requested a job on the carousel because he had ridden it in Long Island when he was a child.

"He loved that old carousel because he remembered it from when he was a kid," Apple said. "He named all the horses, knew everything about it. We called him Mr. Carousel."

The man was, like the song says, captive on the carousel of time.

Clay Coppedge is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.



With bowed neck and pricked ears, this horse looks ready to break free at the State Fair of Texas. Classic carousels built early in the 20th century were intricately carved and painted to capture animals striking animated poses. Horses, in particular, seem frozen in time.



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Making the Right Choice With Insulation

Maintaining a comfortable temperature in your home hinges on the effectiveness of your insulation. Properly insulating the walls, attic and ceiling can increase your comfort during extreme temperatures and lower your electric bill.



Nope, it's not snowing. It's loose-fill insulation being blown in—one of many insulation choices.

Finding the best type of insulation depends on how much you need, where you plan to put it and product availability. Here is a rundown of kinds of insulation available and how they can be used, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

BLANKETS: Batts or rolls of flexible fibers such as fiberglass or rock wool can be used in walls, attics and floors and can usually be installed by the homeowner. Though it is cut to fit standard wall-stud spacing, blanket insulation can also be hand-cut for a

custom fit. Flame-resistant insulating blankets are available, and a recent innovation includes a blanket made with 50 percent recycled glass.

BLOWN IN: This loose fill can be made of cellulose, fiberglass or rock wool and is blown in with air-powered tools. Blow-in fill works in walls, unfinished attic floors and irregular spaces and often has to be installed by a professional. In some cases, the fill is mixed with adhesive foam.

FOAM: Spray foams, such as polyurethane, can be effective for filling small cavities. Most foam sprays require special equipment and certification, so a professional should probably do the installation.

RIGID: Frequently used to insulate air ducts, rigid insulation can be made of fiberglass

or mineral wool and usually has a layer of aluminum on the outside. Rigid insulation often has to be installed by an HVAC professional.

REFLECTIVE: Reflective insulation is made from foil with paper, plastic polyethylene or cardboard backings. Homeowners or professionals can install reflective insulation in unfinished walls, ceilings and floors to reduce downward heat flow. Reflective insulation is capable of conducting electricity, so avoid contact with electrical wires.

UNDERSTANDING R-VALUE

Insulation's resistance to heat flow is its R-value. The higher the R-value, the more effective the product. Factors such as the type of material, thickness and density determine insulation's R-value. It also depends on how and where the insulation is installed.

Assess the R-value of your home's insulation to determine if you can save money on your electric bill by adding insulation. The U.S. Department of Energy's ZIP-Code Insulation Program (www.ornl.gov/roofs/Zip/ZipHome.html) can help you determine what type of insulation is right for you.



Practice and teach safety with power tools.

Treat Power Tools With Care

Before you fire up that power tool for your next do-it-yourself home project, remember that these electrical devices must be treated with care. Even though many tools are equipped with safety mechanisms, it's still important to heed precautions. Keep in mind these tips when using power tools:

- Do not carry tools by their cords and always unplug tools by the plug, not by pulling on the cord.
- Do not use tools in wet or damp job sites, unless they are specifically approved for those conditions. Store them in a dry place when not being used.
- To avoid accidental starts while carrying a tool, do not touch the switch or trigger that operates it.
- Ensure that your work area is well lit.
- Unplug tools when cleaning or fixing, while changing other parts of the tool such as blades or bits, and when not in use.
- Wear proper clothing—jewelry or other loose items could get caught.

Whether you're on the job or working at home, staying safe around power tools is a must. Following a few rules could mean the difference between a successful project and an accident.

Source: U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration

Solar Lights

Add Ambience, Save Energy

If you want to skip some wiring and cut the cost of an outdoor lighting job, consider mixing solar fixtures in with low-voltage outdoor lamps—or using them instead.

Here are seven things to consider before investing in solar lights:



Solar lights are convenient to install and provide cost-effective lighting for a variety of outdoor areas.

1. Manage your expectations for light output. You might think solar lights will glow as brightly as traditional, low-voltage lighting, but they don't. One manufacturer estimates that incandescent lights are 10 times brighter. The reason: A limited number of light-emitting diodes (LEDs) can fit into the tiny solar collection panel of a post cap solar fixture. The fewer LEDs in the fixture, the dimmer the light.

2. Rely on solar lighting more for ambience than function. Consider solar for soft accent lighting.

3. Don't write off solar fixtures just because the area is shady or not sunny every day. On a summer night following a bright day, most solar fixtures will stay charged from

dusk until dawn, manufacturers estimate. After a cloudy day—or if the fixture is in a shady spot, it might run for six hours instead of all night. For most people, that's long enough.

4. Solar fixtures are simple to install: Screw them onto a deck post or poke them into the ground, activate the batteries and walk away.

5. Batteries need changing about every three years, manufacturers estimate.

6. You'll pay more per fixture for a solar light than for a typical incandescent lamp, but you'll save on wiring and power supply, so the cost comes out about the same for either.

7. Because solar lighting requires no wiring, it requires no electrician or building permit.



POWER CORDS

Every electric appliance has a cord. Some use chargers rather than direct cords, but either way, proper care and handling of that plug and wire are important to safety. Here are some tips to help keep cords in good condition for safe operation.

- Check cords regularly for frays, cracks or kinks, including power tool cords, holiday lights and extension cords. If you find a problem, have it properly repaired or discard the appliance or tool.

- Cords should be firmly plugged into outlets—if the cord is loose and can pull out easily, choose a different, more snug outlet.

- Do not staple or nail cords in position at any time; if the cord does not remain where desired, use tape or twist ties to secure it.

- Cords should not be placed beneath rugs where they can become trip hazards or where frays will not be noticeable and can cause overheating.

- Do not make modifications to a cord's plug—do not clip off the third prong or attempt to file down a wider prong to fit in a different outlet.

- Extension cords are a temporary solution only, and their use should be minimized whenever possible.

- Use the proper weight and length of extension cord for the appropriate task and be sure the cord is rated for indoor or outdoor use, whichever is required for the situation.

- When unplugging a cord, grip the plug, not the cord.



Did You Know...

A variety of sources are used to generate electricity in Texas. The current mix includes natural gas (48 percent), coal (35 percent), nuclear (11 percent) and renewables (6 percent).

Source: Edison Electric Institute

ILLUSTRATION BY CARL WIENS

Bottled Up

*Year after year,
Dr Pepper die-hards
make the pilgrimage
to Dublin to swap out
old bottles for ones
filled with their
favorite sweet elixir.*

By Wes Ferguson



My friend Todd Hilliard speaks in the hushed tone reserved for rare and sacred things: “Do you want to see the bottles?”

I do. He opens the trunk of his car, and there they are—24 glass bottles, glinting in a flood of sunlight. They’re scuffed, scratched and old—three decades old—the same age as Todd and me.

I pull one of them from a wooden crate. It’s heavy. It bears a logo that hasn’t appeared on the side of a Dr Pepper bottle since the 1980s: Dr Pepper in white letters on a red oval in the upper left corner and below, Dr Pepper in larger white letters along a diagonal red stripe against a maroon background.

The sight and feel evoke childhood memories of hot Texas afternoons prying off bottle caps and wiping away slushy condensation.

“Just like I remember,” I say, and I put it back with the others.

These bottles are all empty, and they seem old and tired. But not for long. That’s because Todd, who lives in Austin, is driving them to Dublin, where the Dublin Dr Pepper Bottling Company will exchange them for filled bottles. The returned empties go into rotation, where machine-bottling equipment will pour new life into them.

Dublin, about 80 miles southwest of Fort Worth, is home to the oldest and longest continuously operating Dr Pepper bottling facility in the world. America’s oldest major soft drink was invented by a pharmacist in Waco in 1885, and in 1891, the Dublin facility was the first plant built specifically to bottle Dr Pepper.

There are more than 170 Dr Pepper bottlers in the United States and Canada. In the 1970s and 1980s, those operations and others in the soda industry began to sweeten their drinks with high-fructose corn syrup, a substitute for more costly sugar. But the Dublin Dr Pepper plant never stopped using the traditional sweetener: Imperial Pure Cane Granulated Sugar. Today, the Dublin plant continues to churn out original-formula Dr Pepper as well as a handful of other old-fashioned soft drinks—SunCrest Orange, Triple XXX Root Beer, NuGrape and Big Red.

These days, though, Dublin’s machinery is so exhausted—its newest piece of equipment was produced in 1965—that it only operates one day each month, typically the third Wednesday (if you want to see the operation, call before heading out). Soapsuds flow across the concrete floor as an antiquated assembly line washes old glass bottles like the ones Todd owns. Then the contraptions wheeze and whirl as they spurt in a dollop of syrup, slowly mix in the carbonated water, punch on a bottle cap and mix it all up into a tasty concoction.

But there’s a catch: Dublin’s legendary bottling apparatus only works on sturdy returnable glass bottles—which Dr Pepper stopped making in 1993, in favor of lightweight and flexible, nonbreakable plastic. While you can still buy Dublin Dr Pepper in a 12-ounce aluminum can or a small, nonreturnable 8-ounce glass bottle, those beverages are filled at an off-site Central Texas plant and then sent back to Dublin.

As Todd puts it, “If you want to truly experience the stuff that comes out of Dublin’s old-timey bottling machine, you’ve got to have old-timey bottles.”

That old-timey machine-bottling equipment in Dublin draws people from all of Texas and beyond who bring their old Dr Pepper bottles by the case and exchange them for filled ones for a nominal fee: It costs \$16 to swap out a case of 10-ounce bottles and \$15 to swap out a case of 6½-ounce bottles. Generally speaking, the bottles can be swapped for the same or similar designs from the same era, depending on what the plant has available.

Twice a year, a lawyer from Brownsville—nearly 500 miles away—hauls 25 cases to be exchanged, according to Lori Dodd, Dublin’s special events coordinator. Another family drives down from Missouri. A guy in Illinois comes by once a year to trade in his empties.

These people are so enamored of Dr Pepper, they have a fan club with about 250 dues-paying member-families, an annual convention, a newsletter and a page on the Dublin Dr Pepper website.

Bill R. Hall, president of the Dr Pepper 10-2-4 Club, lives 150 miles away from Dublin in Taylor. He remembers the day in the late 1980s when he first called the Dublin plant. He said, “I’m coming out with 50 cases.”

“And they switched ‘em all out or refilled ‘em for me,” he said. The process took the better part of a morning. Then “I loaded up that Dr Pepper from one end of my Suburban to the other and drove back to Taylor. They rattled the whole way back. It was like music.”

So why do people travel such great distances for this particular soft drink? Not surprisingly, the folks in Dublin credit a superior product. Every Dr Pepper starts with the same base, a concentrated formula that is manufactured at a plant in St. Louis, Missouri, and then shipped to independent bottlers around the U.S. and Canada. But only Dublin and a handful of other bottling plants use real cane sugar instead of the cheaper corn syrup.

And, depending on what’s in stock, only Dublin lets people drink from the same bottles they remember from childhood—whether it’s a “Good for Life!” bottle from the 1920s through the 1940s or an “I’m a Pepper” bottle that was introduced in the 1970s.

“There’s just something about the experience and taste of a Dublin Dr Pepper after it’s been chilled in those heavy glass bottles that should never, ever cease,” Dodd says.

Wes Ferguson is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.

Editor’s Note: At presstime, Dublin Dr Pepper is being sued by Dr Pepper Snapple Group Inc.,—which owns the brand and licenses sales territory—over trademark rights violations and sales outside the approved territory.



Can't Change the Weather

*But on High Plains,
where storm clouds
often gather with
amazing swiftness,
rainbows, too,
can just as
quickly appear.*

BY JIM STEIERT

T

he seasons and the pages of our lives turn with the weather.

Up here on the Texas High Plains, we experience the perpetual turning of the seasons in the cycles of sun and moon, wind and clouds, the constants of the ever-changing weather.

Weather is the foremost stuff of a morning's initial coffee conversation when the farm and ranch crowd gathers early in and near such towns as Bootleg, Bovina, Nazareth, Hart and Hereford.

Markets and local happenings—and on some days, maybe even politics—will get their hashing out, but always it is the life force that is the weather that will be the lead story. The old saw that folks can't do anything about the weather rings true, but we can certainly all get in our licks talking about it.

Many High Plains farmers and ranchers have crinkles around their eyes—marks of the good humor that is characteristic of working in the sun and wind and squinting at rain gauges. From the early days of spring into autumn, and in winter months, too, they carefully measure the quantity of liquid life that falls from the sky. For the most part, farm and ranch folk delightedly ponder the rainwater level in the glass cylinder, measure it against the ruled lines on the holder, then reverently pour out the meterings of this gift from their maker. What periodically pools in the rain gauge pretty well determines how agrarian lives will go as the calendar pages flip over with astonishing rapidity.

Most years, with a little luck, abbreviated periods of wet somehow wedge themselves between expansive, prolonged and windswept intervals of the dry that is another inevitability with death and taxes on the Plains. The interplay of the opposites of wet and dry dictates mood and outlook, and ultimately, what is realized from the land in grass and grain, bushels and beef on the hoof.

Thus it has ever been, the vagaries of the weather testing the hardiness of Plains folk from ancient times to now. As some historical accounts go, imagine the horrified amazement of the Spanish conquistadors encamped on Blanco Canyon in the eastern edge of the Llano Estacado near present-day Floydada in 1541, when, in the written words of the late, great Texas Panhandle historian Frederick Rathjen: A sudden “frightful hailstorm, apparently a new experience, occurred and injured horses, destroyed equipment, and battered bewildered men.”

The harsh reality of the changeable Plains weather is always hard on those



caught out in it. I remember my late dad, Pete, telling of the time he was on the far southeast corner of the place that would one day be a part of the family farm on which I grew up. He was working well over a mile from the house or any barns, sheds or trees that day, cultivating maize with a team of mules.

Clouds, colored the familiar, sinister shades of gray, dark blue and pinkish purple that spelled trouble, gathered with amazing swiftness. Wary of lightning, he unhitched the team from the cultivator as the first big raindrops pattered.

Then came the thuds of the first jagged, icy hailstones, sluicing through maize leaves, clanking off the cultivator frame. Faster and harder they came, hammers of the heavens beating down. No real shelter to be had in a maize field.

Holding the reins for dear life, he gathered in slack. There was nothing for it. He hunched between the mules, a dicey proposition at best. So long as he kept his grip and held steady, the long ears shielded him from at least some of the icy projectiles, but the risk of mayhem from hooves or an outright runaway was as real as the clubbing hail. He leaned against one wet flank and another. Hail. Hell. Hail Marys.

I can only imagine the thumps of ice upon flesh, the groans and bawling brays of the hail-bludgeoned animals being worked over by the weather in the field where they had innocently gone about their plodding work, the splashing and slashing of hailstones in puddles and against leaves being torn asunder. There was no knowing how long the sudden hailstorm and the suffering of man and beasts would last.

I do know without ever having asked that just as soon as he could, Dad got that team headed for the home place, though its welcoming form was likely still veiled in the rain.

I know somehow that he got those battered mules to the barn, and before he did anything for himself he got them unharnessed, fed, and stalled, their bruises and wounds seen to gently in the very best way he knew how.

When rattling and the rain let up, I have a feeling that he stepped out the barn door, rubbing bruised arms and shoulders, knots on his head, and saw a gorgeous arcing rainbow. No matter life's weather, he could always do that.

*Jim Steiert is an agricultural freelance writer living in Hereford. He is the author of two books: *Playas: Jewels of the Plains* and *Country Turnrows: A Voice from the Heartland*. A version of this essay originally appeared in the June 2010 issue of *Co-Op Connection*, the newsletter of West Texas Rural Telephone Cooperative in Hereford.*

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Thurber: Thriving ... Then Gone

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

There never was a Texas town quite like Thurber, and there probably never will be again. In a state not known for coal, Thurber produced tons of “black diamonds” from the late 1880s to the 1920s. In a state known for its independence, Thurber was a wholly company-owned town, right down to the last nail in the last miner’s house. And in a state with a scant labor union presence, Thurber became a union town largely populated by foreign-born workers.

Thurber, one of the state’s most-celebrated ghost towns, sits in the northwest corner of Erath County, southwest of Fort Worth. This was not a land of cotton or cattle but of coal, bricks and, later, oil. By the turn of the 20th century, Thurber was at the heart of the leading coal-producing area in the state, and Texas’ coal output exceeded the value of all other minerals combined.

It all started when a land speculator from Michigan, William Whipple Johnson, discovered coal in the area in the 1880s and began mining operations. When the miners went on strike, Johnson sold the company to a group of Eastern investors who formed the Thurber-based Texas and Pacific (T&P) Coal Company. A contract with the Texas and Pacific Railway, originally negotiated by Johnson, was renegotiated, and a new town named for T&P Coal Company investor H.K. Thurber was built.

Thurber wasn’t just a new town—it was a new kind of town and one of the first in the state to have full electric service, in 1895. The ice factory, with a 17-ton capacity, was considered the largest in the Southwest. There was even an opera house. In *A Personal Country*, a memoir about vast West Texas, author A.C. Greene wrote that Thurber had “a kind of dangerous pretension.”

Greene wrote, “Thurber was a mining town, an industrial city, and a true city, while most of the rest of West Texas burned cow chips for fuel and gathered buffalo bones to sell to survive the droughts. While other towns in West Texas considered the buckboard and the buggy the ultimate in transportation, Thurber had a siding, a special parking area, for the Pullman Palace cars and private sleepers which were set off the mainline Texas and Pacific Railway at Mingus for the short ramble down to Thurber’s station on the town square.”

Thurber was a company town, and only company miners, along with some schoolteachers and preachers, were allowed to live there. That made for a diverse population with repre-



sentation from some 18 ethnic groups. Italians made up more than half of the workforce with Polish immigrants representing about 12 percent. A mine workers’ union was formed in 1903. A second union, the Italian Local, followed in 1906. Thurber became known as the only 100 percent closed-shop (all-union) city in the country.

The surrounding land contained a lot of shale clay, which the glad hands of Thurber industry turned into bricks. “All its streets and sidewalks, its smokestack and pumphouse, the bandstand on the square, railroad abutments, bridges, and watering troughs—all were made of brick,” Greene wrote of the town.

In the course of looking for coal and other mineral deposits, mine manager William Knox Gordon hit oil a few miles from Thurber, near Strawn. That led to the discovery of the wildly productive Ranger oil field in October 1917 and the beginning of an oil boom that changed everything, including Thurber.

Thurber initially prospered from the local oil boom. The T&P Coal Company added “and Oil” to its name, but when locomotives converted from coal-fired steam engines to oil burners, Thurber had no market for its coal. To make up for the loss of the coal market, Thurber began producing paving bricks, which paved many Texas highways and streets, including Congress Avenue in downtown Austin. They were also used to construct the Galveston seawall and the Fort Worth Stockyards. Then along came concrete and asphalt roads, and the market for the paving bricks went the way of coal-fired steam engines.

One morning in 1933, the T&P Coal Company announced that the town was being abandoned. The utility poles were taken down, the wire salvaged. Houses were boarded shut, and supplies in company stores were sold at cost. In a blink, the Texas city that was like no other joined so many others that flourished for a time and then vanished.

“Thurber had been built all at once, its population had come all at once, and everything it did, it did all at once,” Greene wrote. “And as things turned out, it died all at once.”

Clay Coppedge is a regular contributor to Texas Co-op Power.

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Hunter's Chicken

Simple, Savory Suppers

BY KEVIN HARGIS Cooking a big, elaborate meal can be satisfying, if you don't mind the work involved. But sometimes, all that's required is simple, filling food that doesn't take a bevy of dishes or a whole lot of time.

Tossing some chicken or beef in a pot followed by a bunch of veggies might seem like the easy way out, but sometimes after a long day, the easy way is the only way.

There are hundreds of possible combinations of meat, veggies and spices that can make one-pot meals anything but boring. And if you do the prep work ahead of time, even the most elaborate can be simple to toss on the stove for an easy supper.

A recent cookbook by Jenni Fleetwood, *One-Pot Cooking* (2010, Southwater Publishing), features more than 120 recipes that come from all over the globe but all share one thing: They are all cooked in one vessel. Some of the recipes require other kitchen prep, such as creating a sauce or dumplings, for example. But for the most part, the recipes can be created with only one pot or pan.

The cookbook was published in Britain, using some terms more familiar in

Europe, such as "kitchen paper" for paper towels. But the directions are simple enough to easily follow, and each recipe is beautifully illustrated with photos of preparation steps as well as the finished product.

There are a wide range of dishes, including seafood chowders, pork stir-fries, beef curries, vegetable side dishes and even wild game preparations. One of the simpler, tasty creations is this chicken dish that features a mushroom sauce.

HUNTER'S CHICKEN

- 1/4 cup dried porcini mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 4 pieces bone-in chicken (leg and thigh), skinned
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 1 can (14 ounces) chopped tomatoes
- 2/3 cup red wine
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 sprig rosemary, leaves only, finely chopped, plus more sprigs for garnish
- 1 3/4 cups portabella mushrooms, thinly sliced

Salt and black pepper to taste

Put dried mushrooms in bowl and add 1 cup warm water. Let stand 20 minutes. Squeeze mushrooms over bowl, and strain and reserve liquid. Finely chop mushrooms. In casserole or Dutch oven, heat oil and butter until foaming. Add chicken and sauté over medium heat about 5 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove and drain on paper towels. Add onion and chopped mushrooms to pan. Cook gently, stirring frequently, about 3 minutes, or until onion has softened but hasn't browned. Stir in tomatoes, wine and reserved mushroom liquid, then add garlic, chopped rosemary and salt and pepper. Bring to boil, stirring constantly. Return chicken to pan and turn to coat with sauce. Cover with tight-fitting lid and simmer for 30 minutes. Add portabellas and stir well to mix with sauce. Continue to simmer for 10 minutes or until chicken is tender. Taste and adjust salt and pepper. Serve hot.

Servings: 4. Serving size: 1 piece chicken with sauce. Per serving: 322 calories, 28.2 g protein, 13.5 g fat, 12.2 g carbohydrates, 2.1 g dietary fiber, 336 mg sodium, 6 mg sugars, 111 mg cholesterol

RECIPE ROUNDUP

1st

BETTY MASKEY, *Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Sweet and Sour Pot Roast**

This month's contest entries were many and varied, but they all had one thing in common: They all were cooked in one vessel. And the tangy, sweet roast recipe sent in by Betty Maskey topped them all, according to our taste testers.

- 3 pounds boneless beef chuck roast
- Cooking oil
- 1 large onion, cut in rings and separated
- 1 can (8 ounces) tomato sauce
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper

Brown beef in small amount of oil in heavy pot with lid and remove. Sauté onion in meat drippings. Add remaining ingredients and stir until sugar dissolves. Return beef to pot and spoon onion mixture over top. Cover and cook on low heat for 1 hour. Add carrots and potatoes, if desired, and cook until veggies are tender.

Servings: 8 (meat, onion and sauce only). Serving size: 2 cups. Per serving: 322 calories, 32.8 g protein, 12.4 g fat, 11.5 g carbohydrates, 0.8 g dietary fiber, 609 mg sodium, 9.3 g sugars, 103 mg cholesterol

BORSCHT-STYLE CASSEROLE

- 2 pounds beef short ribs, cut up
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- 2 cups sliced carrots
- 1 1/2 cups turnip strips
- 1 cup sliced celery
- 1 cup sliced onion
- 1 can (6 ounces) tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 2 cups fresh beets, cut into strips
- 1 small head cabbage, cut in 6 wedges
- Sour cream

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In 4 1/2-quart Dutch oven, brown ribs in oil. Drain off excess fat. Add carrots, turnips, celery and onion. Blend tomato paste, salt and pepper with 4 cups water and pour over vegetables. Cover and bake for 2 hours. Skim off fat. Add sugar and vinegar to 1 cup water, then add to meat mixture. Add beet strips and place cabbage wedges atop mixture, pushing partially into liquid. Cover and continue baking 1 1/2 hours more. Serve with sour cream.

Servings: 4. Serving size: 1/4 of dish. Per serving: 511 calories, 32.7 g protein, 22.6 g fat, 42.6 g carbohydrates, 9.8 g dietary fiber, 913 mg sodium, 7.7 g sugars, 70 mg cholesterol

SANDY BECKER

Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative

PICANTE CHICKEN AND QUINOA

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- Salt to taste
- 3/4 cup coarsely chopped onion
- 3 large garlic cloves, minced

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- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1/4 cups medium picante sauce
- 1 cup quinoa, rinsed (or 1 cup basmati rice)
- 1 large ripe avocado, peeled and sliced
- 1 medium tomato, coarsely chopped
- 4 ounces shredded Cheddar or Monterey jack, or more to taste

Sprinkle chicken breasts with salt as desired, set aside. Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil in 10-inch skillet until lightly browned. Add chicken broth and picante sauce and bring to boil. Stir in quinoa, then arrange chicken breasts over top. Cover tightly and simmer 20 minutes. Remove from heat, let stand until liquid is absorbed, about 5 minutes. Garnish with avocado, tomato and cheese.

Servings: 4. Serving size: 1/4 of dish. Per serving: 511 calories, 32.7 g protein, 22.6 g fat, 42.6 g carbohydrates, 9.8 g dietary fiber, 913 mg sodium, 7.7 g sugars, 70 mg cholesterol

KATHY BULEY

Pedernales Electric Cooperative

MOROCCAN CHICKEN THIGHS

- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 pound skinless, boneless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut to bite-size pieces
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1/2 cup quartered dried figs (about 2 ounces)
- 1/4 cup chopped green olives
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 3 tablespoons sweet Marsala or Madeira wine
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom

Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken; cook 5 minutes or until browned, stirring frequently. Stir in chopped cilantro and remaining ingredients. Reduce heat to medium and cook for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve over couscous or rice.

Servings: 4. Serving size: 1/4 of dish. Per serving: 263 calories, 23.4 g protein, 8.1 g fat, 22.9 g carbohydrates, 2.6 g dietary fiber, 390 mg sodium, 17.8 g sugars, 94 mg cholesterol

ELLEN SQUIER

HILCO Electric Cooperative



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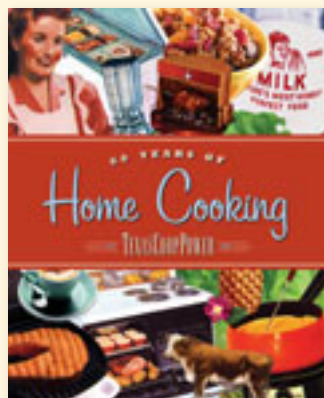
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PITTSBURGH 6 PIECE SCREWDRIVER SET

ITEM 47770 REG. PRICE \$7.99

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SUPER COUPON!

HaulMaster

SAVE 66%

12 VOLT MAGNETIC TOWING LIGHT KIT

LOT NO. 96933/67455

\$9.99

REG. PRICE \$29.99

Item 96933 shown

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SUPER COUPON!

CENTRAL PNEUMATIC 3" HIGH SPEED CUT-OFF TOOL

Item 47077 shown

LOT NO. 47077/67425

\$6.99

REG. PRICE \$19.99

SAVE 65%

HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 9 This valuable coupon is good anywhere you shop Harbor Freight Tools (retail stores, online, or 800 number). Cannot be used with any other discount or coupon. Coupon not valid on prior purchases after 30 days from original purchase date with receipt. Offer good while supplies last. Coupon cannot be bought, sold, or transferred. Original coupon must be presented in-store, or with your order form, or entered online in order to receive the coupon discount. Valid through 12/30/11. Limit one coupon per customer and one coupon per day.

SUPER COUPON!

LOT NO. 97626

80 PIECE ROTARY TOOL SET

drillmaster

SAVE 65%

\$6.99

REG. PRICE \$19.99

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SUPER COUPON!

12" RATCHET BAR CLAMP/SPREADER

PITTSBURGH

LOT NO. 46807

\$1.99

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SAVE 77%

HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 6 This valuable coupon is good anywhere you shop Harbor Freight Tools (retail stores, online, or 800 number). Cannot be used with any other discount or coupon. Coupon not valid on prior purchases after 30 days from original purchase date with receipt. Offer good while supplies last. Coupon cannot be bought, sold, or transferred. Original coupon must be presented in-store, or with your order form, or entered online in order to receive the coupon discount. Valid through 12/30/11. Limit one coupon per customer and one coupon per day.

SUPER COUPON!

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

OSCILLATING MULTIFUNCTION POWER TOOL

Item 68303 shown

LOT NO. 68303/67256

\$19.99

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SAVE 66%

8 Functions: Sanding, Cut Flooring, Cut Metal, Scrape Concrete, Remove Grout, Cut Plastic, Scrape Flooring, Plunge Cut

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SUPER COUPON!

PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE

RAPID PUMP® 3 TON HEAVY DUTY FLOOR JACK

NEW!

\$59.99

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LOT NO. 68048

SAVE \$40

3-1/2 PUMPS LIFTS MOST VEHICLES!

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SUPER COUPON!

NEW!

2000 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH AUTOMATIC LOAD-HOLDING BRAKE

SAVE \$70

\$49.99

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LOT NO. 68146

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SUPER COUPON!

LOT NO. 2707

8 FT. 8" x 11 FT. 6" FARM QUALITY TARP

SAVE 30%

\$6.99

REG. PRICE \$9.99

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SUPER COUPON!

PREDATOR ENGINES

6.5 HP OHV HORIZONTAL SHAFT GAS ENGINES (212 CC)

SAVE \$80

\$99.99

REG. PRICE \$179.99

LOT NO. 68120
LOT NO. 68121, CALIFORNIA ONLY

NEW!

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SUPER COUPON!

PITTSBURGH 6 PIECE PLIERS SET

LOT NO. 38082/46005

Item 38082 shown

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SAVE 40%

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SUPER COUPON!

36 LED SOLAR SECURITY LIGHT

LOT NO. 98085

SAVE 28%

\$17.99

REG. PRICE \$24.99

Includes 1.2 volt, 600mAh/6 volt NiCd rechargeable battery pack.

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SUPER COUPON!

3/8" x 14 FT. GRADE 43 TRUCKER'S CHAIN

HaulMaster

LOT NO. 40462/97711

Item 40462 shown

Not for overhead lifting.

SAVE 40%

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REG. PRICE \$29.99

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SUPER COUPON!

4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER

drillmaster

LOT NO. 95578

Grinding wheel sold separately.

SAVE 50%

\$9⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$19.99

HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 9
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SUPER COUPON!

6" DIGITAL CALIPER

PITTSBURGH

LOT NO. 47257

Includes two 1.5V button cell batteries.

SAVE 66%

\$9⁹⁹

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HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 7
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SUPER COUPON!

CENTRALPNEUMATIC HIGH SPEED METAL SAW

LOT NO. 91753/113

Item 113 shown

SAVE 66%

\$9⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$29.99

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SUPER COUPON!

RECIPROCATING SAW WITH ROTATING HANDLE

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

LOT NO. 65570

SAVE 50%

\$19⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$39.99

HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 7
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SUPER COUPON!

LEATHER INDUSTRIAL WORK GLOVES, 5 PAIRS

LOT NO. 66287

One size fits all.

SAVE 40%

\$5⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$9.99

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SUPER COUPON!

US*GENERAL 11 DRAWER ROLLER CABINET

LOT NO. 67421

INCLUDES:
• 6 Drawer Top Chest
• 2 Drawer Middle Section
• 3 Drawer Roller Cabinet

SAVE \$150

\$149⁹⁹

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SUPER COUPON!

ADJUSTABLE SHADE AUTO-DARKENING WELDING HELMET

CHICAGO WELDING

LOT NO. 46092

SAVE 50%

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HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 3
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SUPER COUPON!

7 HP, 3050 RATED WATTS/ 3500 MAX WATTS GASOLINE GENERATOR

CHICAGO ElectricGenerators

LOT NO. 67560
LOT NO. 67561
CALIFORNIA ONLY

SAVE \$190

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SUPER COUPON!

CHICAGO ELECTRIC 45 WATT SOLAR PANEL KIT

LOT NO. 90599

SAVE \$80

\$149⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$229.99

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WIRELESS DRIVEWAY ALERT SYSTEM

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SUPER COUPON!

CHICAGO ELECTRIC 10" SLIDING COMPOUND MITER SAW

LOT NO. 98199

SAVE \$60

\$79⁹⁹

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SAW BLADE INCLUDED

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SUPER COUPON!

CHICAGO WELDING 90 AMP FLUX WIRE WELDER

LOT NO. 98871

SAVE \$60

\$89⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$149.99

NO GAS REQUIRED!

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SUPER COUPON!

CENTRALPNEUMATIC 3 GALLON 100 PSI OILLESS PANCAKE AIR COMPRESSOR

LOT NO. 95275

SAVE 40%

\$44⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$74.99

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SUPER COUPON!

10/2/55 AMP, 6/12 VOLT BATTERY CHARGER/ ENGINE STARTER

CHICAGO ELECTRIC

LOT NO. 66783

SAVE 50%

\$29⁹⁹

REG. PRICE \$59.99

HARBOR FREIGHT TOOLS - LIMIT 4
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▲ **Shelly Carpenter**'s family literally hung out—and hung on—at Enchanted Rock State Natural Area near Fredericksburg. Carpenter, a United Cooperative Services member, said everyone had a great time exploring the huge, pink, granite dome of Enchanted Rock, one of the largest batholiths (an underground rock formation uncovered by erosion) in the U.S.

Russell Dickerson Jr., 14, takes his sled for a spin at Monahans Sandhills State Park in West Texas as fellow Boy Scouts from Abilene's Troop 206 await their turns. His dad, **Russell Dickerson Sr.**, is a Taylor Electric Cooperative member. ►



▲ **Jaime Gammill** and her boyfriend, Bowie-Cass Electric Cooperative member **Glen Fox**, sent in this hauntingly beautiful photo of an afternoon at Caddo Lake State Park near Karnack.

Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Nov	At the Cook-Off	Sep 10
Dec	Fun with Photoshop	Oct 10
Jan	Baby, It's Cold Outside	Nov 10
Feb	Going Nuts!	Dec 10
<i>Sponsored by Texas Peanut Producers</i>		
Mar	Wild Animals	Jan 10
Apr	April Showers	Feb 10

AT THE COOK-OFF is the topic for our **NOVEMBER 2011** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **At the Cook-Off, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701**, before **SEPTEMBER 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.** If you use a digital camera, submit your highest-resolution images online under the Contests tab at TexasCoopPower.com. 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.

STATE PARKS

*I saw miles and miles of Texas, all the stars up in the sky.
I saw miles and miles of Texas, gonna live here 'til I die.'*

Lyrics from 'Miles and Miles of Texas'

by Tommy Camfield and Diane Johnston

Mountains. Plains. Canyons. Rivers. Lakes. Deserts. The Gulf of Mexico. The landscape of Texas is so diverse, it's no wonder folks say it's like a whole other country. With the fall camping season swinging into gear, it's the perfect time to pay homage to our 93 unique state parks at which we can hike, camp, catch a fish or simply kick back and relax. —**ASHLEY CLARY**

Check out more state park photos at TexasCoopPower.com.

Dixon Matlock, a member of Central Texas Electric Cooperative, scratched off an item on his 77-year-old father's bucket list when he and his brother grabbed their dad and made a boys' road trip to Palo Duro Canyon State Park near Canyon. ▼



Each fall and spring, Bryan Texas Utilities member **Mark Garton** takes his boys camping at Fort Parker State Park near Mexia. Garton says his sons both caught their first fish at the park. ▼



AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

This is just a sampling of the events and festivals around Texas. For the complete listing, please visit the Events page at TexasCoopPower.com.

PICK OF THE MONTH

SEPTEMBER 10, 17

LAKE JACKSON

Xtreme Hummingbird Xtravaganza
(979) 480-0999, www.gcbo.org



SEPTEMBER

07

COLUMBUS [7-10]
Colorado County Fair,
(979) 732-8385,
www.coloradocountyfair.org

09

MARBLE FALLS [9-10]
Starving Artists' Show
& Sale, (830) 693-7324,
www.highlandartsguild.org

10

GORMAN
Peanut Festival,
(254) 734-2317,
www.gormantx.com

QUITMAN

Classics in the Park Car
Show, (903) 763-4437,
www.lakecountryclassics.com

WARRENTON

Wrangler Gala,
(713) 825-7149



10

GORMAN
Peanut Festival

15

LUFKIN
Texas Forestry Museum
TREETemendous Celebration,
(936) 632-9535,
www.treetexas.com

16

SULPHUR SPRINGS
[16-17] Civil War Reflections
Quilt Show, (903) 994-
2570, www.sulphurspringstxquilts.com

17

ROSENBERG
Hispanic Heritage Day,
(832) 595-3525,
www.rosenbergevents.com

PONTOTOC
VFD BBQ Fundraiser,
(325) 251-6652

HONDO [17-18]
Medina County Fair,
(830) 426-5406,
www.medinacountyfair.org

BUFFALO [17-18]
Buffalo Stampede,
(903) 322-5810



10

QUITMAN
Classics in the Park Car Show

HUMMINGBIRD: 2011 © LEE O'DELL. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM. PEANUTS: 2011 © ALIASEY HINTAU. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM. CAR: 2011 © HANNU LIIVAAR. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM.

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AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

23 ATLANTA [23-24]
Hoot 'N Holler BBQ,
(903) 796-3296,
www.atlantatexas.net

MCKINNEY [23-24]
Oktoberfest, (972) 547-
2660, ext. 2662,
www.downtownmckinney.com



24

COMANCHE
Comanche County Heritage
Pow-Wow Festival

24 BASTROP
CASA of Bastrop, Lee
and Fayette Annual Gala,
(512) 303-2272,
www.casaofbastrop.org

24 COMANCHE [24-25]
Comanche County
Heritage Pow-Wow
Festival, (325) 356-3233,
www.comanchechamber.org

OCTOBER

01 COLEMAN
Fiesta de la Paloma,
(325) 625-2163,
www.colemantexas.org

BOWIE
Chicken & Bread Days
Heritage Festival,
(940) 872-6246,
www.bowietxchamber.org

CLEBURNE
LCVFD Country Fair,
(817) 774-9594

RUSK
Cherokee County Fair,
(903) 683-4242,
www.ruskchamber.com

01 CAMERON
Arts & Crafts Fair & Fun
Run, (254) 697-4979,
www.cameron-tx.com

DUMAS [1-2]
Noon Lions Club Arts
& Crafts Festival,
(806) 935-4111,
www.dumasnoonlions.com

SALADO [1-2]
A Christmas Carol &
Fright Trail Audition,
(254) 947-9205



SALADO
A Christmas Carol
& Fright Trail
Audition

DUMAS
Noon Lions Club
Arts & Crafts Festival



We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event for November by September 10, and it just may be featured in this calendar! You can also mail to Around Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, or fax to (512) 763-3407.

DRUM: 2011 © KELLY LAURENT. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM. GHOUL: 2011 © PAUL MOORE. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM. GLOVE: 2011 © STEPHEN COBURN. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM.

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At Schlitterbahn, where finding the perfect inner tube is conducive to finding your inner child, the only difference between an 8-year-old and a 48-year-old is obsessive worrying about swimwear. Consider the dialogue among four grown women en route to New Braunfels' Schlitterbahn Waterpark Resort on a sultry Monday morning in May:

Lori, 35: "I'm going to Schlitterbahn!! Owwww!!!"

Donna, 50: "We're going to Schlitterbahn!! Wheeeee!!!"

Kelly, 53: "I'm going to Schlitterbahn, and I'm so happy!!!"

Camille, 48: "ARE WE THERE YET??"

Or, as Lori put it so eloquently before we departed Austin: "SCHLITTERBAAAAAHN!!!!!"

But, excited chatter aside, there had been much consternation about what to wear. I, for one, had not bought a new swimming suit in years. Finally, after growing weary of the harsh, fluorescent-lit reality of retail dressing rooms, I opted for an old, tried-and-true, faded navy-blue, sort-of-comfortable suit.

Lori, Kelly and Donna, meanwhile, looked like wild, fresh-cut flowers in turquoise and royal blue, purple polka-dotted, and leopard/wave-print swimming attire. As we pulled into the Schlitterbahn parking lot, up sprang an old adolescent emotion: "Oh no ... what if somebody SEES me?"

Horrors. But as we draped our towels over chaise lounge chairs, my senses took over: Ah, the smell of suntan lotion. The sound of crashing waves and the peals of laughter from **THE TORRENT WAVE RIVER**. I looked up, high above the swelling blue water, to the top of a six-story-tall tower. There it was. An uphill water coaster enthusiast's fantasy: Master Blaster.

Lori wisely suggested that we ride it first before the line got long. The fourth Monday of May was shaping up to be a banner day: School was not yet out for summer, and at 10:30 a.m., the parking lot was almost empty—a virtual miracle at Schlitterbahn's New Braunfels location, which the Travel Channel calls the world's No. 1 water park.

INNER TUBE INNER CHILD

Float to serenity at Schlitterbahn.

BY CAMILLE WHEELER



(Schlitterbahn also operates water parks in Galveston, South Padre Island and Kansas City, Kansas.)

Since opening in 1979, the original New Braunfels location has become a shrine of sorts: an inner-tubing mecca where millions of visitors have screamed down speed slides and wrapped their tongues around Schlitterbahn (SCHLIT-ter-bon), which, loosely translated from German, means slippery road. But there's nothing haphazard in its operations: Lifeguards are stationed on every ride, and life jackets are free (as are inner tubes and parking).

Schlitterbahn, as magical names go, ranks right up there with Santa Claus: Getting to go is a gift, and I felt that way even after learning that Schlitterbahn West, the section that incorporates the Comal River's spring-fed headwaters on several rides, would be closed the day of our visit. (This season, the New Braunfels park is open weekends until September 18. The 2012 season is scheduled to start the last weekend of April.)

But **BLASTENHOFF** and **SURFENBURG**, the other two sections, were open, with

thrills aplenty on tunnel rides. We rode, in rapid succession from the top of the **BLASTENHOFF TOWER**, **MASTER BLASTER**, **BLACK KNIGHT** (an inner-tube plunge into darkness) and **WOLF PACK** (a gentler descent in a raft).

Atop the tower, I pondered strangers' feet, the absurdity of toes and the one-pieces, two-pieces, scars, rashes, pimples, varicose veins, sunburns, tans and tattoos decorating the bodies in line. I realized: Nobody here, except maybe teenagers preening for each other, cares how you look or what you wear. At Schlitterbahn, you've gotta have some skin in the game.

And it's easy to get in the water and stay in the water. At **THE TORRENT WAVE RIVER**, simply wade in, grab an inner tube, climb aboard and get swept away by a current of gentle swells and waves. Or, ditch the tube and join the herd of humanity swimming, running and body-surfing its way round and round.

I can't wait to try what Schlitterbahn calls the world's longest water ride: **THE FALLS**, a 3,600-foot-long whitewater river that opened this past summer in New Braunfels. It features the **AQUAVEYER**, a conveyor belt that carries guests back to the ride's beginning. You never have to get out. Except at closing time.

And Schlitterbahn has mercy on directionally challenged floaters with inner tubes that bear three words: "Right" and "Left" under the handles and "Forward," with an arrow. You REALLY can't mess this up. Unless you mimic four grown women who simultaneously tried to ride the same "floatable": a blue, foam-filled alligator with a slippery, hard shell.

But we did stay aboard the **DRAGON'S REVENGE**, an uphill water coaster with a scary storyline: The dragon, as we see by a huge, broken chain, has escaped. Standing in line under water pouring off a wooden roof, we climb into our getaway craft: green, two-person inner tubes.

Such is the allure of Schlitterbahn: Hurry. Escape. Then ... relax. Dreamily float a river. Come as you are.

Camille Wheeler, associate editor



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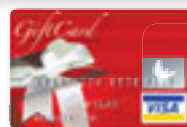
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