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JUNE 2012

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FEATURES

8 The Kings and Queens of Brownsville

By Jazmine Ulloa

Photos by Will van Overbeek

Major media outlets continue to chronicle the legacy of chess success in Brownsville and the Rio Grande Valley, where students from kindergarten through college never play the role of pawn.

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By Carol Moczygemba

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Observations by Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

A Writer Regains Her Creative Voice



TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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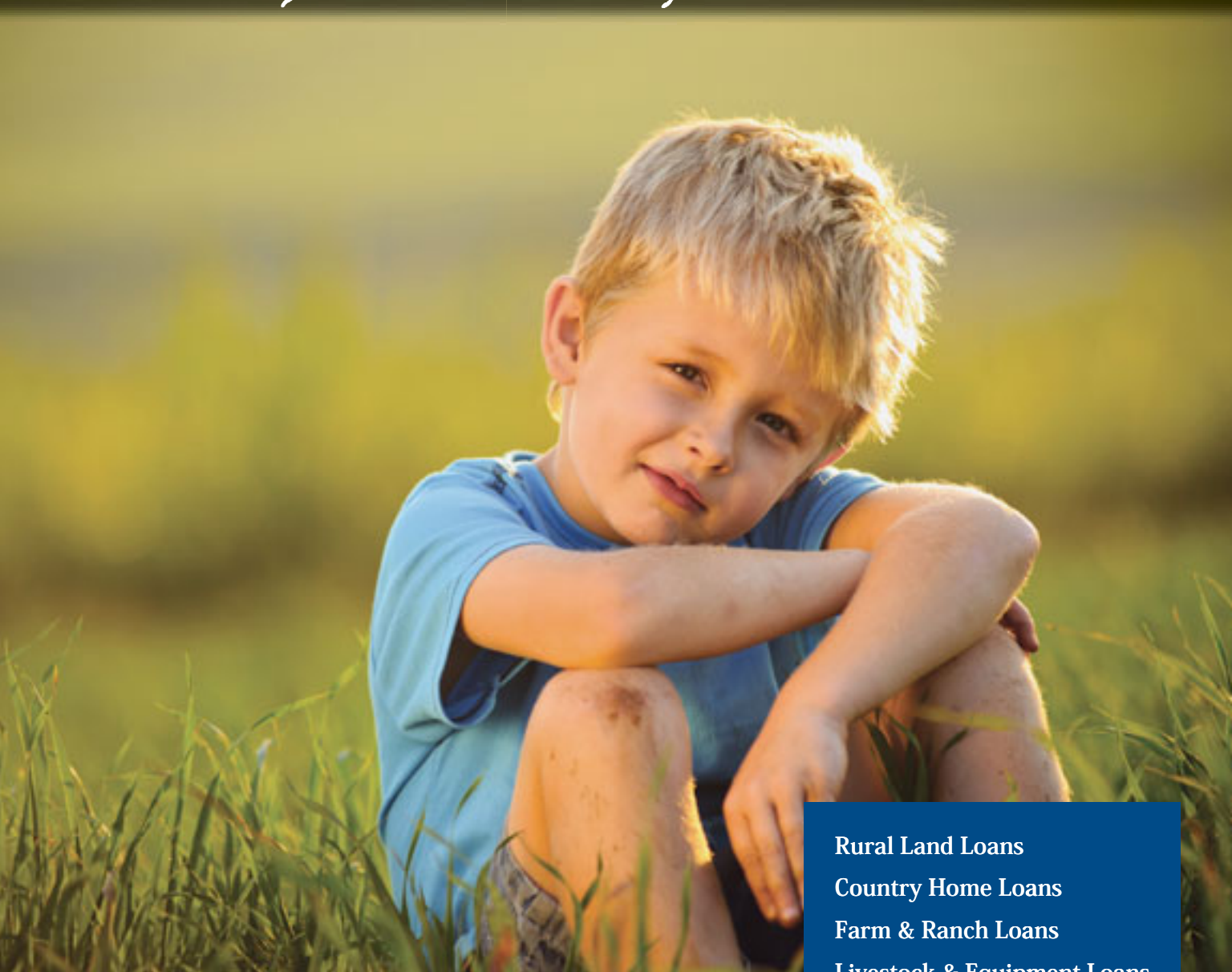
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POWER^{talk}

Letters from Texas Co-op Power Readers

HAND-ME-DOWN WORK ETHIC

I enjoyed the article "Hand-Me-Down Work Ethic" in the April 2012 issue [about Kirk Lacy, maintenance manager of Texas Electric Cooperatives' Manufacturing and Distribution Services pole plant], especially since it seems we might be losing this great attitude with each generation. My dad, a retiree of Hamilton County Electric Cooperative, and his 10 siblings had this work ethic.

HALLYE BOTTLINGER
Hamilton County ECA

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June Table of Contents.

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prize drawings and more!

I enjoyed the profile of Kirk Lacy. It is interesting and rewarding to read about someone who is very competent at his job, is modest about it, and has a solid work ethic that backs it all up.

ANDREW FORSYTHE
Pedernales EC

A big thumbs-up to Suzanne Haberman for the "Hand-Me-Down Work Ethic" article. The quality of the story matches the story's subject. As a brother of an IBEW construction lineman, I appreciate the "Pole Manufacturing Facts."

And having a career based on mentors from the petrochemical industry, I appreciate the accuracy and appropriateness for a general audience of the other sidebar, "What Is Creosote?" Hurrah for the April 2012 Texas Co-op Power! That includes Woody Welch's photos.

OWEN CAMPNEY
Pedernales EC

LOVING DUTCH OVEN RECIPE

The April 2007 Dutch oven recipe for Texas Caviar Casserole is a hit with Sam Houston Area Council Boy Scout Troop 993. The recipe was also our entry in the Scout Fair Dutch Oven competition April 14 and won a Silver Spoon!

KAREN BRENNAN
Jackson EC

Editor's note: Find this and other recipes in the archives at TexasCoopPower.com.

DISAPPOINTED IN PHOTOS

I was extremely disappointed in the April 2012 edition's selection of Easter pictures [Focus on Texas]. Sadly, the celebration of the meaning of Easter was not captured in any of the chosen photographs. Cascarones, Easter eggs and dressed-up cows are fun, but let's not miss the real celebration. Where were the church-attending children dressed up in their finery celebrating this joyous

holiday? Thanks for your hard work in producing a well-written magazine.

MARSHA MAYFIELD LOCKETT
Hamilton County ECA

FESS UP

Before I even read the first paragraph in the March 2012 cover story—"Don't Do Mild" about Roy Spence's life and times—I saw Royism No. 2: "Fess up when you mess up." I had preached that same message to 125 golfers about to tee off in the 2012 Turtle Hill Golf Classic. After going over the rules, I explained that golf is a game not only of skill,

but also of integrity. I finished by saying that if you shave off a stroke on a hole with no one knowing, you can count on the golf gods getting it back before the end of the round. I'm proud to say that Royism No. 2 now hangs from the bag of each member of my golf team, right beside the "Rules of Golf."

DAN HAMRIC
Cooke County ECA

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Sowing Seeds for the Future

Thank you for your recent keyhole gardening article [February 2012]. Inspired by your article, The Master's School's sixth-grade students, led by their teacher, Nick Moore, and Principal Beth Heatwole, just completed a garden on the school's campus. Some of the students were inspired to start their own gardens at home, and others hope to use the knowledge gained to apply this gardening method in the mission field someday.

Sharon Blue, business manager,
The Master's School of San Marcos, *Bluebonnet EC*



Under the direction of Principal Beth Heatwole, far left, and teacher Nick Moore, far right, students at The Master's School of San Marcos completed a keyhole garden.

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Ditch the Ducts for Cool Air

Energy Star-rated ductless system can cut energy costs by 30 percent

By Suzanne Haberman

Air conditioning is the biggest energy user in most U.S. homes. Each month, cooling and heating costs make up about half of a typical electricity bill. Two-thirds of U.S. homes have air conditioners, and homeowners collectively spend more than \$11 billion on cooling costs per year, reports the U.S. Department of Energy.

Homes typically have central air conditioners or room units. Central air conditioners circulate cool air into the home through a system of supply and return ducts, while room air conditioners regulate temperature in a smaller space. Regular maintenance can help these systems run more efficiently, but switching to a ductless system can save money and increase comfort and control.

Ductless systems, also called mini-split air conditioners, have been around for about 30 years and are used worldwide. Like central air conditioners, these systems use outside compressors or condensers, but they also typically have one to four indoor blowers mounted inside that provide zoned cooling.

PROS

In traditional air-conditioning systems,

about 20 percent of the air moving through the duct system is lost to leaks, holes and poor connections. Investing in an Energy Star-rated ductless model, which eliminates such air loss, could cut energy costs by 30 percent, according to the DOE.

The ability to power up units individually to cool only occupied rooms or zones rather than the whole house can also save energy. Each ductless air-conditioner unit has its own thermostat, and some models can be controlled by remote control.

Ductless air conditioners are often used in buildings without built-in ductwork, such as homes constructed before the advent of central air. The design allows adding air conditioning without tearing into walls to install ducts. The systems are also popular for replacing noisy, hard-to-seal window air conditioners or for better cooling rooms poorly served by central air units.

But ductless systems aren't just for retrofits or supplemental cooling. They're found in new construction, including houses, multifamily units and home additions. The units' small size and versatile mounting options make them practical for some of these applications.

CONS

The biggest drawback is the initial cost, generally about 30 percent more than a central air-conditioning system, according to the DOE. Also, large homes might require more than one condenser, warns Consumer Reports. And ductless systems can cost double what you'd spend on window air-conditioning units.

Plus, installation can be tricky: Measuring the space—a room or zone—and the units' capabilities can be a difficult process: Ask a professional for help. And if they don't match up, cooling and humidity control won't be as effective, and energy will be wasted.

If you're installing any kind of air conditioner, be sure to get the right size. A unit that's too small won't cut the heat, but an over-sized system wastes energy. Match room size with cooling capacity, measured in British thermal units, or BTU: the quantity of heat required to raise the temperature of 1 pound of water by 1 degree Fahrenheit at a specified temperature. Follow these steps to determine what size unit will maximize your cooling.

1. Calculate the square footage of the area to be cooled.
2. Determine the best approximate cooling capacity using this chart (capacity will differ depending on ceiling height).

SQUARE FEET	BTU
550 to 700	14,000
700 to 1,000	18,000
1,000 to 1,200	21,000
1,200 to 1,400	23,000
1,400 to 1,500	24,000
1,500 to 2,000	30,000
2,000 to 2,500	34,000

3. Adjust measurements in these situations:

- Reduce capacity by 10 percent for shaded rooms.
- Increase capacity by 10 percent for sunny rooms.
- If more than two people regularly occupy a room, add 600 BTU for each additional person.
- If a unit is used in a kitchen, increase capacity by 4,000 BTU.

And consider where you install a unit: If you're mounting an air conditioner near the corner of a room, look for a unit that can send the airflow in the right direction.

Source: www.energystar.gov



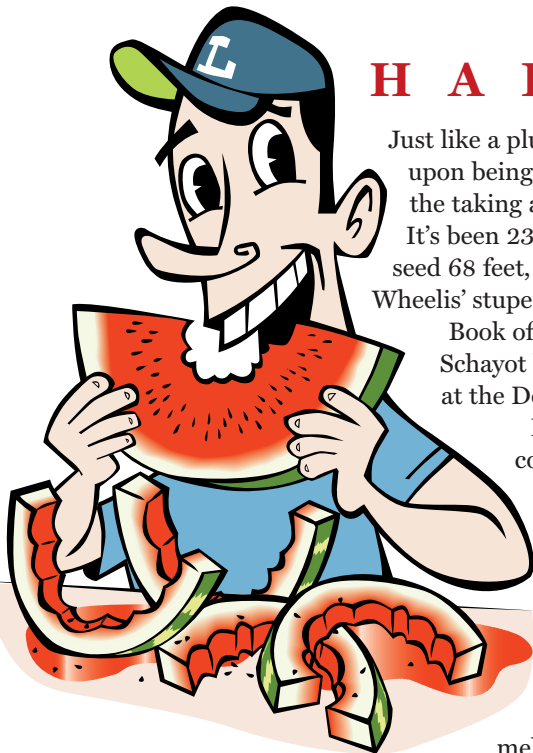
H A P P E N I N G S

Just like a plump melon that sounds a satisfying thud upon being thwacked, the seed-spitting record is ripe for the taking at the June 21-24 **LULING WATERMELON THUMP**. It's been 23 years since Lee Wheelis spit a watermelon seed 68 feet, 9 1/8 inches at this Central Texas festival.

Wheelis' stupendous spit held the top spot in the Guinness Book of World Records until 1995, when Jason Schayot launched a watermelon seed 75 feet, 2 inches at the De Leon Peach and Melon Festival.

Remember, Luling competitors, the bounce counts, meaning the distance measured is from where the seed stops on the concrete spitway. Meanwhile, don't forget the watermelon-eating contest and the champion watermelon competition in which the winner has brought up to \$22,500 at auction, with annual proceeds helping support student scholarships and area watermelon growers. For more information, go to www.watermelonthump.com or call (830) 875-3214.

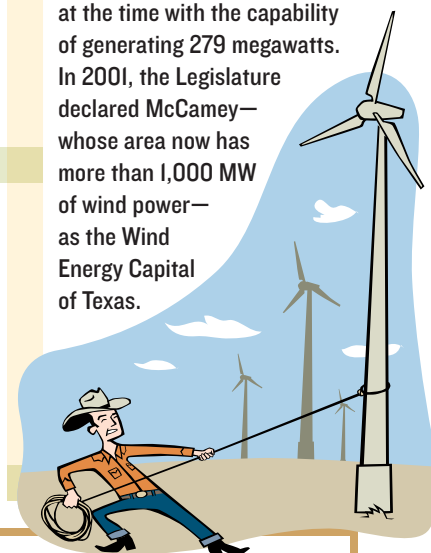
Find hundreds of happenings all across the state at TexasCoopPower.com.



WHO KNEW?

WIND ENERGY CAPITAL OF TEXAS

There wasn't an established wind generation industry in Texas when McCamey-area farmers, ranchers and city officials invited wind farm developers into their corner of West Texas. What started as the Southwest Mesa Wind Project in 1999 grew into other projects, including the King Mountain Wind Ranch in 2001, which held the world record at the time with the capability of generating 279 megawatts. In 2001, the Legislature declared McCamey—whose area now has more than 1,000 MW of wind power—as the Wind Energy Capital of Texas.



2012

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Equal Exchange, based in West Bridgewater, Massachusetts, is among the 300-plus worker-owned co-ops in the nation. Equal Exchange partners with small farmers' co-ops in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the United States to produce fairly traded organic coffees, teas, chocolates, bananas, olive oils and almonds.

CO-OP PEOPLE

Bandera EC Couple Renews Vows Via Face-to-Face Video

BY ASHLEY CLARY-CARPENTER

Most husbands would be in the doghouse if they forgot that all-important date: the wedding anniversary. That holds true for

Bandera Electric Cooperative IT Supervisor Richard McDonald, even though he only has to remember every four years.

"I asked her to marry me one week after I met her, and she said no. I told her I would never ask her again," Richard said of Lory Ann, his wife of 24 years. "She asked me eight years later on Sadie Hawkins Day (which always falls on leap day), and I said yes."

As part of Lory Ann's proposal, she told him: "If you marry me on leap day, you only have to

remember your wedding anniversary once every four years." His reply: Every four years then, the couple would renew their vows in a different way.



Every four years, Richard and Lory Ann McDonald take that big wedding leap.

JENNIFER McDONALD

At high noon, February 29, 1988, the couple—high school sweethearts who met while cruising Walzem Road in San Antonio—were wed beneath an oak tree across from the Bandera County courthouse.

Since then, the couple has renewed their vows in a limo at a drive-thru chapel in Las Vegas. On another anniversary, Richard's brother married them again at his place in Chico, California. Then they were married at a friend's ranch in Tarpley. But 2012 posed a problem.

"We were going to come up with something last minute, and that's when the co-op called me out of town," Richard said. It was an important meeting in Dallas—one he couldn't miss. Just when the McDonalds thought this might be the year they had to break tradition, technology came to the rescue.

The eldest of their four children, 23-year-old Jonathan, became an ordained officiant online. Then, with Lory Ann using her iPad in Tarpley and Richard using his in Dallas—and connected with FaceTime, a face-to-face video call application—Jonathan presided over their "virtual" wedding.

"The only thing missing was the kiss at the end," Lory Ann said.

Ashley Clary-Carpenter, field editor
Send Co-op People ideas to editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

The **KINGS** and **QUEENS** of Brownsville



When It Comes to Chess, Students in Texas' Southernmost Border Town Make All the Right Moves

With foldable chessboards in small, oblong bags slung over their shoulders, armies of excited children squeeze through the halls of Filemon B. Vela Middle School on a winter Saturday morning. Everywhere, coaches, teachers and volunteers shuffle groups back and forth from one corridor to the next to gaming areas set up throughout the small campus in Brownsville. Alongside follow mothers and fathers, cousins and grandparents, aunts, uncles and anyone else the competitors' families have invited to the annual Chess of Champions, one of 10 major chess tournaments held for students in kindergarten through high school in this border city.

Brownsville, with a population exceeding 175,000, sprawls along the southernmost tip of Texas in the Rio Grande Valley. The lush city with tropical temperatures and palm-fringed, artificial lakes, known locally as *resacas*, attracts avid bird-watchers from around the world and serves as a winter home for thousands of retirees—typically from the Midwest and the North—dubbed Winter Texans or “snowbirds.”

But the city lies in an impoverished area, where the median household income is roughly \$30,000, about 95 percent of students are considered economically disadvantaged and 34 percent have limited proficiency in English. When Brownsville and other cities in the Valley make national headlines, it is usually in connection with the politics of immigration or the atroc-

ities of the drug war only a stone's throw away in Mexico.

Yet, over the past two decades, a different story has attracted the attention of major media outlets, including Texas Monthly, The New York Times, CBS and HBO, as they chronicle the legacy of chess as a phenomenon in the region and the burgeoning of some of the world's newest young talent.

At national championships, schools from the Brownsville Independent School District have placed among the top five in team competition since 2005. At the state level, they have dominated the Texas Scholastic Championships chess competition, winning about a dozen first-place slots at the elementary, middle and high school levels since 1993.

Tournaments like the one at Vela Middle School are family affairs. Parents, relatives and community members pitch in to raise money, contribute team snacks and meals—be it breakfast tacos or lasagna—and pack schools during competitions, so much so that in some instances, police have even been called out to unsnarl traffic jams.

At Vela, the parking lot is filled to the brink, and cars spill onto the side streets, parked brazenly under “No Parking” signs. Inside the gym, the commotion amplifies. Players search for their places among rosters taped to the walls and press their way through rows and rows of numbered, brown cafeteria tables. Hundreds of chessboards, checkered forest green and white, deck their sur-

faces, pieces at the ready: rooks bidding time to topple kings, queens waiting to capture knights.

Gertrude Sharp Elementary School second-grader Eduardo Campella Rodriguez, or “Campy” as his friends call him, climbs onto his assigned metal chair. He sits on his knees to get a full view of the chessboard in front of him. The pint-sized 8-year-old with bright, chestnut eyes and a quick wit isn't nervous, he says. Not yet. So far, he has always won his first round. “Maybe by the fourth or fifth I will be, but I get more confident when I win,” he later says with a sheepish smile.

He is good at winning, too. He beams when his teachers list his victories. He placed second in his division at his first national chess tournament. He was 5 then, and in kindergarten. But Campy's triumph for such a young child does not surprise most Valley educators or chess coaches. There is no mystery—and more to it than luck—behind what has led to the rise of young chess stars like Campy.

It's due to hard, hard work. It's due to community effort. “To me, it comes down to expectations,” says Juliet V. Garcia, president of the University of Texas at Brownsville. Children from the Valley, predominantly Hispanic, are often clumped into stereotypes and assigned government labels, such as at-risk or low-income. But when it comes to the game of chess, educators and parents impel them to succeed—and they thrive.

“It’s a pretty powerful change of a paradigm,” she says.

Chess: What the Cool Kids Play

J.J. Guajardo has told this story at least 600 times to friends, family members and dozens of reporters, he estimates, chuckling. But he does not mind sharing it again. It is inspirational, he says, one of the few positive tales told about Brownsville, where the good is often overlooked or forgotten.

School officials and parents consider Guajardo the father of the city’s chess movement. He’s a figure they revere along the lines of Jaime Escalante, a Los Angeles high school teacher whose mentoring of at-risk students turned a failing calculus program into one of the nation’s best. The true story played out in the 1988 film “Stand and Deliver.”

But Guajardo, a soft-spoken, large man with kind eyes, is more modest. On a warm November night, sporting a Hawaiian shirt and a brown, tweed flat cap, he sits with his wife at a small pub in McAllen, a large Valley city about an hour from Brownsville. He is honored by the Hollywood comparisons, he says, but prefers the focus stay on the students. “I don’t think I picked chess,” Guajardo says. “Chess picked me.”

He was a teacher at Brownsville’s Russell Elementary School in 1989 when several children in his rambunctious group of sixth-graders were believed to have broken the gym coach’s vinyl square dance records as part of a prank. No outright accusations were made, Guajardo recalls, but the episode brought the principal marching into his classroom.

The principal urged him to create an extracurricular program that could keep the group of high-energy students busy in the mornings and stop them from causing trouble. She suggested chess.

Chess. The art form—or sport (it is often debated which)—is known as the “royal game,” in which the pieces, kings and queens, bishops and pawns, are moved across a checkered board to attack and capture. Its history spans centuries, a pastime popular among the echelons of the elite who have mastered the skills of strategy and analytical thought.

And Guajardo was charged with introducing all of this to a group of children who could barely keep still. But his students showed an interest, and he



Eduardo Campella Rodriguez—known to his friends as ‘Campy’—is already used to winning as he prepares to enter the third grade. In kindergarten, Campy placed second in his division at his first national chess tournament. His success mirrors what Brownsville school officials attribute to hard work across the board.

taught them how to play, even though he only knew the basics. All of the children built upon the foundations Guajardo taught them, and later, they could win in a match against their instructor.

The students raised about \$500 (Guajardo paid most of it out of his own pocket) to attend their first state championship in Austin in the spring of 1990, he recalls with a proud smile. They did not win that year. But they did win two school years later—and every time after that for the next seven consecutive years.

Like the students, Guajardo improved with practice and started organizing competitions at the school.

“I started learning the nuances of the game and how to run a tournament, how to read a wall chart, how to make sure the pairings were correct, and we began to become more sophisticated as we participated,” he remembers.

The chess team at Russell Elementary also gained participants, growing from a dozen students to more than 50 after the team won its first school title. Soon the school’s competitions were drawing hundreds. Students from across the country wanted to travel to Brownsville for a chance to compete against Russell players, and newspapers throughout the region began featuring



TOP: Thanks to J.J. Guajardo, a former elementary school teacher who ignited students' passions, chess is what the cool kids do. **BOTTOM:** Students at Brownsville's Hanna High School ponder their next moves. On the left side of the table Ian Santos (red jacket), Brandon Marchan, Josh Garza, Danny Casas, Miguel Hernandez and Tanis Anzaldúa match wits against opponents on the right side: James Ukoli (foreground, yellow shirt), Christopher Ingle, John J. Davila, Ivana Santos, Nidia Jacome and Katy Prebble.

its hometown heroes, Guajardo says. Chess became what the cool kids did.

Kings and Queens on Campus

Guajardo resigned as Russell Elementary's chess coach in 1999, but the movement he spurred continued forward. More schools in the Brownsville school district and private schools across the area developed chess programs.

In 1999, Morningside Elementary School gripped media attention when a group of second- and third-graders placed second in the national championships. It was the first time a school from Brownsville had made it that far.

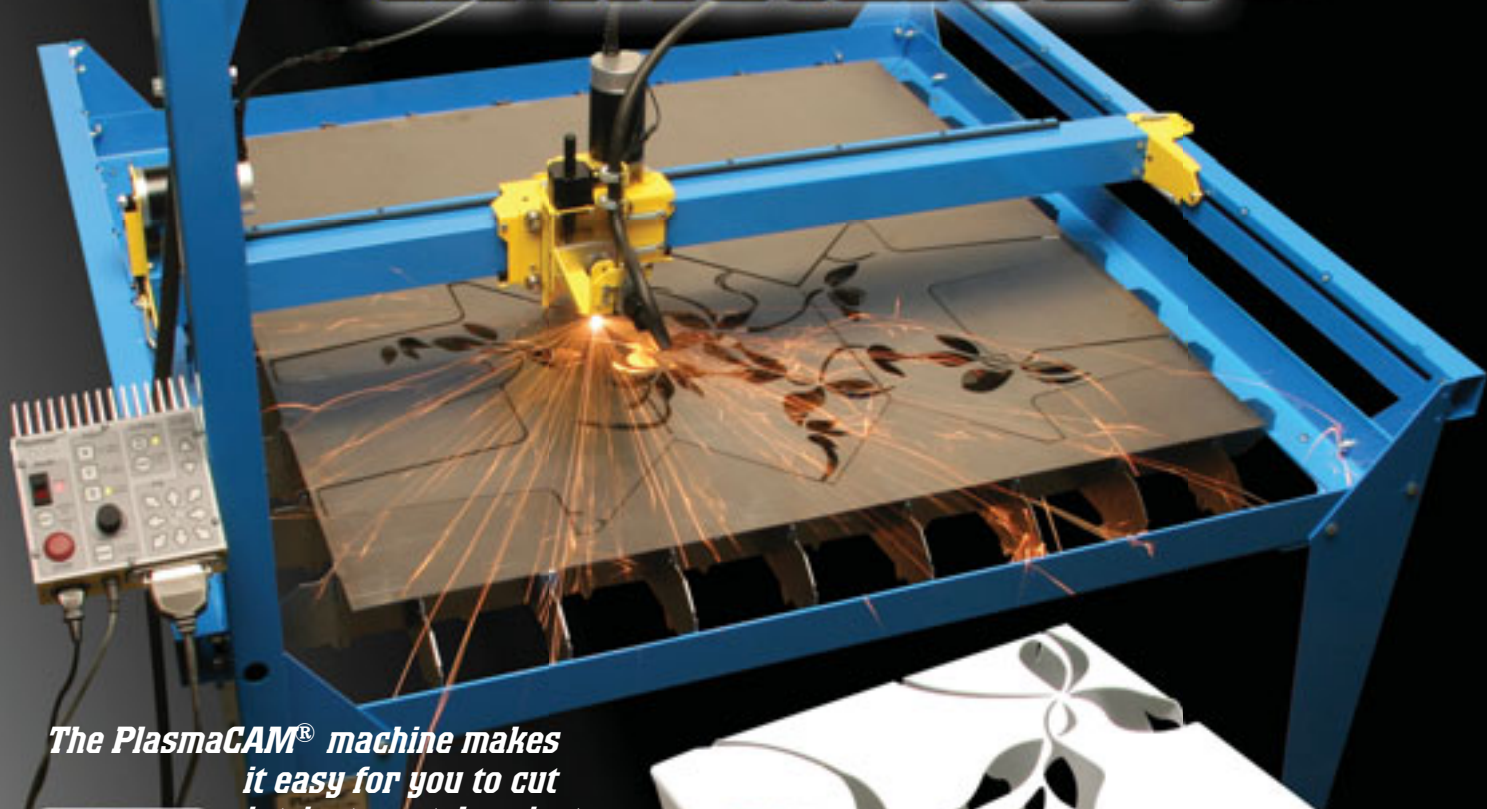
"And it really just took off. We started with six kids, and by the time we left Morningside, we had well over 100 kids playing chess," says Rusty Harwood, one of three second-grade teachers at the time who, inspired by Guajardo's success, started the chess team. Harwood, who now serves as the director for the chess program at The University of Texas at Brownsville, went on to teach at Americo Paredes Elementary in 2001. There, he helped start another chess team that advanced to win seven national titles through the years, including six under his direction.

The community rallied behind the students' successes, and the chess movement grew into a citywide effort, with students and faculty working with families and local businesses to raise funds for tournaments and trips. For many children who had never left Brownsville, traveling to state and national competitions allowed them to explore other parts of the country for the first time. Parents later banded together to gain financial support from Brownsville ISD. Now, the program operates on an annual budget of \$400,000.

As the program soared, UTB President Garcia was among its major proponents. While on a visit to Washington, D.C., to serve as chair of the Advisory Committee to Congress on Financial Aid, she told then-U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley about Morningside Elementary's 1999 feat. It became the first example of success cited by Riley in his speech titled "State of the Union Address for Hispanic Education."

And when a former college student approached her with the idea of launching a chess program at UTB,

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Students of all ages represent chess success in Brownsville. **TOP:** Luke Moore, who's entering the third grade at Americo Paredes Elementary; **MIDDLE:** Ivana Santos, a recent graduate of Hanna High School; **BOTTOM:** and Chayse Sundt, a soon-to-be sophomore at The University of Texas at Brownsville, are part of an incredible story that has captured the attention of media outlets nationwide.

Garcia says she did not have to think about it twice. "It felt absolutely natural," she says of drawing upon an existing pool of students who were quickly surpassing the levels of their instructors and seeking a higher platform to which to advance.

When the UTB chess team formed, one of its loftiest ambitions was beating The University of Texas at Dallas, known for its success at the national level. Now the college students are going head-to-head with Ivy League students from Harvard and Yale: UTB teams have advanced three times to Final Four competition—the country's topmost collegiate tournament sanctioned by the United States Chess Federation—and have placed in the top five four times at the Pan American Intercollegiate Team Chess Championships, the foremost intercollegiate team chess competition in the Americas.

Better training at the university level also has since trickled down to younger students, school officials say. The area had no grandmasters, the highest title a player can attain in chess, back in the 1990s when Guajardo's students first started taking state titles. Now, the UTB chess team, including its coach, boasts four of roughly 1,250 grandmasters in the world.

Future Moves

School officials say they do not see enthusiasm for the game ever fizzling out in Brownsville. With university players now serving as coaches, and with former Brownsville ISD students returning to teach, younger students are developing increasingly higher skills.

Chess competitors in the Valley now span the ages. Most train in free, after-school lessons held three to four times a week. Before violence escalated in Mexico, some families crossed over into Matamoros, only a few minutes' trip across one of the city's three international bridges, where they could pay less for coaching than on the U.S. side. There are still some brave enough to try, like the family of 12-year-old Edgar Santoyo, who was featured on HBO's *Real Sports*. But most stick to private tutors and computer programs designed to increase proficiency, school officials say.

Many outsiders are amazed upon learning that Brownsville students are

so good at chess. Back in the day, Guajardo remembers, intimidated opponents would spread rumors that students practiced instead of going to class—of course, that was not true, he assures. School leaders have more realistic theories; bilingual students, for instance, could have an edge when learning chess because it is a lot like learning another language.

To Garcia, the most important piece, she says, is that educators need to do a better job of tapping into students' potential. "The discussion is not really about chess, is it?" she asks. "It's about how the brain really works and how expectations work and how then, why aren't we able to translate the success children are having in chess into other disciplines?"

Yet some educators have seen chess help students in other areas. It boosts self-confidence and develops high critical-thinking and memory skills, school officials say, requiring players to recognize and memorize elaborate patterns of attack. Teachers and coaches attest to students' improvements in academics as well, noting higher state standardized testing scores.

And chess also teaches students life lessons, Guajardo says. "One of the basic rules of the game is 'touch move,'" he explains. "That means that if you touch a piece, you have to move that piece. You can't take it back."

You can't say, "Never mind." So the children sit on their hands, until they absolutely know what their next move will be and can commit to it. They learn the virtue of patience and to calculate, to predict outcomes, to be self-sufficient. "They learn how to succeed using their own wit, without anyone's help," Guajardo says. "Because in chess, you are all alone out there."

Across the street from Vela Middle School sits Cameron Park, a colonia, or humble neighborhood, considered one of the most impoverished areas in the nation.

But the disparities and struggles of the outside world seem far removed from the classroom where several children have their chessboards laid out on the floor, enthralled in last-minute practice sessions before their next match.

Jazmine Ulloa is a reporter for the Austin American-Statesman.

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BY CAROL MOCZYGEMBA

MAGICAL HISTORY TOUR

{PART TWO}

Be a True Texan: Stop the Car, Get Out and Let Curiosity Be Your Guide on State's Fascinating Heritage Trails

LAMPASAS ★ MASON ★ FORT MCKAVETT



EDITOR'S NOTE: *In the second of two stories about stops along two of the 10 Texas Heritage Trails, join us as we visit Lampasas in the Hill Country Heritage Trail region, and Mason and the Fort McKavett State Historic Site on the Forts Heritage Trail. To learn more about the Heritage Trails, go to www.thc.state.tx.us/heritagetourism/htprogram.shtml. To read the May story about Marble Falls, Burnet and Longhorn Cavern, go to TexasCoopPower.com.*

SOME TEXAN I AM. Long before writing this story, I had driven through Lampasas numerous times without stopping. I had heard that Mason is a mighty fine town but had never been there, and I didn't know Fort McKavett existed. Just as I discovered with my visits to Marble Falls, Burnet and Longhorn Cavern, these

places are rich with stories, fascinating and friendly people, preserved and refurbished remnants of the past and vibrant energy that shapes their present and predicts their future. When, after three days, I ended my whirlwind trip, I felt a renewed pride in my Texas heritage and a resolve to see more of my home state.

The dining, lodging and touring references are based on my personal experience, and are far from comprehensive. Visit the chamber of commerce in each town to get the full menu of options.

Lampasas

ONCE KNOWN AS THE "SARATOGA OF THE SOUTH," Lampasas was home to one of the most popular health resorts in Texas in the 1880s. People came to "take the water," drinking and



Hancock Springs in Lampasas

SUMMER WILES



SUMMER MILES

bathing in the sulfur water of Hanna and Hancock springs to cure what ailed them. The springs still flow, but the bathhouses have long since shut down, although visitors can see the remains of the Hancock Springs bathhouse and the original limestone pool built around Hanna Springs in the 1870s.

Today, Lampasas (www.lampasaschamber.org) is again looking to its springs and natural resources for economic healing. Micky Tower, director of the city's parks and recreation department, shows me a 17-acre spread traversed by Cooper Springs that's being developed as a nature trail and bird and butterfly park. With the winter's cooler weather and a little rain, the fields have recovered from the punishing drought of summer. Stretches of green with a backdrop of oak and pecan trees hint at a future open-air classroom or a peaceful path for long walks.

During the summer, the city sponsors Moonlight Swim Nights at the spring-fed pool in Hancock Springs Park. Tower says this event is growing and attracts swimmers from around the area, including Austin.

In town, be sure to tour the renovated Second Empire-style courthouse, where the grand old courtroom has been restored to its 12-foot ceilings with pressed tin, and the blocked tin wall panels duplicate the original 1884 pattern.

Go to the third-floor museum and check out the inner workings of the 1884 Seth Thomas clock in the courthouse tower. In the 1940s, the clock stopped. With original parts

not readily available, its mechanical innards were replaced with an electric motor. In the 1980s, two local craftsmen, Major Dumas and J.M. Crumley, searched for replacement parts. What they couldn't find, they machined themselves. Jeff Jackson of the Lampasas County Historical Commission points out the homemade pendulum, which he said was created from a fire extinguisher canister.

Through the work of Vision Lampasas, murals, sculptures and a downtown pocket park celebrating water are some notable projects that dress up the town.

EAT: *I cap off my tour of Lampasas with dinner at The County Seat, a family-friendly restaurant on the square, featuring a varied menu and full-service dining.*

Mason

I'M SCHEDULED TO MEET MY MASON CONTACT at the Willow Creek Café on the town's square. I stand just inside the door and try not to appear lost as I scan the diners, as if I would recognize someone I've never met. If this were a movie, the soundtrack would be a lonely, solo piano.

Finally, I approach a woman at the cash register and tell her who I'm looking for.

Change the tempo on that soundtrack and bring in the guitars and harmonicas. The cash register lady breaks into a big smile, and I'm now a guest. She knows just the person I'm talking about, and she's on the lookout.

Fast-forward about 30 minutes, and I'm sitting around a



SUMMER MILES

table with a bowl of chili and my three new friends, fourth-generation Mason residents Patsy and Gene Zesch and Chamber of Commerce Director Kristi Nunez. I'm getting a crash course in Mason history, including the parts that some residents still only whisper about. Gene and Patsy's families settled in Mason County in 1857. Patsy, dressed in a flouncy Western skirt and boots, talks about the long line of artists on both sides of the family. Gene's hands are stiffened with arthritis now, but until recent years, he was the prolific creator of wood-carved caricatures of the American cowboy, sought after by collectors around the world, including Lyndon B. Johnson. Zesch's cowboy prints appear on card racks across the country for the Leanin' Tree line of greeting cards.

Nunez is a relative newcomer, having traded her job a few years ago as vice president of a Houston business for director of the Mason Chamber of Commerce (www.masontxcoc.com). She has history in these parts, too, owing to spending summers here with a childhood friend.

The Mason stories swirl around me. It's pointed out that a cut sandstone wall in the café was once part of nearby Fort Mason. When the fort was vacated after the Civil War, Mason citizens recycled the building materials. In effect, the heritage of Fort Mason is part of daily life, seamlessly incorporated into some of the very structures that define the town.

On a hill overlooking its namesake, Fort Mason stands perched like the sentry it was established to be in 1851. Today, the restored officers' quarters are all that's left, but the fort's presence and heritage loom large in Mason. Frontier soldier re-enactor and guide Tommy Koepke is on hand to give a tour of the dog-trot-style building. Take note of the 1796 map denoting: "Great Space of Land Unknown." One day that vast unknown space would be Texas.

A number of prominent generals, including Albert Sidney Johnston and Robert E. Lee, trained at the Union fort. When the Civil War broke out, it was there that Lee decided his allegiance was with his home state of Virginia, and he joined the Confederacy.

Beginning in the 1870s, Mason was at the center of another conflict, the infamous Hoo Doo War, a blood feud—

allegedly incited by a cattle-rustling incident—between German-speaking and English-speaking families that terrorized the town and countryside until it finally ended in 1902. (To learn more, read David Johnson's book, *The Mason County "Hoo Doo" War, 1874-1902*.) It took more than 100 years for townspeople to talk openly about the Hoo Doo War, since many prominent descendants preferred to bury the infamous deeds along with their forebears.

These days, the biggest battle in town is on the football field, where the Mason Punchers perfected the plays that won them the 2011 Class 1A Division I state championship.

Mason's town square shows off another facet of the town's identity as a magnet for artists. Check with the Chamber of Commerce for a walking tour of the square and for a list of attractions, activities, accommodations and dining options.

Visit Gems of the Hill Country, where gemologist Diane Eames creates stunning jewelry from the state gem, the Texas blue topaz, which, in the Lone Star State, is found only in Mason County. Get your history fix at the Mason Square Museum, where you'll see the largest light-blue topaz discovered in North America, right here in 1904. Visit Hinckley's Country Store, an old-time variety store owned and operated by the mayor and his wife, who also own the Red Door Bed & Breakfast upstairs and are working on opening an antique shop next door. Stop by the Odeon Theater, which has been screening films since 1928 and is still in business as a movie house and performing arts venue. Just off the square, stop in and taste some award-winning selections at locally owned Sandstone Cellars Winery. In front of the Eckert Library, see the bronze statue of Old Yeller, commissioned to honor Mason-born writer Fred Gipson.

EAT: *Willow Creek Café is a pleasant establishment on the square with a diverse menu, and Santos Taqueria is a small café with authentic Mexican fare and décor that makes you think you're in a quaint Mexican village.*

SLEEP: *I stay at the Gamel Guest House, just off the square. Built in 1869 by cattle baron John Gamel, the*

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TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

home has been lovingly restored by owners Patsy and Gene Zesch. Earlier in the day, I had purchased a copy of *The Lucia Holmes Diary* at the Mason Square Museum. Lucia and her husband, Henry, lived across the street from the Gamels. Their home still stands, a mustard-yellow cottage I can see from the kitchen window. The two couples were close friends, so the diary fills in the details of daily life in both households and interactions between the women and the men. But it is most valued for Lucia's account of events that shook the town between 1875 and 1876, during the infamous Hoo Doo War. I read until I can't keep my eyes open and fall asleep with images of Lucia Holmes and Catherine Gamel visiting over tea in this house more than a century ago.

Fort McKavett State Historic Site

YOU'LL THINK YOU'RE IN A TIME WARP as you approach Fort McKavett (www.visitfortmckavett.com), 23 miles west of Menard. The frontier base, constructed in 1852, was established to protect immigrants to California and travelers on the San Antonio-El Paso military road from Comanche and Apache attacks. Today, just as it did then, Fort McKavett stands isolated, a village of 19 whitewashed, hand-cut limestone buildings—including a hospital, morgue, bakery, barracks, officers' quarters and a school. From this windswept mesa, rocky scrubland stretches for miles, until it meets the distant hills. It's easy to imagine a soldier standing sentinel, sweeping his field glasses along the horizon for signs of movement.

At the visitors' center, formerly the fort's hospital, a small but very well-organized and informative museum maps out the fort's history. One exhibit notes an observation of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman, who came through Fort McKavett in 1876 and proclaimed it "the prettiest post in Texas." Nearby settlers must have thought so, too. When the military left the fort for good in 1883, the settlers moved in and established a civilian community that remained until 1974.

My guide is Jay Wright, outfitted in the navy blue, wool uniform of a frontier soldier of the Second Regiment

Dragoons. Wright grew up in the area and knows the story of this place and its characters as if he lived it himself. We talk about the kind of person who would voluntarily live this rugged and dangerous life. Wright says many of the infantry soldiers were running away from something, maybe the law, maybe a bad marriage, but probably debtors. The average soldier was about 5 feet, 5 inches tall, he tells me, as we enter a dormitory furnished with rows of narrow, cast-iron cots and little else. The officers' quarters are more well appointed to accommodate wives and children; even so, there is only one bedroom, and a very small one at that. Period furnishings tell a story of small luxury: One upholstered and stuffed chair; one velvet bed cover; ruby goblets; pieces of china brought from the East; and an extra wall hook for a lady's gown.

After the Civil War, companies of Buffalo Soldiers, African-American troops known for their bravery and tenacity in battle, were stationed here and fought in the Indian Wars. There are several stories about how the soldiers got their name, but the most popular one attributes it to the Native Americans who believed the soldiers' hair resembled the sacred mane of the buffalo. Buffalo Soldier was thus a term of honor ascribed by their enemies on the battlefield.

Menard

MY MEANDERING COMES TO AN END in Menard, where my only stop is for lunch at the Side Oats Café, named for Texas' official state grass, sideoats grama. From a menu of imaginative entrées and side dishes, I choose a hearty and delicious grilled steak salad. Although I don't linger, I drive away knowing I will come back someday. I want to hike on the 10-mile historic Ditch Walk, an irrigation ditch built by the Spanish in the mid-1750s, and visit the newly restored Presidio de San Sabá, established by the Spanish in 1757.

Happy Trails to You

AS I HEAD BACK TO AUSTIN, a little film reel of flashbacks plays in my mind's eye. The tiny schoolhouse at Fort Croghan in Burnet. The old train depot in Marble Falls. The cold wind whistling through the soldiers' barracks at Fort McKavett. Mason's pretty town square. The surprise of Lampasas, with its murals and public art. Longhorn Cavern's secret passages and shy creatures. As the images roll past, I can't help humming to myself that lilting, cowboy farewell: "Happy trails to you ... until we meet again."

Carol Moczygemba, executive editor

MORE INFORMATION

To request a *Texas Heritage Trails* travel guide, call 1-866-276-6219 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us/travel to download materials.

Communities participating in the *Texas Heritage Trails* Program receive assistance from heritage tourism experts in developing and promoting historical and cultural attractions. For more information on becoming a participating historical community or site, email community-heritage@thc.state.tx.us or call (512) 463-6092.

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Stay Alert To Avoid

Lightning Strikes

Did you know lightning can strike even if it's not raining? Lightning strikes kill 55 to 60 people every year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. More than 400 people are hit by a bolt each year.

But if you prepare before an outdoor event and know how to protect yourself, you can keep your family safe from lightning. Follow these tips from NOAA:

PLAN AHEAD. Just as you have an emergency plan for fires and weather events like tornadoes and hurricanes, form an action plan for lightning. Choose a safe shelter, and time how long it takes to get there.

CHECK THE WEATHER. A simple forecast can tell you whether you should delay outdoor activities to avoid a dangerous situation.

LOOK TO THE SKY. Dark skies, whipping winds and lightning flashes are all signs that you should stay indoors.

SEEK SHELTER. As soon as you hear a rumble of thunder, head for a safe place—an enclosed structure with plumbing and wiring is best, or a car. Open-air shelters, sheds and covered porches are often not safe places. Avoid tall trees that stand alone, towers and poles, as well as metal fences and other conductors of electricity. And keep out of open areas, so that you're not the tallest object in a field.

WAIT IT OUT. Leaving safe shelter too quickly makes you vulnerable to lightning strikes. Wait at least 30 minutes after the

last rumble of thunder before you head back outdoors.

AVOID CORDED PHONES AND APPLIANCES. If you're indoors when a storm hits, do not use phones or appliances with cords. Lightning can travel through your home's wiring. Also, water is a great conductor of electricity, so don't take a bath or shower.

If someone near you has been struck by lightning, call 911 immediately. A certified person should begin CPR right away if necessary—the victim will not have an electric charge and is safe to touch.

For more information on how to stay safe in a lightning storm, visit www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov.



ISTOCKPHOTO

As you spend time working or playing in your yard this summer, use caution with electric tools and power lines.

- Call 811 if you plan to dig in your yard. Whether you're putting up a fence, planting trees or digging a foundation for an addition to your home, you run the risk of hitting a buried utility line. Don't guess; damaging utility equipment can leave you and your neighbors without service and could wind up costing you big bucks for repairs. 811 is a free service that can advise you on the presence of all buried utilities.

- If your trees need trimming, avoid utility lines overhead. Hire a professional to trim trees that are within reach of an overhead electric line. If the lines are close to your roof, call your electric cooperative to work out a safety plan that might include temporarily shutting off the power.

- Educate your children about the dangers of playing around electrical equipment. Forbid them from flying kites near overhead lines, climbing utility poles or playing around substations.

- Assume every fallen power line is "live" and deadly. Stay far away—and keep your children away. Call 911 and your co-op for help if you see one.

- Before you use your power tools, clean them and inspect them for cracks, frayed cords and damaged plugs.

- Always remember that water and electricity don't mix. Avoid using electrically powered tools if the ground (or grass) is damp.

Block the Heat for Cooler Rooms

DEAR JIM: Even though I think my house is adequately insulated, my air conditioner runs a lot. On sunny days, the bedroom ceiling seems hot, so I assume heat is coming from the hot roof. How can I reduce this heat flow?

—Shauna G.

DEAR SHAUNA: Adequate attic insulation is only one aspect of keeping your house cool and reducing air conditioning costs. By “insulation,” most folks mean thermal insulation that blocks heat conduction. This includes fiberglass, rock wool, foam and/or cellulose insulation on the attic floor and in the walls.

There are three modes of heat transfer—conduction, convection and radiation. Conduction refers to heat flow, typically through solid materials. This is how the handle of a metal skillet gets hot on the stove. Convection is similar to conduction, but occurs in fluids and gases. This is why you feel cooler in the wind than in still air.

Regular thermal insulation in your home’s walls and ceiling, to which you refer, blocks conduction and convection

heat transfer. Most recommended insulation charts, which mention R-values, refer to thermal insulation.

The third mode of heat flow, radiation, is how the sun heats Earth or how you feel warm in front of an open fireplace. Unfortunately, standard thermal insulation is not very effective at blocking this type of heat flow. On a hot summer afternoon, a roof, especially a dark asphalt shingle one, gets extremely hot. This heat then radiates downward through the attic floor insulation and into your house.

You can tell if the ceiling is hotter than the walls just by putting the back of your hand against it in the afternoon. If it really feels much warmer, this may be a major reason for high electric bills.

Even with your air conditioner running and air in the room reasonably cool, you may still feel uncomfortable under a warm ceiling. This heat often causes you to set the air conditioner thermostat even lower, which further increases your electric bills.

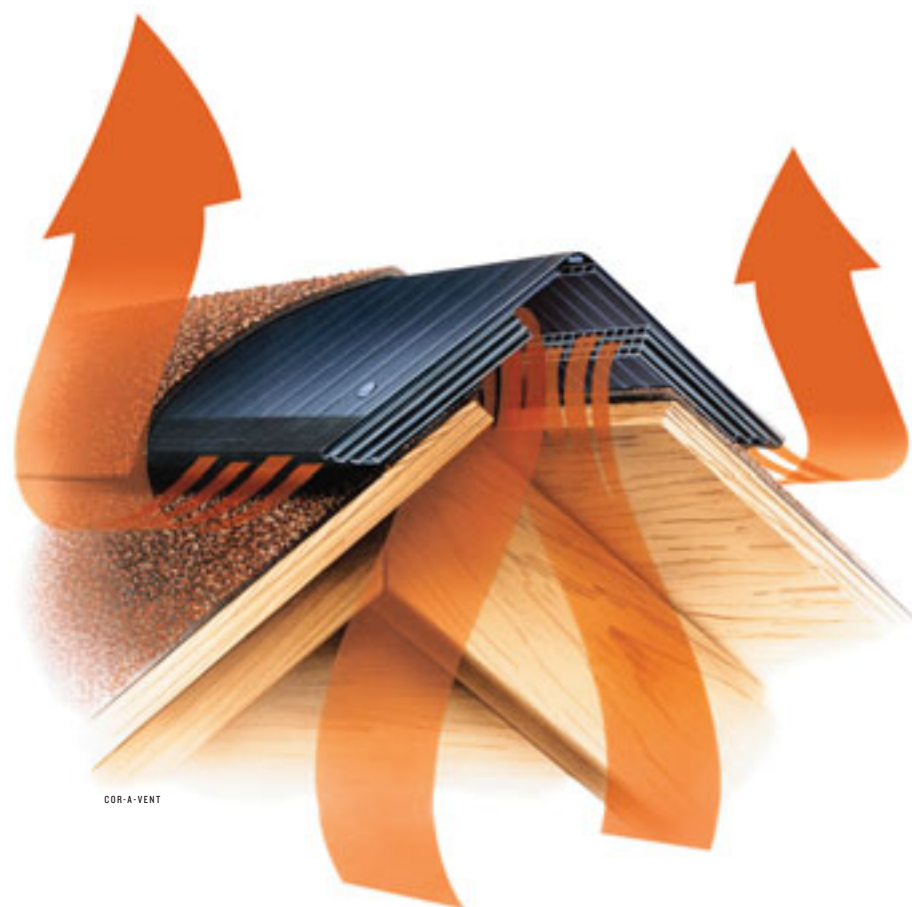
If your house will need a new roof soon, replace it with light-colored—preferably white—shingles to reduce the roof temperature. Metal roofs, particularly aluminum ones with heat-reflective (not visibly reflective) paint, stay even cooler and minimize heat transfer to the ceiling below.

Other than replacing the roof, adding insulation and adequate attic ventilation can help significantly. When I installed more attic vents in my own home, I could immediately feel the temperature difference in my second-floor bedroom.

Attic insulation will also cool ceilings that meet attic space because it blocks heat transfer. Don’t assume your insulation is adequate. Over time, it can be damaged and settle, reducing its effectiveness. Replacing insulation and adding extra can make a big difference. Adding attic vents can also help. Continuous ridge or inlet soffit vents usually work best. They allow cool air to move over the insulation, become less dense as it warms up, and then flow out the ridge vent.

Your attic and roof will still be hot, but extra insulation and ventilation will help cool the living space underneath your attic.

© James Dulley



This schematic shows how hot air flows from an attic through a ridge-type attic vent. Notice it can be covered with shingles for a nice appearance.

I Track Wildlife

*And so can you with
this digital field guide
that deciphers clues
left by our wild
neighbors.*

**By Sheryl
Smith-Rodgers**



Read any best-sellers lately? Prefer historical nonfiction or maybe the latest titles in science fiction? Like many people, Jonah Evans of Alpine in far West Texas loves a spine-tingling mystery. But his favorite page-turners can't be found on a bookshelf or in a library. Instead, Evans—who created iTrack Wildlife, a digital field guide made exclusively for iPhones and iPads that contains track information for 65 North American mammals—sleuths the oft-ignored footprints of elusive animals.

“If you're aware of tracks, then you can read stories of what's happening around you,” says the 33-year-old Evans, an expert tracker who's employed as a wildlife diversity biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. “Tracks can help you know who's eating who, which is the crux of the dramas happening in an open field or on a muddy riverbank. Mice and rats feed on grass seeds. The scat of gray foxes and coyotes contain their bones. Owl pellets may, too. So if you learn to read animal tracks, you learn their stories.”

For Evans, even a seemingly mundane stroll down his dirt driveway can turn up fascinating tales of after-dark trysts and midnight mayhem. “In the morning, when I leave for work and walk outside to my pickup, I read tracks left in our front yard by javelinas, deer, raccoons and striped skunks,” Evans says. “Then after I get out of my truck at my office, I read more tracks left by gray foxes, White-winged Doves and domestic cats.”

Tracking, said to be both an art and a science, blends storytelling with acute observation. “Animals are shy and hide from us,” explains Evans, who always totes his digital camera so he can document what he finds. “But an experienced tracker can take a walk and find signs, like tufts of hair, digs and burrows, or skulls and bones. A good tracker can even sometimes tell if the animal stopped to turn and look behind it.”

Deciphering a track used to be tough. Not anymore, thanks to Evans. Last fall, he released iTrack Wildlife (www.itrackwildlife.com), an application that features more than 675 photos of animals, tracks and scat along with front and hind feet track drawings, gait information and species accounts.

“My goal is to enable anybody to identify animal tracks,” says Evans, who worked for three years to design and develop the app. “Hunters using the app in the field can find out what's going on around them. Hikers in a park can identify tracks they see along a trail. It can even help the rest of us figure out what got into the chicken coop or garden last night.”

Like a book, the app alphabetically lists mammals by their common and scientific names. To identify a track, simply select its basic characteristics, narrow your search to a few similar tracks and then browse through the photos until you find a match.

More detailed searching allows users to enter a track's length and width, symmetry, number of toes and their shape and claws, if any. Results either identify the animal or at least narrow down possibilities. “All without flipping through pages of a field guide,”

Evans adds. “That’s the beauty of a digital guide—you’re not limited by page numbers or printing costs. I can add as much data as I want.” There are plans to eventually add birds, amphibians and invertebrates to iTrack Wildlife.

Evans, who grew up on a ranch near Boerne, inherited his love of wildlife from his parents, Brent Evans and Carolyn Chipman-Evans. In 1988, they founded the Cibolo Nature Center, where Jonah and his sister, Laurel, spent countless hours outdoors with scientists and naturalists. “As a kid, I’d see raccoon tracks along Cibolo Creek, and I got interested in them,” he recalls. “When I grew older, I started reading books on tracking and track identification.”

Evans’ fascination with tracks spiked after he studied under Mark Ellbroch, a renowned author and wildlife tracker who lives in Jackson, Wyoming, and other master trackers. Evans and his wife, Ciel, whom he met at Prescott College, both earned bachelor’s degrees in environmental science from the Arizona school and master’s degrees in wildlife science from Texas A&M University. Thus far, their partnership has produced a website called Nature Tracking (www.naturetracking.com) and a daughter, Stella, who’s nearly 2.

On the job with TPWD in Alpine, Evans uses tracking intermittently. Every week, he answers questions about tracks that come via emails and phone calls from biologists and the public. He trains colleagues as well. Since 2008, Evans has been a track and sign evaluator—he’s one of only six in the U.S.—with the South Africa-based CyberTracker Conservation, which oversees an international system for measuring animal tracking skills. To achieve the designation, Evans had to ace field exams in two different regions of the country. “Before CyberTracker, there was no way to determine someone’s real knowledge about tracks so ‘observer reliability’ could be questioned in some wildlife research projects,” Evans says. As of March, about 160 TPWD biologists had been certified through CyberTracker.

Reading tracks dates back to ancient times, when humans relied on tracking to survive. “Some scientists hypothesize that tracking played a role in how our brains and vision work,” Evans says. “They think that our ability to recognize letters and form them into words may be linked to our ancestors’ ability to read tracks.”

Want to sleuth for tracks? “A good place to find them is under bridges, which attract animals because of the water and also protect their tracks,” Evans suggests. “But you don’t have to go far from home to learn about tracks—they’re all around us!”

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, frequent contributor

FURTHER READING: *Mammal Tracks & Sign: A Guide to North American Species*, by Mark Ellbroch (2003, Stackpole Books); *Bird Tracks & Sign: A Guide to North American Species*, by Mark Ellbroch, Eleanor Marks, C. Diane Boretos (2001, Stackpole Books); *Animal Skulls: A Guide to North American Species*, by Mark Ellbroch (2006, Stackpole Books)



Jonah Evans, a wildlife diversity biologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in Alpine, created iTrack Wildlife, an application made exclusively for iPhones and iPads that contains track information for 65 North American mammals. The digital field guide, he says, can help anybody—from hikers on a park trail to urbanites inspecting their garden or chicken coop—identify animal tracks.

At a Loss for Words

*Flower by flower,
author by author, a
writer rediscovers
her creative voice.*

BY SHERYL
SMITH-RODGERS

Giddy. I hadn't felt like this since the afternoon I'd met a good-looking man from my past and married him five months later. Now, five years later as I drove down a Hill Country ranch road, I felt excited to feel so excited again. Soon, I'd be in the fields, breaking a sweat, working in the July morning sunshine, moving among the flowers. I couldn't wait!

Lately, I'd been struggling to find drive and passion within myself. Was it middle age? Laziness? The summer's excruciating heat and drought? Trying to figure out the reasons frustrated me. I made internal matters even worse by measuring myself against a woman who years ago could write a book at her roll-top desk crowded into the living room while her two small children played, the television blared and supper simmered in the kitchen.

That woman was a much younger me.

Now my empty nest reeked of silence. Day after day, I struggled to turn out one sentence at the same desk, now tucked in a corner of my very own, tastefully decorated office. More often than not, I'd give up at the keyboard before even starting. Why bother? Sometimes, my lack of initiative drove me to tears. Something had to change.

When a close friend went in for dental surgery, I decided fresh flowers might brighten her day. On a whim, I called another friend who grows cut flowers for floral arrangements on her family farm. Did she have bouquets for sale? "Yes," Pamela said. Mustering up some courage, I asked if I could help cut flowers with her. What I didn't say was how I'd secretly fantasized about working in the fields and how the hard physical labor would magically transform my life. Among the flowers, I'd find renewal, inspiration and healing. Or so I thought.

Graciously, Pamela agreed. Quickly, I slathered on some sunscreen and flung on jeans, a cotton top and a gimme cap. As I cruised down the highway, I was barely aware of my foot on the accelerator—I just couldn't get there fast enough! After a bumpy ride down the farm's caliche road, I found Pamela and her grown daughter, Hannah Rose, already bent over knee-high zinnias that waved petaled heads of yellow, pink, lavender, red and white. I threw a long-sleeved shirt on over my top.

"Do you have an extra pair of scissors for me?" I asked, eager to start.

"Nope," Pamela replied from beneath her wide-brimmed hat. "We're going to

cut, and you're going to carry our bunches and put them in buckets of water." She pointed to several black plastic containers, set at the row ends. Right away, I realized my naïveté. Inwardly, I chastised myself. How dare I presume that I could just pick up scissors and cut away! Of course, Pamela knew best how to select and trim blossoms. Years of farming experience had also taught her how to work more efficiently in the field.

I felt like a numskull.

But Pamela paid no mind. She had work to do. With scissors in one hand, she deftly cut one long stem after another, stripping off leaves as she went and adding the stem to her other hand. If a bloom didn't meet her standards, she snipped it off and moved on to the next one. In no time, Pamela had a heap of flowers for me. "Hold them gently across your arm and try to keep the bottoms even," she instructed. "When you put them in the bucket, make sure all the stems are in water or the heads will wilt."

Making my way down the row, I stepped carefully so I wouldn't bruise flowers in passing. Around me, honeybees helicoptered from bloom to bloom, filling the warm air with the drone of their buzzing. Off in the distance, a Lesser Goldfinch trilled, and overhead, a Black Vulture lazily soared. When a tiny crab spider dangled from a zinnia petal, I smiled. I adore all of nature, even blazing heat and sticky sweat.

"Here, give me your shirt," Hannah Rose told me when we broke for water. Then, using the water hose, she drenched the shirt, wrung it out and gave it back to me. "Now you'll stay cool until it dries out." Gingerly, I tugged it back on. Sure enough, the damp material felt cold against my skin for a long while. Heavenly!

Throughout our mornings together over the course of several weeks, Pamela and I talked, laughed and worked as we moved among the flowers. Once, just after Pamela had handed me a huge bunch of wispy celosia, I had to give them right back. "Something's inside my shirtsleeve," I said calmly. Bee, I thought. Wrong. I pulled off the sleeve and found a good-sized grasshopper clinging inside. No big deal. Another time, the farm van got stuck in mud, and a rear tire flung goo all over me. I just shrugged. It'll wash off. We all laughed.

I felt like a hero.

We shared stories about our kids, news about neighbors, aspirations for the future and favorite books from the past. Pamela asked if I'd ever read *A Wrinkle in Time*. "No, who's the author?" I asked, embarrassed by my ignorance. "Madeleine L'Engle. I'll loan you some of her books," Pamela offered.

At home, I opened another book by L'Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*, and could barely set it down. Every page challenged and opened my mind to think differently about creativity. I bought my own copy and vowed to keep reading more of her titles. From the library, I borrowed Pat Conroy's book, *My Reading Life*, and read how different books, classics and contemporary, had left lasting imprints on his personal and professional life. I decided that I, too, wanted to open myself up to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Thomas Wolfe, George MacDonald, Wilkie Collins, Nathaniel Hawthorne, D.H. Lawrence and Beatrix Potter, to name but a few on my list. Right away, I embarked on Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.

A month later, my stint at the flower farm ended. As expected, the giddiness within me mellowed. But a newfound enthusiasm for words emerged. As I closed yet another L'Engle volume, a deep realization filled me: With every page I turn, I still move among the flowers.



Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, frequent contributor

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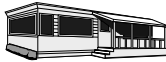
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A Snakebitten Legacy

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

Being a pioneer is not always everything it is cracked up to be. Sometimes there is a psychic price to be paid for posterity, a surcharge that history applies to those who dare to venture where others dare not. Father Leopold Moczygemba, who founded the country's first Polish community, the first Polish Catholic school and consecrated the first Polish Catholic Church, was one person who had to pay a price in his own time for an honored place in history. It took about 120 years for Texans to get around to officially thanking Moczygemba for all his work, but we realize now that there is not much to be done about rattlesnakes and droughts.

The consecration of the church occurred in September 1856 under a spreading live oak tree near the confluence of the San Antonio River and Cibolo Creek. The community that Moczygemba founded there was called Panna Maria, Polish for Virgin Mary. Most of those who attended were newcomers who had recently emigrated from Silesia seeking a better life. At that point, they weren't sure they had found it. Many had come at the urging of Father Moczygemba, one of five Catholic priests chosen by Bishop Jean-Marie Odin of Galveston to work in Odin's sprawling diocese, which covered all of Texas. Moczygemba arrived in Galveston in 1852. He was first assigned to a New Braunfels parish as a resident pastor but was in Castroville when immigrants from Silesia began arriving in 1854.

Upper Silesia, where Moczygemba grew up, had been under Prussian rule since 1742, but the region's peasants maintained their Polish language, traditions and faith. Moczygemba wrote letters back to Silesia, encouraging people to come to this new world of freedom and abundance. Other Silesian letter writers talked of free land, fertile fields and even golden mountains, which we suspect was lifted from earlier descriptions of California. One letter writer described Texas as "a land without winter."

The situation in Poland, complete with floods, a bad economy and epidemics of typhus and cholera, made for attentive readers. Hundreds of Polish immigrants set sail for Galveston in 1854 and arrived on December 3. Moczygemba wasn't there to meet them as they had expected, so they traveled to San Antonio, walking and riding in ox-pulled carts. Moczygemba hurried to greet them there and take them to their new home. The settlers were taken aback by what they found at Panna Maria, which wasn't much. Moczygemba had unwittingly chosen a place that rattlesnakes had already claimed as a nesting site, sort of a viper metropolis among the brush and mesquite. The settlers arrived on Christmas Eve, so Moczygemba conducted a Christmas mass and

thanksgiving ceremony, which turned into a plea for perseverance and guidance in their harsh new world.

One Silesian wrote of the early struggles: "What we suffered here when we started! We didn't have any houses, nothing but fields. And for shelter, only brush and trees. There was tall grass everywhere, so that if anyone took a few steps, he was

lost from sight. Every step of the way you'd meet rattlesnakes. And the crying and complaining of the women and children only made the suffering worse. How golden seemed our Silesia as we looked back in those days!"

Moczygemba hosted a reconciliation banquet at his home where the settlers were allowed to air their complaints. Just as everybody settled down to dinner, a rattlesnake fell from the rafters onto the table, which pretty much put reconciliations on hold.

Moczygemba organized the building of a church at the site around 1856, and a barn served as the country's first Polish school. The winter of 1856-57 was cold and wet, which delayed planting, but it didn't matter because an extreme drought hit that spring; it didn't rain in Panna Maria for 14 months. Wells dried up, the earth cracked and livestock perished.

The settlers directed their frustration toward Moczygemba, whose life was threatened, though there was disagreement as to whether he should be hanged or drowned. Moczygemba retreated first to Castroville and then to other states, serving Polish communities in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri and New York for the rest of his life. He is best known as the cofounder of SS. Cyril & Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan. He died in Michigan on February 23, 1891.

On October 13, 1974, his remains were re-interred at Panna Maria under the oak tree beneath which he had offered Mass for the first arriving Polish immigrants 120 years earlier. A monument was erected at the site honoring him as the "Patriarch of American Polonia."

Fortunately, rattlesnakes were nowhere to be seen this time.

Clay Coppedge, frequent contributor



Father Leopold Moczygemba founded Panna Maria, the nation's first Polish community. But the immigrants he urged to sail to Texas weren't enamored with their drought-stricken, rattlesnake-infested surroundings.

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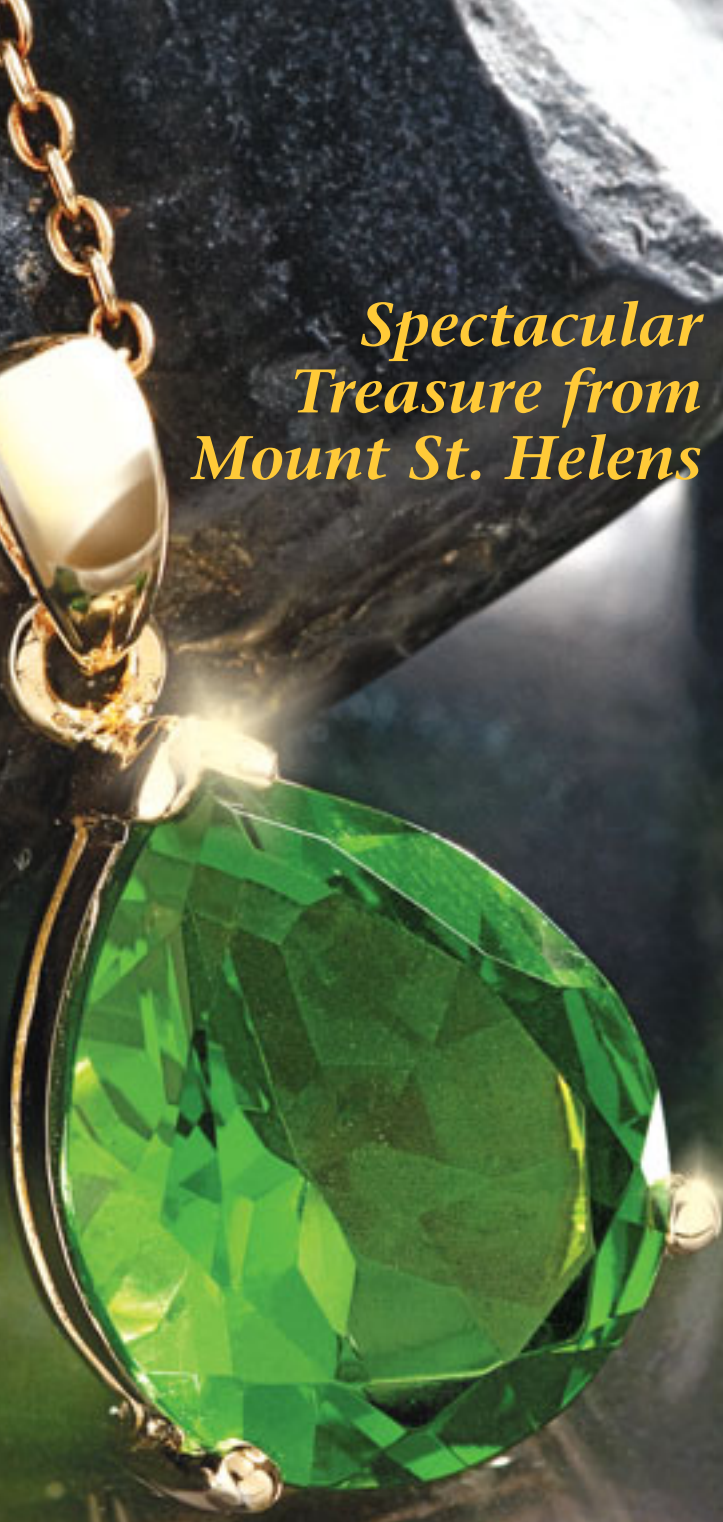
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Blueberries with Cornmeal Shortcakes

A Big Blue Flavor

BY KEVIN HARGIS

Sweet and succulent, fresh, ripe blueberries make a wonderful early summer treat in Texas. The berries, rich in antioxidants, are good for snacking right out of the container (or straight off the bush) and are featured in a number of delicious recipes.

The state's blueberry industry is a relative newcomer, with the first large experimental crop being cultivated in the 1970s at a Texas A&M University research center, according to the Texas Blueberry Marketing Association. From there, heavy commercial production began in the mid-1980s.

The sandy soils of East Texas are ideal for the crop, and fresh blueberries are sold throughout the season (May, June and July) at markets across the state. Or true-blue (berry) mavens can take a road trip to one of the region's pick-your-own farms.

Even in New York City, Texas blueberries get their due. Lisa Fain, the author of a wonderful cooking blog called the Homesick Texan (<http://homesicktexas.blogspot.com>) is a transplanted Texan living in the big city. She missed the food she grew up with as a seventh-generation Texan and has re-created food from all across her native state.

She recently collected those and other recipes in *The Homesick Texan Cookbook* (2011, Hyperion), featuring many Lone Star-inspired dishes. Among them is this sweet one that puts blueberries front and center.

BLUEBERRIES WITH CORNMEAL SHORTCAKES

- 2 cups blueberries
- 7 tablespoons sugar, divided
- 1½ teaspoons lime juice, divided
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon, divided
- 1 cup flour, plus more for kneading
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter, chilled
- ¾ cup half-and-half
- 2 cups heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla

Toss blueberries with 2 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon lime juice and ¼ teaspoon cinnamon. Allow to sit at room temperature for 30 minutes, so berries will become soft and juicy.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease and flour large cast-iron skillet or baking sheet and place metal mixing bowl in freezer. Mix 3 tablespoons sugar, flour, cornmeal, baking powder and salt. Cut butter into pieces and work into flour mixture with your hands or pastry blender until it resembles pea-sized crumbs. Add half-and-half, mixing until dough is loose and sticky. Remove dough to floured surface and knead for 1 minute. Dough should be smooth and no longer wet. Sprinkle more flour on surface if dough sticks. Roll or pat dough until ¼ inch thick, then fold in half. Using round 2-inch cutter or drinking glass, cut out biscuits from dough. You should get eight rounds. Place biscuits close together, about ⅛ inch apart, in cast-iron skillet or baking sheet (so they rise up, not out) and bake 15 minutes or until tops are golden brown. Allow to cool for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, remove metal bowl from freezer. Pour in heavy cream and whisk in 2 tablespoons sugar, ½ teaspoon lime juice, ¼ teaspoon cinnamon and vanilla. With electric mixer, whisk or eggbeater, beat cream until it triples in size—thick with soft peaks.

To assemble shortcakes, slice each biscuit in half. Place ⅓ cup of blueberries atop one biscuit half, then top with whipped cream and second biscuit half.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1 shortcake with topping. Per serving: 530 calories, 5.3 g protein, 34.5 g fat, 47.2 g carbohydrates, 2.2 g dietary fiber, 363 mg sodium, 15.1 g sugars, 120 mg cholesterol



MARK SCHWEND, *Pedernales Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Hill Country Blueberry Salsa**

The beginning of summer is smack-dab in the middle of the Texas blueberry season. Plenty of those crisp, sweet berries are available in markets across the state at the height of their ripeness. If you want to try making something of them, check out these winning recipes. Thanks to the folks at the Texas Blueberry Festival, June 9 in Nacogdoches, Pedernales Electric Cooperative member Mark Schwend—who submitted the prize-winning recipe—will be able to enjoy a two-night stay at the historic Hardeman House Inn bed-and-breakfast.

HILL COUNTRY BLUEBERRY SALSA

- 2 medium heirloom tomatoes
- 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- 3/4 cup chopped sweet onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 jalapeño, finely chopped
- 1/2 Hungarian hot pepper or banana pepper, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tablespoons chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons rice or cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Bring pot of water to a boil. Immerse tomatoes in water for about 15 seconds. Remove tomatoes and place into bowl of cold water. Slip skins off tomatoes, cut in half, and remove and discard seeds. Chop tomatoes. In medium bowl, combine tomatoes, blueberries, onion, garlic, jalapeño, Hungarian pepper, cilantro and parsley. Pour in vinegar and olive oil and stir gently to mix. Season with salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1/2 cup. Per serving: 55 calories, 0.7 g protein, 3.4 g fat, 6 g carbohydrates, 1.2 g dietary fiber, 121 mg sodium, 3.4 g sugars, trace cholesterol

COOK'S TIP: You may wish to drain salsa slightly before serving, depending on how juicy the tomatoes are.

BLUEBERRY CITRUS BITES

- 4 ounces cream cheese
- 1/4 cup butter, softened
- 1 1/4 cups plus 1 tablespoon flour, divided
- 1/4 medium lemon
- 1/4 medium orange
- 1 1/2 cups blueberries
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/4 cup oatmeal
- 1/4 cup Grape Nuts cereal
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Blend cream cheese, softened butter and 1 1/4 cups flour as for piecrust. Divide into 24 balls. Shape into bottoms and up sides of mini-muffin tin. Set aside. Remove seeds from lemon and orange and slice thinly. Chop fruit and rind into small pieces. Place in

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Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com. Each entry MUST include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Specify which category you are entering, savory or sweet, on each recipe. Send entries to: Texas Co-op Power/Holiday Recipe Contest, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can fax recipes to (512) 763-3408. Up to three entries are allowed per co-op membership. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. Mailed entries can all be in one envelope. No email entries will be accepted. For official rules, visit TexasCoopPower.com.

RECIPE ROUNDUP



Blueberry-Lime Jam

2012 © STEPHANIE FREY. IMAGE FROM BIGSTOCK.COM

medium bowl. Add blueberries, sugar, cornstarch and vanilla and mix well. Spoon fruit mixture into prepared muffin tin. Combine 1 tablespoon flour, oatmeal, cereal, brown sugar and melted butter. Sprinkle topping on each tart. Bake at 30 to 35 minutes. Check crust for doneness.

Servings: 12. Serving size: 2 bites. Per serving: 206 calories, 2.7 g protein, 8.5 g fat, 28.8 g carbohydrates, 1.4 g dietary fiber, 44 mg sodium, 13.9 g sugars, 25 mg cholesterol

DARLENE ROBERTS BURTON

Nueces Electric Cooperative

ALDEN'S DIVINE SALAD

- 1/2 cup pecans
- 1 shallot
- 1 1/2 pints blueberries, divided
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 1/3 cup raspberry vinegar
- 1 cup oil
- 10 ounces fresh spinach, washed and drained
- 1/2 cup crumbled blue cheese

Toast pecans in skillet or in oven at 300 degrees. Process shallot, 1/2 pint blueberries, sugar, vinegar and oil in blender or food processor. Combine spinach with remaining blueberries, blue cheese and pecans. Toss with dressing and serve immediately.

Servings: 8. Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 378 calories, 4.2 g protein, 33.4 g fat, 15.7 g carbohydrates, 3 g dietary fiber, 145 mg sodium, 10.8 g sugars, 6 mg cholesterol

MARY DONNALLY-VAZQUEZ

Mid-South Synergy

Source: Camp Allen Cookbook, published by the Episcopal Diocese of Texas (www.campallen.org)

BLUEBERRY-LIME JAM

- 10 cups blueberries, rinsed and picked over
- 1 box (1.75 ounces) low-sugar powdered pectin
- 4 1/2 cups sugar, divided
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- Zest from 1 lemon

Into an extra-large stockpot, place blueberries, then stir in pectin, 1/4 cup sugar, lime juice, zest and 1/2 cup water. Simmer 5 minutes. Bring heat to medium-high. Bring mixture to full rolling boil, stirring often, and add remaining sugar. Bring back to full rolling boil for one minute. Fill clean, sterilized jars to 1/4 inch headspace. Seal and process small jars 5 to 7 minutes and large jars 10 minutes in hot water bath. Yield: 9 half-pints.

Servings: 72. Serving size: 2 tablespoons. Per serving: 62 calories, 0.2 g protein, 0.1 g fat, 16.2 g carbohydrates, 0.6 g dietary fiber, 1 mg sodium, 14.5 g sugars

TRACEY STEWART

Sam Houston Electric Cooperative

BLUEBERRY TART

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup rolled oats, processed to a fine powder
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 pint blueberries
- 8 ounces cream cheese
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix flour, oats, brown sugar, vanilla and salt. Cut in butter until well blended. Press into well-greased 12-inch tart pan or pie pan. Bake 10 minutes. Remove from oven and cool. Pour blueberries into crust. Mix cream cheese and sugar, blending well. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Add nutmeg and lemon extract and mix well. Pour over berries and bake for about 30 minutes, or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Serve warm or cold.

Servings: 12. Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 393 calories, 4.8 g protein, 21.4 g fat, 42.7 g carbohydrates, 1.5 g dietary fiber, 178 mg sodium, 28.9 g sugars, 102 mg cholesterol

BECKY WESTMORELAND

Big Country Electric Cooperative



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\$100 RECIPE CONTEST

October's recipe contest topic is Homemade Sausage. Do you make your own sausage? Please share your best recipes and techniques. The deadline is June 10.

Submit recipes online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests. Or mail them to Home Cooking, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You may also fax them to (512) 763-3408. Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric co-op. Also, let us know where you found the recipe or whether it's one you developed yourself. The top winner will receive \$100. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

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—ASHLEY CLARY-CARPENTER

On TexasCoopPower.com: See more Hard at Work photos.

◀ Goin’ and blowin’: Cleaning up is not a problem for **Zachary Henderson**, who lends his dad, CoServ Electric member **Chris Henderson**, a hand after mowing.

Cade Lee Altum, grandson of United Cooperative Services members **Danny** and **Sandra Altum**, is at the ready with John the horse. ▶

◀ **Glenn Dodd**, a Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative member, is making good use of co-op electricity, says HOTEK member and lifetime friend **David Skupin**.



▲ When Lamar Electric Cooperative member **Carl Vaughn** started planting potatoes in his spring garden, grandson **Layne Vaughn** just had to help his Pappy.



Bryan Texas Utilities customer **Pam Ferro** sent us this shot of her husband, **Mike**, a BTU lineman. “Thanks to people like him and their dedication to their jobs, we are richly blessed,” she says. ▶

Upcoming in Focus on Texas

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Aug	Up Close and Personal	Jun 10
Sep	Pet Tricks	Jul 10
Oct	Ooops!	Aug 10
Nov	Water Towers	Sep 10
Dec	Night Photography	Oct 10
Jan	Naptime	Nov 10

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL is the topic for our **AUGUST 2012 issue**. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Up Close and Personal, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701**, before **JUNE 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 at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests. 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.



AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

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

PICK OF THE MONTH

JUNE 28 KILGORE

Texas Shakespeare Festival
(903) 983-8601,
www.texasshakespeare.com



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JUNE

02 HILLSBORO [2-3]
Texas Pirate Festival,
(254) 548-6238,
<http://middlefest.com>

03 LAKEHILLS
St. Victor Church Festival,
(830) 612-2207

05 VICTORIA [5-9]
Victoria Bach Festival,
(361) 570-5788, www.victoriabachfestival.org

08 BURNET [8-9]
Burnet County Area Fair,
(512) 793-2348, www.burnetcountyfair.com

CENTER [8-9]
Shelby County Sheriff's
Posse PRCA Rodeo, (936)
598-3682, www.shelbycountychamber.com

COLUMBUS [8-9]
FFA Alumni BBQ Cook-Off,
(979) 732-8385,
www.junecookoff.com

8

PLANO
Ham-Com 2012



08

CROSS PLAINS [8-9]
Robert E. Howard Days,
(254) 725-4993

PLANO [8-9]
Ham-Com 2012,
(469) 964-2814,
www.hamcom.org

09

EAST BERNARD
Kolache Klobase Festival,
(979) 335-7907,
<http://kkfest.com>

JACKSONVILLE
Tomato Fest,
(903) 586-2217,
www.jacksonvilletexas.com

14

COLEMAN [14-16]
75th Annual PRCA
Coleman Rodeo, (325)
625-2163, www.colemanrodeo.com

STONEWALL [14-16]
Stonewall Peach
JAMboree, Rodeo & PBR,
(830) 644-2735,
www.stonewalltexas.com



14

COLEMAN
75th Annual PRCA
Coleman Rodeo

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AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS

15 BASTROP [15-16]
Juneteenth Celebration,
(512) 789-6097

DRIFTWOOD [15-22]
Camp Ben McCulloch
Reunion,
(512) 858-2084,
www.campben.com

16 ANDICE
Crafters Show,
(254) 793-2565

LAKE JACKSON
Bird Banding,
(979) 480-0999,
www.gcbo.org

NEW BRAUNFELS [16-17]
Old Gruene Market Days,
(830) 629-5077,
www.gruenetexas.com

22 BELLVILLE [22-23]
Austin County Fair
Summer Music Fest,
(979) 865-5995,
www.austincountyfair.com



22 BREMONT
Polski Dzień
(Polish Day)

22 BREMONT [22-23]
Polski Dzień (Polish Day),
(254) 746-7771,
www.bremontdtxas.org

DE LEON [22-24]
De Leon Quilt Show, (254)
893-6704, www.thirdwednesdayquilters.com

23 LOTT [23-24]
Picnic and Barbecue Cook-
Off at Sacred Heart
Church, (254) 584-2011

23 BOWIE [23-30]
Jim Bowie Days
Association,
(940) 841-3418,
www.jimbowedays.org

28 QUITMAN
Classic Car Cruise Night,
(903) 763-4414

30 CANYON
Pioneer Town Grand
Opening, (806) 651-2244,
<http://panhandleplains.org>

GRANBURY [30-7/4]
Old Fashioned 4th of July
Celebration, (817) 573-
1622, <http://granburychamber.com>

JULY

04 TENAHA
Independence Day
Celebration,
(936) 248-3841

04 WASHINGTON
Fireworks on the Brazos,
1-888-273-6426, www.birthplaceoftexas.com



We pick events for the
magazine directly from
TexasCoopPower.com.
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ARCHER CITY

Bookmark this North Texas town immortalized by native author Larry McMurtry.

BY KATE HULL

Tucked away in North Texas, southwest of Wichita Falls and past endless fields and countless mesquite trees, Archer City appears at first glance to be little more than a place to stop on the way to someplace else. But don't be deceived. Stay a spell, and discover the historic and literary riches in this enduring community of roughly 1,900.

Archer City's bread and butter is deeply rooted in the oil and ranching industries, but the abundance of wild game in the area draws hunters from around the state. And the legacy of the town's most notable son, author Larry McMurtry, attracts history buffs and lovers of literature alike.

Coming into town on State Highways 79 or 25, you can't miss the solitary red stoplight on Main Street, constantly blinking at a steady pace

that seems to mark the passage of time. Keeping that same tempo, head for the square and McMurtry's four warehouses-turned-bookstore, **BOOKED UP**, which houses around 400,000 second-hand and rare books. McMurtry's admiration of the written word in all genres has made Archer City a must-see destination for book collectors and enthusiasts.

A stone's throw to your west, you'll find **LONESOME DOVE INN**, a homey retreat for fans of all things Texas. In 1998, owner Mary Slack Webb and her sister, Ceil Slack Cleveland, bought the building that formerly housed a 12-patient Archer County hospital and turned it into a bed-and-breakfast, with six rooms in the main house and three rooms in a neighboring expansion.

As her lifelong friend and regular guest, McMurtry gave Webb permission to name the inn after his most famous, Pulitzer Prize-winning work. She took it a step further, naming rooms after his books, such as *Terms of Endearment*, *Cadillac Jack* and *Desert Rose*. The Cadillac Jack room doubles as the Angela Kinsey room. Kinsey, formerly of Archer City, plays Angela Martin-Lipton on the popular TV show "The Office." Before Webb bought the build-

ing, it belonged to Kinsey's parents as their home, and as a teenager, she lived in the room that now bears her name.

Nearby, the **SPUR HOTEL**, owned by rancher Abby Abernathy, offers yet another inviting getaway. With Abernathy's mantra of "down the road from ordinary," the 12 rooms are draped in Texas-chic décor and offer a range of styles and sizes.

No stay is complete without a little Texas-sized comfort food, which **THE IRON TRAIL STEAK HOUSE** offers via hearty cowboy cooking: steaks, mashed potatoes and chicken-fried steaks, to name a few. The restaurant is only open on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, and reservations are recommended.

Head east on Main Street, and you'll land right in front of a pale-blue marquee announcing the **ROYAL THEATER**, a renovated, historical snapshot of Archer City's past. The theater was a focal point in McMurtry's semi-autobiographical book-turned-famous-film "The Last Picture Show" and its sequel, "Texasville."

Archer County Judge Gary Beesinger was a senior in high school when "The Last Picture Show" was filmed and had a small role in a scene playing basketball with Jeff Bridges' and Timothy Bottoms' characters. He remembers a time when friends were not allowed to read the controversial book or watch the film because of its stark depiction of small-town life.

The theater building—which housed a local movie theater before a fire gutted the interior in 1965—was vacant and in shambles by the 1990s when Abernathy, Beesinger and a group of other volunteers set out to revamp the beloved landmark. It reopened in 2000 as a performing arts center, and each year, the theater hosts an array of plays and concerts, as well as a variety show modeled after Nashville's famed "Grand Ole Opry" called "Texasville Opry."

For outsiders, many quaint, captivating attractions draw them into town. But for locals, it's just the place they call home.

Freelance writer Kate Hull lives in Austin.

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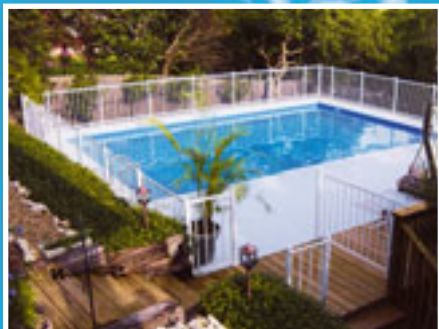
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