

LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EDITION

FEBRUARY 2016

Home Design Resources

First Texans?

Touchdown Party Foods

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

A woman with short grey hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and purple gloves, is raking leaves in a garden. She is smiling and looking down at her work. The garden is filled with green foliage and purple flowers. In the background, there is a wooden fence and a tree. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

TEXAS MASTER GARDENERS

Volunteers nurture
love of horticulture



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Patty Zohlen is one of the more than 6,000 master gardeners in the state.

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NEXT MONTH

Birthplace of a Nation

Texans at Washington-on-the-Brazos pledged independence 180 years ago.



GARDENER: WYATT MCSADDEN. FLAG: SOMARTIN | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB



ON THE COVER Master gardeners such as Patty Zohlen share their expertise in more than 100 Texas counties. Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

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Relative Infamy

When I read the article by Stephen Sharpe [*Endangered Places*, September 2015], I saw the name of a relative in the "Lost" segment. Ben "Tall Texan" Kilpatrick's great-grandfather and my great-great-great-grandfather were one and the same, so I guess that makes us cousins.

I first became aware of this infamous cousin when I read *Bill O'Reilly's Legends and Lies* (Henry Holt and Co., 2015). Ben is mentioned in the book and is even pictured in the famous "Fort Worth Five" photograph (he is seated in the middle between Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid). The photo, incidentally, became the beginning of the downfall of the whole gang—kind of an early mug shot.

Seeing Ben's name in the article was yet another verification that my family tree has a few termites in it!

VIVIAN BARRINGTON | JASPER
JASPER-NEWTON EC

Dobie Is Mr. Texas

The article by Lonn Taylor on J. Frank Dobie tells it like it is [*J. Frank Dobie Rides Again*, October 2015]. I disdain naive, politically correct or pandering articles.

BARBARA DUVALL-WESOLEK | HOUSTON

After my discharge from the Air Force, I attended Sul Ross State University in my hometown of Alpine. One of my history professors was Dudley Dobie, first cousin of J. Frank Dobie, and another professor, Clifford Casey, was a friend of both Dobies and taught history of the Spanish Southwest.

Inspiring Songwriter

Thank you for the wonderful article written by Darden Smith [*The Next Song*, November 2015]. I am a big fan of his music.

It was a nice surprise to see the article and read about his inspiring songwriting work with military service members.

LINDA SECRIST | MAGNOLIA | SAN BERNARD EC



Casey lectured entirely from memory, and I took every course he taught. A couple of times, I had the honor to meet J. Frank Dobie. I shared a couple of tales I had heard all my life about old-timers, a couple of whom were still alive at the time. I went with one of the old-timers' granddaughters when I was in high school and got even more old stories.

GARRY HENDERSON | COMANCHE
COMANCHE EC

Helping in Haiti

I was glad to see that co-op people have gone to Haiti to help with its infrastructure [*The Power of Your Cooperative*, October 2015]. Since September 2013, I have been going to Haiti on a regular basis and am involved in teaching the residents to build earthquake- and hurricane-resistant homes.

HERB NORDMEYER | CASTROVILLE
MEDINA EC

Travel Companion

Here is a picture of me at the historic Gage Hotel taken September 15 with the magazine featuring an article about the hotel [*Big Bend Baron*, September 2015].

MARY KRABLIN | SPRING
SAM HOUSTON EC



Tick, Tick, Ticked Off

I could not believe what I read in *Daylight Saving Time Law Intercepted* [Currents, November 2015]. These people need to sort

out their priorities. When did the NFL schedule become the criteria to determine whether a law should pass or not? It makes no sense to keep a law that nobody wants and serves no purpose. I don't even want to hear the reasoning behind the failure to pass the no-text, no-talk law.

SANDRA N. LORENZ | PLANTERSVILLE
MID-SOUTH SYNERGY

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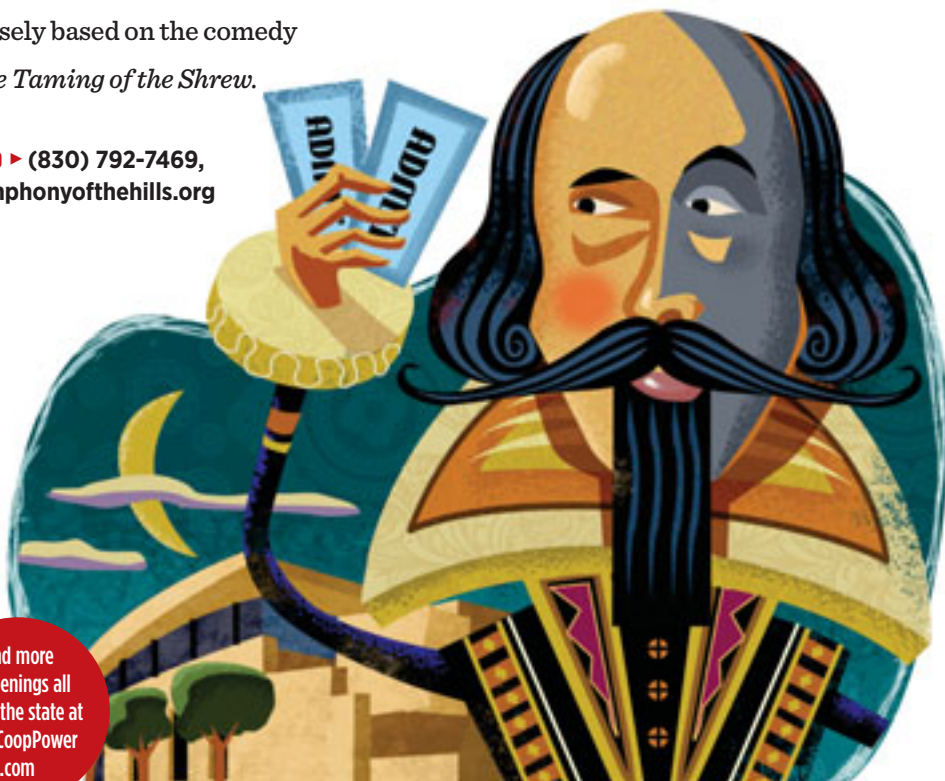
How To Spend a Midwinter Night

KERRVILLE'S SYMPHONY OF THE HILLS pays tribute to William Shakespeare, who has dominated the literary scene of Western civilization for the 400 years since his death in 1616. The symphony performs *ShakespeareFest: A Musical Tribute to the Bard* the evening of February 25 at the Cailloux Theater in Kerrville.

The event features five performances, including Felix Mendelssohn's acclaimed score for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Cole Porter's jazzy Broadway musical *Kiss Me, Kate*, loosely based on the comedy *The Taming of the Shrew*.

INFO ▶ (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

Find more happenings all across the state at TexasCoopPower.com



COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE NO. 6

COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES

When a winter storm of historic impact is forecast for the Texas Panhandle, keeping the lights on takes a special kind of preparedness—and a special kind of follow-through. Co-ops follow the Seven Cooperative Principles, and the sixth principle is Cooperation Among Cooperatives.

When one co-op in North Texas experienced 1,700 downed utility poles in its service area, other co-ops were standing by to send in linemen and materials.

In this case, half a dozen co-ops responded to the call and were prepared to send resources, one from as far away as the Texas Gulf coast.

It's never easy to forecast where the damaging weather will hit, but it's always easy to know that the co-op family is ready to take care of its members.

BY THE NUMBERS



(10 BILLION THAT'S A LOT OF ZEROS!)

- February 18 is **NATIONAL BATTERY DAY**, which shines a light on the more than 10 billion batteries produced annually worldwide.

- As the popularity of mobile devices that rely on cutting-edge rechargeable cells continues to grow, batteries increasingly rely on the electric grid to keep cellphones, laptops and even cars humming along.

CO-OP PEOPLE

Cap-ital Idea

A doctor in San Angelo ended up helping more than one heart when he inserted a stent into Nancy Johnson's artery in May 2015.

A grateful Johnson, who's been a member of Southwest Texas Electric Cooperative for 57 years, turned to knitting to help get the word out on heart health.

Johnson already had been contributing knitted red hats to the American Heart Association's **LITTLE HATS, BIG HEARTS** program, which raises awareness for what the organization says is the No. 1 killer of Americans—heart disease—and congenital heart defects, by providing babies born in February with keepsake red hats. Johnson and other donors from all 50 states sent more than 30,000 hats to Chicago hospitals in 2014.

But she saw an opportunity closer to home: "I just said, 'Why not here? Why not in Texas?'" So she founded the first Texas-based Little Hats, Big Hearts group, which has grown to include 19 craftspeople. By October, they had amassed more than 400 caps crafted by knitters as young as 9 and as old as 79.

"It doesn't matter who made it; it's the cause behind it," says Johnson of Sonora, whose husband, Jerry, recently retired from Southwest Texas EC's board after 43 years.



Their initial goal was to make enough hats to adorn the heads of all babies born in nearby San Angelo in February, American Heart Month, but they've since eclipsed that expected mark. Now Johnson has eyes on sparking a statewide movement for Texas-born babies.

"If we can get this to spread, then eventually we can cover the whole state," says Johnson, a proud mother and grandmother herself, who guesses she's made at least 50 caps. "It makes your heart feel good."

WANT TO HELP? ► Visit heart.org or call (325) 226-3659.

ALMANAC

STAR OF A NEW FRIENDSHIP

170 Years Ago: The lone star joined 27 others when the Republic of Texas flag was lowered and the U.S. flag raised in a ceremony at the Texas Capitol. On February 19, 1846, the young state's Legislature convened for the first time, about a year after the U.S. Congress—with the support of President John Tyler—passed a bill to admit Texas as the 28th state.

Out-Of-This-World Quote:

Texas' last president, Anson Jones, who is sometimes called the Architect of Annexation, addressed the crowd at the Austin ceremony. Near the end of his speech, he referenced the symbolic joining of the former nation's flag with that of the U.S. "The Lone Star of Texas ... has culminated, and, following an inscrutable destiny, has passed on and become fixed forever in that glorious constellation, which all freemen and lovers of freedom must reverence and adore—the American Union."



Did you know?

➔ **TEXAS OFFICIALLY BECAME THE 28TH STATE DECEMBER 29, 1845.**

FLORIDA HAD BECOME NO. 27 EARLIER THAT YEAR.

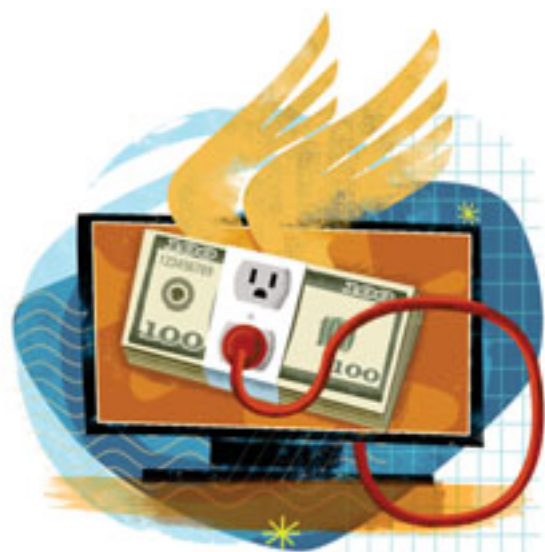
IOWA BECAME NO. 29 AT THE END OF 1846.

ENERGY INFO

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TEXAS MASTER GARDENER



TEXAS A&M AGRILIFE EXTENSION *program*
sows cadre of green thumbs around the state

By SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS *Photos by* WYATT MCSPADDEN

OVERGROWN

with weeds and brush, 23 acres of city-owned property in the East Texas town of Quitman stood neglected. That is, until Pam Riley, one of 78 current members of the Wood County Master Gardeners Association, an offshoot of the county's extension program, proposed a project to preserve the area's diverse flora and teach others about horticulture.

Eight years later, the Quitman Arboretum & Botanical Gardens attracts hundreds of visitors who stroll the walking paths, tour the gardens and attend workshops. In May, Science Day at the Arboretum, hosted by the master gardeners, teaches local third-graders about vegetable gardening, plant propagation and honeybees.

"We're the only arboretum in Texas that's managed completely by volunteers," Riley says. "The community supports us in other ways, too. Wood County Electric Cooperative, of which I'm a member, has donated plants and a gazebo and installed electricity where we've needed it."

Debbie Robinson, Wood County EC general manager, says she admires master gardeners for their willingness to volunteer, learn about gardening and share their knowledge with others. "Across Wood County, their work gilds our town squares, libraries and parks," Robinson says. "We love to support our master gardeners."

From planting demonstration gardens to fielding questions, giving presentations, working with kids and writing articles, approximately 6,160 master gardeners in more than 100 of Texas' 254 counties share their gardening know-how within their communities. Annually, they contribute 550,000 hours of volunteer work worth \$11 million toward a common mission: to assist county agents with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in disseminating gardening information.

The idea for training grassroots gardening experts originated in the 1970s when two extension agents in Washington state became overwhelmed with gardening questions from the public. To relieve the pressure, they recruited and trained volunteer assistants who, once trained, earned the title of "master gardener."

Today, master gardener programs exist in all 50 states. The concept spread to Texas in 1978 when the late Sam Cotner, an extension vegetable specialist, shared the program's success with his colleagues. Doug Welsh, an extension horticulturalist, was soon hired to work as the first state coordinator. In 1979,

From left, Patty Zohlen, Terri DeBusk, Barbara Elmore and Anne Brown are members of Hill Country Master Gardeners.

This page: Blanco master gardener Jim Meadows; opposite page, from left: Hill Country master gardener Terri DeBusk, and Rebecca Henricks at a plant sale

25 trainees attended the first class, held in Montgomery County. Galveston and El Paso counties started their own programs in 1981, followed by five more by the end of the decade.

Jayla Fry, statewide coordinator in College Station, has overseen the Texas program since 2008. “What really sets master gardeners apart from other home gardeners is their special training in horticulture,” she explains. “In exchange for their training, those who become master gardeners work as volunteers through their Texas A&M AgriLife Extension office.”

Basic training, which varies by county, covers botany, soils, composting, vegetables, plant diseases, lawn care, water conservation and more. Most volunteers join a nonprofit county association. Most associations and county programs raise funds through plant sales, but some partner with other groups or companies to obtain funding or grants.

Though they share the same vision, Texas master gardeners affect their neighborhoods in ways that vary as widely as the geography where they live.

A mere 10 inches or so of rain falls annually on Ector and



TEXAS MASTER GARDENERS AFFECT THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS IN WAYS THAT VARY AS WIDELY AS THE GEOGRAPHY WHERE THEY LIVE.

Midland counties in West Texas, where the flat, mostly treeless terrain stretches to the horizon. So the 164 volunteers with the Permian Basin Master Gardeners Association strongly stress water conservation.

“Our master gardeners teach workshops about rainwater harvesting,” says Extension Agent Jeff Floyd. “We charge a fee, but participants go home with a 55-gallon drum. Our hope is that they’ll get hooked on rainwater collection and buy a bigger collection tank.”

Among their many projects, Permian Basin volunteers partner with the city of Odessa to maintain a compost demonstration garden that teaches how to recycle yard waste. They also help maintain the George and Milly Rhodus Sculpture and Sensory Garden at the Ellen Noel Art Museum in Odessa.

“It’s so neat to be able to spread my enthusiasm for gardening,” says Barbara Porsch of Midland, the association’s president, who trained in 1992 and writes about herbs for the group’s monthly newsletter. “My grandchildren even call me ‘Pepper’ because that’s what I love to grow.”

Farther west, 100 volunteers with the El Paso Master Gardeners Association tend a public rose garden, pick up trash along the Woodrow Bean Transmountain Road and host Saturday gardening classes. At a demonstration garden in El Paso’s Ascarate Park, they show residents how to use raised beds, containers and rainwater barrels to grow vegetables in the Chihuahuan Desert.

“We receive less than 8 inches of rain annually,” says retired school administrator Jan Petrzelka, association president. “We

can’t raise heirloom tomatoes here! So we research what grows best and share what we learn with the public. What we raise goes to our local food bank. Last year, we donated 1,594 pounds of vegetables.”

On the Gulf Coast, master gardeners in Aransas and San Patricio counties visit with property owners to answer questions and offer advice. “Our coastal live oaks here are so important to us, and many of them are declining,” says Extension Agent Ginger Easton Smith in Rockport. “Our trained ‘tree team’ checks oaks for hypoxylon canker and offers pruning advice.”

Every month, the master gardeners host brown bag seminars, where participants can learn about composting, pruning, water-wise landscaping and controlling invasives. “Our master gardeners also answer gardening questions on our hotline and help with the annual HummerBird Celebration,” Smith says.

In the five Hill Country counties of Kerr, Kendall, Gillespie, Bandera and Real, approximately 100 volunteers form the Hill Country Master Gardeners Association. They assist with 10 community gardens, award scholarships to horticulture students and sell plants at Kerrville’s monthly Market Days.

“Our oak wilt specialists make home visits, which helps me out,” says Extension Agent Roy Walston, who’s a member of Central Texas Electric Cooperative. “Our master gardener network definitely expands the capabilities of Texas A&M AgriLife.”

In April, the gardeners sell plants and rain barrels at their annual Blooms & Barrels event. “We’ve expanded the day to include public education programs and demonstrations,” says Patty Zohlen,



a retired registered nurse and the association's president. "Once you learn about gardening, you want to talk about it!"

In Houston, people struggling with chemical addictions find healing in a therapeutic greenhouse tended by the Harris County Master Gardeners Association. Horticulture Specialist Jeanie Dunnihoo, who's also a master gardener, oversees the greenhouse and Serenity Gardens at the Memorial Hermann Prevention and Recovery Center. "Stress often leads to drug or alcohol abuse," Dunnihoo explains. "We teach people how gardening and being with nature relieves stress."

Although Madison County lacks a master gardener program, three certified volunteers work in Madisonville's Restoration Community Gardens. The 6-acre project, sponsored by the county and Texas A&M AgriLife, consists of raised vegetable beds, a rainwater collection system and an aquaponics system.

Fun Fridays, a children's summer camp at the gardens, includes a gardening component hosted by master gardeners. "We teach kids about vermiculture, composting and keyhole gardening," says

Leslie Lazenby, a master gardener who first envisioned the community gardens. "Ultimately, we want to empower our residents by teaching gardening fundamentals and self-sustainability."

Extension Agent Jennifer Herrera works with the 35 members of the Cameron County Master Gardeners Association. "In our demonstration garden, they teach the public about vegetable gardening, rainwater harvesting and attracting butterflies," she says. "In the Valley, we have two growing seasons for vegetables, so we help people select the best plants for each season."

Master gardener Elizabeth Garcia, who works full time at a Brownsville charter school, volunteers at five vegetable gardens in low-income communities where diabetes and obesity run high, and healthy foods are difficult to obtain. As part of the Growing and Nourishing Healthy Communities program, the gardens were funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and implemented by Texas A&M AgriLife.

"We're teaching adults and kids how to grow their own food," Garcia says. "Each family has its own plot, and we provide everything they need. The program is making a huge difference. I know one man in his 70s with diabetes who's going to the doctor less and taking less medication, all because he's eating fresh vegetables."

"As a master gardener, I love to teach," Garcia adds. "It's thrilling to hear people tell me, 'This was a seed in my hand, and now I'm eating a carrot!'"

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, a member of Pedernales EC, lives in Blanco.

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Home Design Innovation

ENERGY-EFFICIENT STRATEGIES GO EASY ON
HOMEOWNER EXPENSES AND ENVIRONMENT

BY DAN OKO

When veteran Austin architect Scott Ginder drew up plans for the custom home his family would live in, he knew it would take more than a high-tech thermostat and energy-efficient lightbulbs to make the house stand out. He wanted to create a model of sustainability. With that goal in mind, Ginder, who founded Forge Craft Architecture + Design with partner Rommel Sulit in 2013, needed not only to embrace the latest technology but also satisfy his family's expectations for comfort.

"Ten years ago, you could not have convinced me that you could actually design and build a net-zero house," says Ginder, using the industry phrase for a home that produces as much energy as it uses. "But if we were going to build a home with our values, and propose that to clients, I needed to walk the walk."

Those desires led him to think beyond traditional design elements and explore new technologies that are not yet commonplace in most American homes. He installed a state-of-the-art HVAC system, a multizone heating and cooling system that employs what's known as variable refrigerant flow. This VRF technology can improve HVAC efficiency by about 25 percent. With no gas connection to his house, Ginder also relied on a 66-gallon electric water heater that recirculates the home's interior warm air to heat the water and then channel cool, dry air into the air-conditioning ducts.

"In a typical house, hot water is about 20 percent of your energy costs," says Ginder. "With the system we used, I expect to lower that by a third." It all adds up to substantial savings, he notes.

To further save on energy, Ginder kept the size of his home—which accommodates him, his wife, Andrea, and their two young children—to 2,000 square feet. Doors and windows were scaled and positioned to limit the effect of outdoor temperatures. Ginder further boosted energy efficiency by heavily insulating the interior with foam panels and adding spray-on barriers between the attic rafters, thereby sealing the building envelope. The finished house was airtight.

But you don't have to head for Austin or other big Texas cities to find homeowners who embrace green-building technology in the hopes of having an energy-efficient household. Town residents and ranch families served by electric cooperatives across Texas pursue strategies to improve energy efficiency for new homes as well as older homes, installing solar panels and individual wind turbines, and upgrading climate controls.

As of 2015, the Solar Energy Industries Association, a national trade group, ranked Texas the 10th state overall with 387 megawatts in cumulative solar capacity—roughly the capacity to energize 41,000 homes, though the majority is used commercially. Even so, the cost of residential solar installation has dropped about 8 percent since 2014.

Some cooperatives have taken steps to demonstrate innovative building options. Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative completed its demonstration Eco-Home on the outskirts of Brenham in 2012. The house boasts solar panels and a wind turbine mounted on a 40-foot pole, capable of generating 2.4 kilowatts. There's a geothermal system that uses Earth's temperature for heating and cooling by pumping water into

Even as green

construction grows
more popular, however,
green-building experts
agree that home
efficiency requires
more than technology.

Energy conservation

requires that
consumers educate
themselves about
opportunities for
saving electricity.

ENERGY-EFFICIENCY UPGRADES

If you're not in the market for a new home, boost the energy efficiency of the one you're in. A home energy audit, available from many electric co-ops, can help identify where to start. After that, here are some solutions to consider.

BIG PROJECTS

Update your fireplace with tempered glass doors and a heat-air exchange system to warm your home more efficiently.

Add energy-efficient, well-sealed windows that let in more or less energy based on the amount of sun they receive.

Upgrade your older appliances with newer, more efficient ones. New refrigerators, for example, are 60 percent more efficient than those made 20 years ago.

WEEKEND UPGRADES

Install a programmable thermostat that adjusts temperature levels based on the time of day to cut usage by up to 10 percent annually.

Add ceiling fans to rooms that tend to be warmer, so the air feels cooler and the air conditioner can run less in warmer months.

Replace faucets and showerheads with low-flow models, which can lessen your home's water heater load.

SMALL CHANGES

Caulk or add weatherstripping to small holes and cracks around ducts, pipes, exhaust fans, vents, sink and bathtub drains, fireplaces and under countertops.

Tape a heavy-duty, clear plastic sheet to the inside of window panes to reduce heat loss in the winter.

Replace incandescent lightbulbs with compact fluorescent lamps or light-emitting diodes.

the ground and then circulating it through the house. "It shows what you can do on your ranch and farm," says the narrator of the co-op's online video.

Will Holford, manager of public affairs at Bluebonnet EC, says it makes sense that rural Texans would be attracted to energy conservation and the promise of technology to improve energy efficiency. In addition to the financial incentive to build homes that create their own energy, Holford notes that co-op membership statewide has its roots in farming and ranching communities with deep ties to the land, and they have an abiding interest in sustainability and preservation when it comes to natural resources.

The money that can be saved by generating one's own electricity is another aspect of energy-efficiency standards touted by Ginder, who has a 7.2-kilowatt solar array on his Austin roof.

"There's a great interest in this not just from our members, but from all across Central Texas," Holford says of Bluebonnet EC's Eco-Home. "Not a day goes by that we don't have two to three drop-ins, as well as regularly scheduled tours."

Business is booming for Lloyd Lee, owner of Native, a Bastrop firm that builds custom homes and retrofits established homes with energy-efficient amenities. He did not work on the Ginder house, but Lee takes a similar approach to home efficiency. To help people transform houses into what are sometimes called "passive homes," which marks improved energy efficiency, Lee installs federally Energy Star-certified windows to cut back on thermal loss, uses spray foam to better seal building envelopes and mounts solar panels.

Native takes a similar approach regarding water, integrating rainwater catchments and providing additional filtration so that the water provided by these systems is of a superior quality for drinking and cooking. "People who live on rainwater," he testifies, "it's almost like a cult."

Even as green construction grows more popular, however, green-building experts agree that home efficiency requires more than technology. Energy conservation requires that consumers

educate themselves about opportunities for saving electricity. Even Ginder faces an uphill battle when it comes to persuading his family members to eschew air conditioning in favor of opening a window, or trade the convenience of the clothes dryer for a clothesline to dry their laundry.

"Energy is quantifiable, and that's why we tend to talk about it," Ginder says. "But we tend to forget there is a user component to all this. A five-star green house can be a two-star home if the people living there don't understand all the passive aspects."

Dan Oko is a Houston writer; his website is danoko.com.

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CONSERVATION AND SAFETY INFORMATION



If you feel a temperature change around a window or door, seal the perimeter with caulk.

Save With a DIY Home Energy Audit

WHETHER YOUR HOME IS OLD OR NEW, it's likely that you're spending more on energy than necessary.

You can conduct a baseline energy audit of your home to identify where you are losing energy (and money). Use a checklist and take notes on problems you find as you walk through your home. Here are some ways to get started:

Insulation and air leaks/drafts: Improving your home's insulation and sealing air leaks are the most cost-effective ways to reduce energy waste, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Is there sufficient insulation in the attic? Are the openings that contain piping, ductwork and the chimney sealed? Are there changes in temperature where walls meet ceilings or floors, or around windows and outlets?

Electronic devices: Take an inventory of the electronic devices you have and how often you use them. Computers, printers, DVD players, phones and gaming consoles are notorious "vampire power" users; they drain energy even when not in use. If items can be turned off without requiring a lengthy reboot, plug them into a power strip that can be turned off.

Lighting: Replace incandescent lightbulbs with compact fluorescent lightbulbs or light-emitting diodes. Install motion-sensor lights in any low-use area such as a closet, porch or garage. Consider replacing night-lights with LEDs.

Thermostat/indoor temperature: Do you have a programmable thermostat? When was the last time it was programmed? Is it set so the temperature is lower during times when no one is home, and at night when people are sleeping? Consider lowering the temperature a few degrees.

Appliances, timing and maintenance: If your appliances are more than 10 years old, they are likely not as energy efficient as today's options. How and when you use them also makes a difference. Do you wash clothes in hot water, or can you use cold instead? Consider running your washer, dryer or dishwasher at night, during off-peak times. Does your water heater have a blanket? If not, consider insulating it. Make sure the dryer vent isn't blocked; this will save energy and also could prevent a fire.

Evaluation: Once you have completed the audit, take a look at your findings. Prioritize actions you can take based on your time and budget, weighing where you can get the most impact for your investment.

You Can Prevent Burns

THERE'S NO REASON for anyone in your family to suffer from an electrical burn or any other kind of burn.

The first week of February is Burn Awareness Week, and that's a good time to take an inventory of your home's burn hazards. Spend some time this week to:

- ▶ Replace smoke detector batteries, which need changing at least once a year.
- ▶ Put away any extension cords left over from Christmas. They're not made for permanent use and can burn you or your children if they overheat because of overuse.
- ▶ If any electrical wires are hiding under rugs, move them. Stepping on them can cause damage and turn them into a burn hazard or fire risk.
- ▶ Teach your children to stay a safe distance away from the stove.
- ▶ Turn pot handles inward when you cook, and place them on rear burners if you have children.
- ▶ Lower your water heater thermostat to 120 degrees, a comfortable temperature that won't scald.
- ▶ Replace traditional candles with realistic-looking, battery-operated ones.
- ▶ Forbid your children from lighting matches and playing with lighters.

Children should never be left unsupervised when stovetop burners are on.



Smart Appliances

Convenience on the horizon

IT SEEMS LIKE EVERYTHING IS “SMART” THESE DAYS: cars, the grid, watches, houses, phones—and appliances.

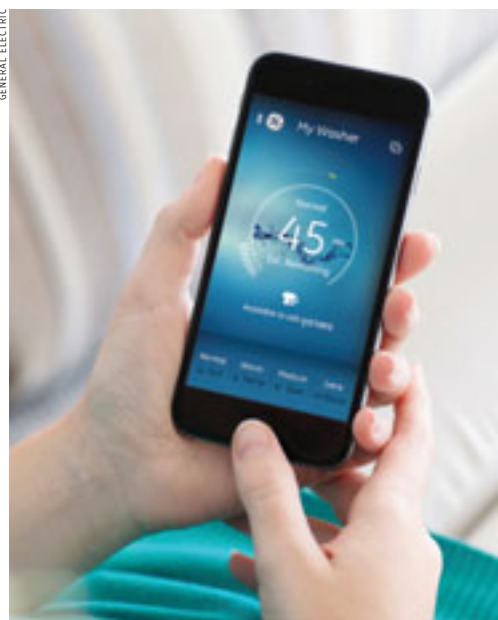
When the term “smart appliance” comes up, the Jetsons’ fully automated home immediately comes to mind. Their dinner was cooked, laundry done and dishes washed by a smart machine. In reality, smart appliances use modern communications technology to make their functions faster, cheaper and more energy efficient.

Even though today’s smart appliances can be expensive, experts predict these new technologies will deliver major benefits for energy efficiency, convenience and maintenance.

For example, from the smart screen on your dazzling new refrigerator, you can check the weather while grabbing your orange juice. You can even browse the Internet for recipes—all on the conveniently placed touchscreen.

Remotely monitor your oven to turn it on and adjust temperatures. Running late from work and need to get the kids somewhere? Stop for a frozen pizza on the way home, and preheat the oven so you can pop it in upon arrival.

Got a load of clothes in the washer you forgot to start? Log in and start the cycle from the golf course. Or show off your smarts by



Smart appliances and a smartphone allow you to control your home’s thermostat and appliances from anywhere.

taking advantage of your electric cooperative’s lower-cost off-peak rates and scheduling it to run during evening hours.

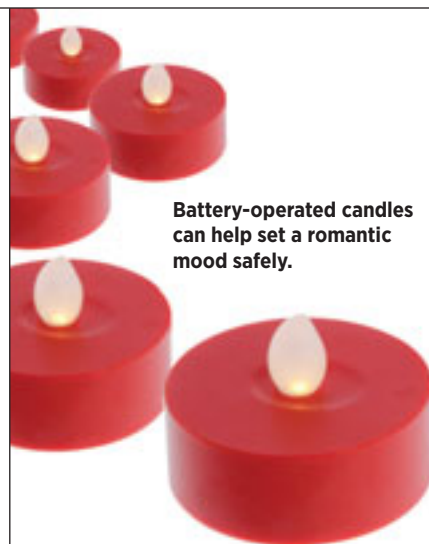
How about this one? Wi-Fi-connected appliances with clocks will reset themselves for daylight saving time. That’s fewer digital devices to adjust twice a year.

A refrigerator that reads the bar codes of what you put inside and tracks consumption could recommend a shopping list if it notices something getting low or out of date.

Maintenance is another area of huge potential. Let’s say one of your smart appliances needs repairs. Someday, it might be able to call the manufacturer and get a diagnosis. You won’t have to wait at home for a technician who may or may not find the problem—or have the right parts. With your permission, the tech can show up to your home with everything necessary to make the repair.

Finally, from an energy-efficiency and load-management point of view, smart appliances present an opportunity to manage energy load more effectively in the quest to give co-op members the highest possible quality of service at the lowest possible price.

Sure, the Jetsons’ flying car might be a long way off—but not their appliances.



Battery-operated candles can help set a romantic mood safely.

Have an Energy-Wise Valentine’s Day

A ROMANTIC DINNER FOR TWO at home can save you more than the price of a fancy restaurant meal. It can save energy.

Here are five ways to celebrate Valentine’s Day with energy efficiency in mind:

1. Turn off the lights and enjoy a candlelit dinner. Don’t want open flames in your home? The latest battery-operated candles have moving “wicks” and “flames” that look so natural, nobody will be able to tell they’re artificial.

2. Prepare your feast for two in the microwave, which uses less energy than the cooktop and oven, especially for small meals. Other ideas: Use an electric grill for fish or meat. Or skip the cooking altogether and fill up on strawberries and chocolate melted in a fondue pot over a candle.

3. Take a long walk after dinner, even if it’s cold outside. When you get home, snuggle up under a thick blanket and sip cocoa heated in the microwave.

4. At bedtime, lower the temperature on your thermostat a few degrees and throw an extra blanket on the bed.

5. As long as you’re in the mood for love, show some to your water heater, too: Wrap it in a water heater blanket to insulate it.

Making of a Coach

Photographer Tadd Myers' *Portraits of the American Craftsman* spotlights stagecoach maker in Paradise

.....
EXCERPT BY ERIC CELESTE

IT WAS 2007 AND JIMMY WILSON'S MENTOR told him he was ready.

Jay Brown—Wilson's father-in-law, owner of Jay Brown Stagecoach Works, and maker of sixty stagecoaches—asked Wilson to take over the business. “Jim-boy,” Brown told Wilson, “I’m tired of making stagecoaches. I’m gonna let you have the orders.”

Wilson felt the rush of pride and responsibility Brown's decision gave him; he had been learning the craft for years alongside Brown, who first fell in love with stagecoaches when he drove one for a hold-up scene in a Wild West show at Six Flags Over Texas. Not long after, Brown was coincidentally asked to do restoration work on one. Brown began studying the history of stagecoaches and working on his own designs; he eventually was asked to build one. Brown would describe it as “a hobby that got out of hand.”

Not for long. It soon was a full-fledged business. Wilson had been helping his father-in-law in his spare time for decades, first building buckboards (four-wheeled wagons pulled by a horse, like on *The Rifleman*) and finishing his own coach in 1992. “You have to make every piece and part,” Wilson says. “There are no stagecoach parts at Home Depot.”

Over the next twenty years, while keeping his day job doing custom millwork, Wilson “tooled up,” stocked his own shop, and helped Brown as much as possible. When he took over making the coaches, he quit his day job, of course, as it takes many months to build a single coach.



The wheels are still built by Amish tradesmen, but everything else today is handmade by Wilson. He makes a Concord, or western-style, stagecoach: “the Cadillac of coaches.” Once the wheels are ordered, he begins the ironwork to construct the running gear (the base of the coach). It’s an exacting process of assembling for fit, then disassembling to prime and paint, then reassembling.

Next he makes the leather straps that cradle the body (the cabin area) on the running gear. It works better than springs for shock absorption (the idea came to a



stagecoach designer watching a baby carriage on a bumpy sidewalk). The body is constructed either out of fiberglass for durability or wood for authenticity.

Once the body is built and painted, he completes the interior upholstery work (usually leather). The painting and pin-striping artwork on the wheels, running gear, and body are the final touches before the coach is “born.”

Wilson built two stagecoaches for Wells Fargo last year. They were Brown’s best customer, and when he passed away in 2011, the company signed a contract with

Wilson. He’s working on his fifth coach now, waiting on his next order. Hollywood is always a possible customer—Brown’s coaches have been seen in movies like *Maverick* and *Night at the Museum*.

Wilson says he takes great pride in how “square and true” his coaches ride. “On level ground, you can pull that coach with two fingers,” he says. “Jay always stressed that. Square and true.”

WEB EXTRAS at TexasCoopPower.com

Learn more about *Portraits of the American Craftsman* (Lyons Press, 2013) online.

The Original Crooner

Texan Gene Austin created a singing style copied by the stars

BY JOHN MORTHLAND

HE'S CREDITED WITH CREATING THE VOCAL style known as crooning, and during the six-year peak of his career in the late 1920s and early '30s, he sold some 86 million records. Several of his songs became standards that are still sung today. Known as "The Voice of the Southland," he was an iconic figure to an emerging Southern middle class. Gene Austin, born Lemuel Eugene Lucas in Gainesville, Texas, in 1900, was a towering figure in early 20th-century American pop culture. Yet today, he's barely remembered.

Austin rode new technology to the top of the charts. He cut his first record, the self-composed *When My Sugar Walks Down the Street*, a duet with Aileen Stanley, in 1925, the year after electronic recording was introduced. Acoustic recording until that time required a full-throated vocalist to belt lyrics into a cone-shaped device called a horn, which couldn't fully catch the sounds.

The electronic system allowed the vocalist to sing into a microphone, which more accurately captured not only different volumes (allowing singers to raise and lower their voices for dramatic effect) but also the nuances of an individual's voice (so they could phrase lyrics more subtly).

The radio-friendly result sounded warm and intimate, as if the vocalist was singing directly to each listener, and it proved a perfect foil for Austin's delicate, high tenor. He and others, including Rudy Vallee, ran with this new technique, which was later perfected by the likes of Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra (both of whom credited Austin with initiating the style).

Crooning remained the dominant form of pop singing until rock 'n' roll took over in the mid-1950s.

Before his breakthrough, Austin led a vagabond life. His parents divorced when he was 6, and his mother soon married a blacksmith named Jim Austin, who gave the child his own surname and moved the family to swampy Yellow Pine, Louisiana, about 30 miles east of Shreveport.

To avoid his belligerent stepfather, Austin began sneaking off to the African-American area known as "The Quarters," where he embraced a mentor he called Uncle Esau and fell hard for black singing styles. At 16, he fled home for good, hobnobbing around the South. Then came two Army stints, followed by time in Baltimore studying dentistry and law.

Finally, after he sought to crack vaudeville as one half of the comic duo Roy and Gene, he had a hit with the 1924 original *How Come You Do Me Like You Do?* That took the team to New York, where they broke up. Then, Austin hired on with Irving Mills Music as a songwriter and song plugger, with the job of inducing other artists to perform material from the company's catalog.

Once his own singing career began, Austin's familiarity with the Mills inventory enabled him to find good tunes that other vocalists were ignoring. That's how he unearthed early hits he didn't write, including *Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue* and *Yes Sir, That's My Baby*, and that's how in 1927 he became the first to cut *My Blue Heaven*. That hit went on to sell at least 5 million records (some estimates go as



high as 12 million) and became his signature song. Austin also put *Bye Bye Blackbird* on the map in '26 and *Ramona* in '28.

The Lonesome Road, a secular spiritual he wrote in 1927, was Franklin D. Roosevelt's favorite song and eventually found its way into the musical *Show Boat*. Americans, especially in the South, couldn't get enough of the soft, seductive style of the "Genial Texan," as he was sometimes dubbed, and if they listened closely to some hits, they could even detect a bit of an accent. Performing in a suit and tie, he lent respectability to Southern singers, who'd previously been stereotyped as blackface minstrels and vaudevillians or working-class country and blues bums.

But almost as soon as he began hitting,

Austin discovered the high life. He claimed he began drinking to excess to buffer the phoniness of show biz and because he was unhappy his record company wouldn't let him record the black material he wanted to expose to white America (though he did release his friend Fats Waller's *Ain't Misbehavin'* even before Waller did). Whatever the case, he lived it up in Harlem speakeasies, developing a reputation as a hard man to work with, as wives began to come and go—five in all. Between that and the Depression, his snowballing career began to melt instead.

He fell back on his fondness for the South, moving to New Orleans and then Charlotte, North Carolina, and eventually running a traveling tent show. He then

went out to Hollywood, taking roles in three movies and opening a nightclub, *My Blue Heaven*. There were regular radio shows, and periodic attempts at a national comeback, none more than moderately successful.

In 1962, with a new *My Blue Heaven* anchored in Las Vegas, he ran for governor of Nevada but was roundly trampled. By the time he died of lung cancer in Palm Springs, California, in 1972, he'd been virtually forgotten. But Southerners like Austin were the backbone of American popular music.

John Morthland is an Austin writer.

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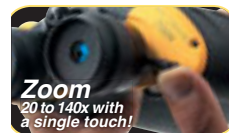
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The First Texans?

Recent archaeological discoveries change understanding of earliest inhabitants

BY MARTHA DEERING

ANTHROPOLOGIST MICHAEL R. WATERS did not believe his 2006 dig along Buttermilk Creek would fundamentally alter the understanding of the first humans in Texas.

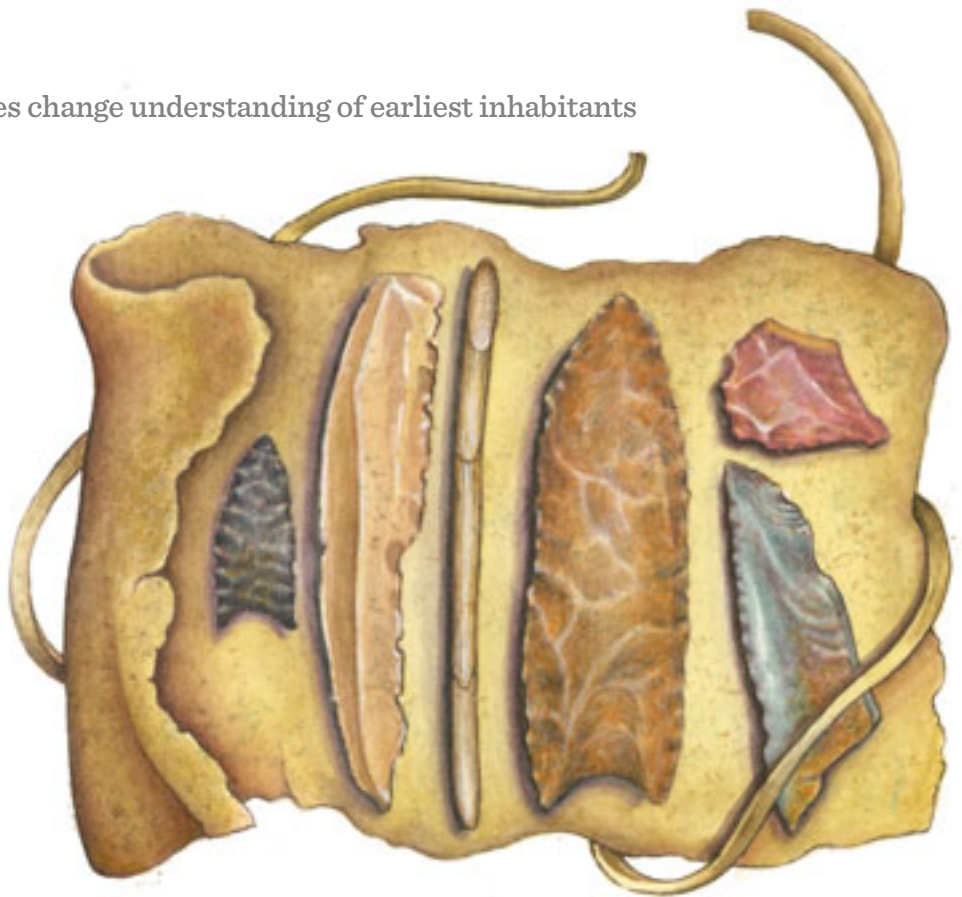
Excavations had unearthed tools that detail almost continuous habitation of the site near Salado for thousands of years. Waters, the director of the Center for the Study of the First Americans at Texas A&M University, wasn't surprised to find these artifacts. They proved the evidence of the Clovis people, who inhabited the areas 12,800 to 13,100 years ago. Scientists had long held that Clovis people were the earliest humans in the Americas.

The real surprise for Waters and his team came when further excavation unearthed more primitive tools beneath the Clovis level. Roughly 15,000 artifacts appeared: blades, flakes and end scrapers, left by an unknown people who lived along Buttermilk Creek 2,500 years *before* Clovis.

Who were these pre-Clovis Texans who left behind signs of double-sided toolmaking that would be refined about 2,000 years later by Clovis artisans?

"They were probably hunter-gatherers, passing through the area from time to time over thousands of years," Waters says. "The artifacts make up a mobile toolkit, easily transported to the next campsite." Waters knew that his discovery would be controversial and supporting materials essential, but the absence of organic matter at this deep level made traditional radiocarbon dating impossible.

Instead, he called in experts Steven L. Forman, Lee Nordt and Steven Driese of Baylor University to use optically stimulated luminescence dating, a method that measures the time since crystals in sediment were last exposed to sunlight. The samples from the Buttermilk Creek site consistently yielded the same ages: 13,200–15,500 years.



"We were all surprised at the antiquity of the site," Forman says, "but duplication of observations and ages supported a new view on paleo populations of the Americas."

"The sediment layers were remarkably intact," says Nordt. "The ancient floodplain sediments were clayey enough to mitigate against bioturbation [disruption by animals or roots] and mixing of artifacts from different time periods, but not so clayey as to cause churning and mixing."

In the mid-20th century, most archaeologists jumped aboard the Clovis-first bandwagon. The consensus is that the Clovis people, named for the town in New Mexico near where their spear points were first discovered, arrived in the New World from Asia over a land bridge and spread through North and South America. The discovery of pre-Clovis populations shoots holes in this long-cherished view.

Other traces of pre-Clovis peoples have cropped up in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Oregon, and as far south as Monte Verde, Chile. Alternative migration theories suggest that early settlers may have come down both coasts, either on foot or

hugging the shoreline in small boats. DNA samples confirm that early Texans are of Asian ancestry, but confirming a precise date for their arrival is difficult.

Because no Clovis artifacts have ever been discovered in Asia, the fluted spear point technology that marks Clovis occupations must have developed after the new settlers arrived in this hemisphere. However, Waters points out that stone tools may represent only 5 percent of a culture's material relics. Others, such as textiles, animal skins, wood, bone and antler tools disintegrate over time. "We have to be careful," Waters says, "about how we interpret the small amounts of evidence."

Archaeology is subject to controversial discoveries and interpretations. Although most archaeologists accept Waters' findings, a few hesitate, even when faced with compelling evidence.

"We continue to work as a team," Forman says, "to provide geologic context critical for dating. New discoveries are almost certain at Buttermilk Creek in the future."

Martha Deering, a member of Heart of Texas EC, lives near McGregor.

Chicago Doctor Invents *Affordable* Hearing Aid Outperforms Many Higher Priced Hearing Aids

Reported by J. Page

CHICAGO: A local board-certified Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) physician, Dr. S. Cherukuri, has just shaken up the hearing aid industry with the invention of a medical-grade, affordable hearing aid. **This revolutionary hearing aid is designed to help millions of people with hearing loss who cannot afford—or do not wish to pay—the much higher cost of traditional hearing aids.**

"Perhaps the best quality-to-price ratio in the hearing aid industry" — Dr. Babu, Board-Certified ENT Physician

Dr. Cherukuri knew that untreated hearing loss could lead to depression, social isolation, anxiety, and symptoms consistent with Alzheimer's disease. **He could not understand why the cost of hearing aids was so high when the prices on so many consumer electronics like TVs, DVD players, cell phones, and digital cameras had fallen.**

Since Medicare and most private insurance plans do not cover the costs of hearing aids, which traditionally run between \$2,000-\$6,000 for a pair, many of the doctor's patients could not afford the expense. Dr. Cherukuri's goal was to find a reasonable solution that would help with the most common types of hearing loss at an affordable price, similar to the **"one-size-fits-most" reading glasses** available at drug stores.

He evaluated numerous hearing devices and sound amplifiers, including those seen on television. Without fail, almost all of these were found to amplify bass/low frequencies (below 1000 Hz) and were not useful in amplifying the frequencies related to the human voice.

Inspiration from a Surprising Source

The doctor's inspiration to defeat the powers-that-be that kept inexpensive hearing aids out of the hands of the public actually came from a new cell phone he had just purchased. **"I felt that if someone could devise an**

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affordable device like an iPhone® for about \$200 that could do all sorts of things, I could create a hearing aid at a similar price."

Affordable Hearing Aid with Superb Performance

The high cost of hearing aids is a result of layers of middlemen and expensive unnecessary features. Dr. Cherukuri concluded that it would be possible to develop a medical-grade hearing aid without sacrificing the quality of components. The result is the **MDHearingAid PRO**, under \$200 each when buying a pair. **It has been declared to be the best low-cost hearing aid that amplifies the range of sounds associated with the human voice without overly amplifying background noise.**

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—Gerald L.

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—Dr. May, ENT Physician

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—Al P.

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When it comes to big, game-winning flavors, Chris Shepherd is in a league of his own. His menus feature ingredients from around the globe. He serves Crispy Ham Ribs With Sorghum Mustard Glaze at his four Hay Merchant restaurants on the club level of NRG Stadium during Houston Texans games.

"This dish puts two of the greatest things on the face of the planet together: ham and ribs," he says.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Crispy Ham Ribs With Sorghum Mustard Glaze

BRINE

- 1 gallon water
- 2 cups light brown sugar
- 1½ cups kosher salt
- 1½ ounces curing salt No. 1

RIBS

- 2 slabs pork ribs

GLAZE

- ¾ cup sorghum
 - ½ cup Dijon mustard
 - 1 tablespoon yellow mustard seeds
 - ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 - ½ tablespoon fish sauce
- Sliced scallions for garnish

1. Combine the brine ingredients in a large pot over medium heat and stir until the salts and sugar melt. Let the brine cool and submerge the ribs. Weigh the ribs down to keep them completely submerged in the liquid, and then refrigerate 4–5 days.

2. When you're ready to cook the ribs, remove them from the brine and pat dry. Heat a smoker to 225 degrees, and smoke the ribs 5–6 hours or until almost

MARY PAT WALDRON

Recipes

Touchdown Party Foods



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

JENNIFER RIECK | MEDINA EC

No matter how your team fares on Super Bowl Sunday—February 7 this year—these crowd-pleasing appetizers will make your gathering a winner.

Cowboy Caviar

A tumble of beans and fresh vegetables, perked up with a zippy vinaigrette or salsa, is a time-honored Texas tradition. Rieck says this “addictive” dip is best served with tortilla chips or “scoops.”

- 3 cans black-eyed peas (15 ounces), drained and rinsed
- 1 can black beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed
- 1 can corn (10 ounces), drained
- 1 can sliced black olives (2.25 ounces), drained and chopped

- 4 jalapeño peppers, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 bottle Italian salad dressing (16 ounces)
- 2 chopped avocadoes

1. Combine all ingredients except avocadoes in a large bowl and toss to combine.
2. Refrigerate at least 1 hour (or overnight for better flavor) to allow the ingredients to marinate in the dressing.
3. Add the avocadoes just before serving and toss to combine. Makes 2 generous quarts.

tender. Remove from heat, cool briefly and refrigerate. Once the meat has chilled, slice the slab into single ribs.

3. To make the glaze, combine all the glaze ingredients in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring the mixture to a boil, stirring, and then reduce heat to low and simmer 20 minutes.

4. To finish the ribs, heat a grill to medium-high and grill the ribs so they have a nice char and are warm through (or you can broil the ribs). In a large bowl, combine the ribs and enough glaze to generously coat them, and toss well. Arrange ribs on a serving platter and garnish with thinly sliced scallions. Serves 6–8.

NOTES Sorghum (or sorghum syrup) is a molasses-like table syrup made from ground sorghum cane. Fish sauce is a condiment popular in Southeast Asia made from salted, fermented fish. It has a pungent “umami” flavor and is used much like soy sauce.

Buffalo Chicken Spread

CHARLIE DASHIELL | NUECES EC

- 8 ounces light cream cheese
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 2 teaspoons Spanish paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ cup finely diced cooked (or smoked) chicken
- ¼ cup sliced green onions
- ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped pickled jalapeño peppers, or more to taste
- ½ cup sour cream, or more as desired for texture

1. Thoroughly combine cream cheese, hot sauce, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika and ground ginger in a mixing bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment.
2. Stir in the chicken, green onions, cheddar cheese and jalapeños. Stir in enough sour cream to reach a desired consistency.
3. Refrigerate at least 1 hour to allow the flavors to meld.
4. Serve with sturdy chips, or spread the dip on extra-thin bread to make wonderful party sandwiches. Makes about 2 cups.

\$100 Recipe Contest



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July's recipe contest is **Primo Pasta**—hot or cold, meat or vegetable, traditional or modern. Send us your favorite pasta recipes by the **February 10** deadline.

There are three ways to enter: **ONLINE** at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; **MAIL** to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; **FAX** to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

Jalapeño Popper Deviled Eggs

CARLY TERRELL | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

To make these eggs particularly devilish, Terrell does not seed the chopped jalapeño (but you can trim the seeds for a less intense fire). She suggests discarding two of the yolks, but using all of them creates a rich and creamy filling.

- 6 hard-boiled eggs
- 3 heaping tablespoons softened cream cheese
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 3 strips cooked bacon, crumbled
- 1 jalapeño pepper, finely chopped
- Pinch salt
- Pinch ground black pepper

GARNISH

- 1 jalapeño pepper, thinly sliced
- 1 strip cooked bacon, crumbled

1. Peel the hard-boiled eggs. Slice each egg in half lengthwise and carefully scoop out the yolk. Arrange the egg

whites onto a serving tray and set aside.
 2. Place yolks in a mixing bowl. Add cream cheese, mayonnaise, crumbled bacon, jalapeño, salt and pepper. Using a fork, stir the mixture until well-blended and creamy.
 3. Spoon the filling into the egg whites or transfer the yolk mixture to a pastry bag (or a plastic bag with a small tip cut off the corner) and pipe into the egg white.
 4. Garnish each egg with a thin slice of jalapeño and a bit of bacon. Serve immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until party time. Makes 12.

Sweet and Salty Chili Peanuts

JAMIE PARCHMAN | MAGIC VALLEY EC

- ½ cup light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

- ¼ cup water
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 4 cups salted cocktail peanuts

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and apply cooking spray or vegetable oil.
 2. Combine all ingredients except peanuts in a small saucepan over medium heat until butter is melted. Continue to cook, stirring, for an additional minute.
 3. Pour hot butter mixture over peanuts in a large heat-proof mixing bowl and toss until well-coated.
 4. Transfer nuts to prepared baking sheet and spread into a single layer. Bake 10 minutes, then stir to redistribute the spices. Spread the nuts back into a single layer and bake until fragrant and sticky, about 5 more minutes.
 5. Cool completely before serving. Makes 4 cups.

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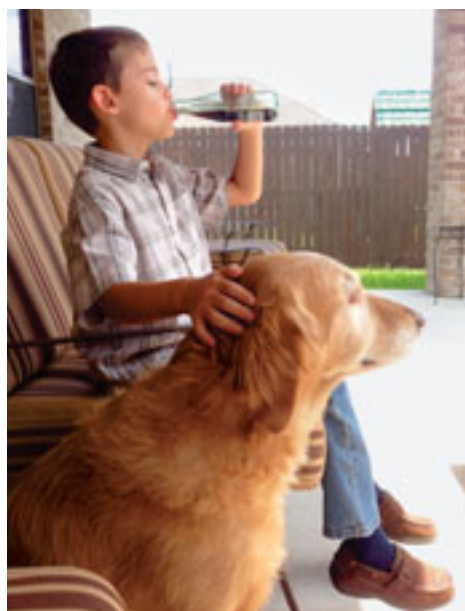


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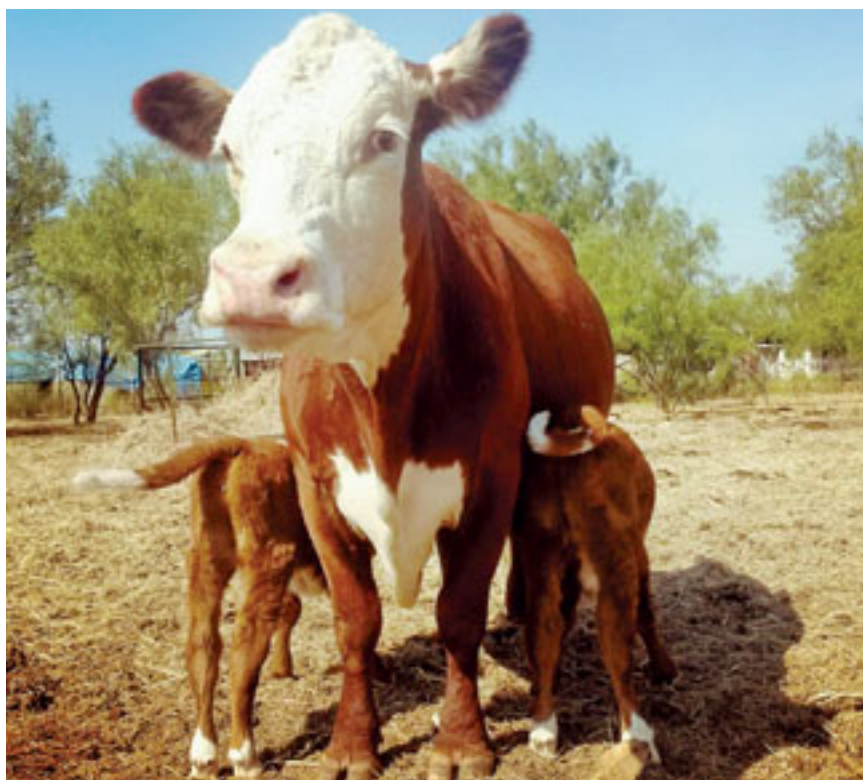
IN GROUPS OR PAIRED, these Texans know life is meant to be shared.
GRACE ARSIAGA

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Better yet, look at them with a friend.



▲ **MOLLY PRICE**, Grayson-Collin EC: Matthew, 8, enjoys a soft drink with his best pal, Reggie, after church on a Sunday afternoon.

▼ **CRYSTAL MOUNT**, Trinity Valley EC: Bullfrogs seem to hold a meeting at a water tank.



▲ **BECKY WESTMORELAND**, Big Country EC: Twin calves born October 1, 2015

◀ **MIGNONE BISHOP**, Mid-South Synergy: Jaxon Bishop, 3, snuggles with his best friend, Jake, a silver Lab pup.

UPCOMING CONTESTS

JUNE BY MOONLIGHT	DUE FEBRUARY 10
JULY THE OLD WEST	DUE MARCH 10
AUGUST RESTORED	DUE APRIL 10

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

ONLINE: Submit highest-resolution digital images at TexasCoopPower.com/contests. **MAIL:** Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We do not accept entries via email. We regret that Texas Co-op Power cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.



◀ **JUDY THACKER**, Farmers EC: Granddaughters Rylee and Kelsey walk hand-in-hand down a country road.



Pick of the Month
Gault Site Tour

Belton [February 13]

(254) 933-5243, bellcountymuseum.org

The Gault Site, in southwestern Bell County, is recognized as one of the most important archaeological sites in America. James E. Pearce, the first professional archaeologist in Texas, excavated there in 1929. The 2½-hour tour covers about 1 mile of gentle terrain.

Below: Michael B. Collins, Texas State University



GAULT: EARL NOTTINGHAM | TPWD. JALAPEÑO: SILVY78 | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB. LOTUS: KLAGYIVIK | DOLLAR PHOTO CLUB

February

6

Amarillo Brundibar, (806) 372-7464, amarilloopera.org

Goliad The Green Flag of Gutierrez and Magee, (361) 645-3752, presidiolabahia.org

Magnolia Mardi Gras on The Stroll, (281) 356-2266, ext. 3; cityofmagnolia.com

11

Lufkin Sandi Patty, Forever Grateful: The Farewell Tour, (936) 633-0359, thepineslufkin.com

Terlingua [11-13] Chihuahuan Desert Bike Fest, 1-888-989-6900, desertsportstx.com

12

Marble Falls [12-13] Quilt Show: Quilts Made in America, (830) 598-7539

13

Ennis Czech Music Festival, (972) 875-7959, ennisczechmusicfestival.com

February 19-20
Laredo
Jalapeño Festival



19

Crockett Driving Miss Daisy, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

Henderson [19-28] Little Women, (903) 657-2968, hctonline.org

Laredo [19-20] Jalapeño Festival, (956) 722-5528, wbcaredo.org

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20

Blanco Clarinetist Victoria Luperi, (409) 504-2397, blancoperformingarts.com

21

San Angelo West Texas Jazz Orchestra: Play It Again, (325) 653-3333, samfa.org

Star Harbor Star Harbor Watercolor Society Show, (903) 451-4016, starharborws.org

23

San Antonio Tuesday Musical Club Artist Series: Tenor David Portillo, (210) 392-9047, satmc.org

Abilene [23-24] Texas Farm, Ranch and Wildlife Expo, (325) 677-7241, abilenechamber.com

24

Brenham [24-27] Annual Used Book Sale, 1-888-273-6426, visitbrenhamtexas.com

25

Boerne TAO: *Seventeen Samurai*, (830) 331-9079, visitboerne.org/calendar

27

Gainesville North Texas Farm Toy Show, (940) 736-9966

Luling American Legion Chili Cook-Off, (830) 875-9329, discoverluling.com

Fredericksburg [27-28] Texas Hill Country Home & Garden Expo, (830) 992-5074, hillcountryhomeandgardenexpo.com

February 27-28
Fredericksburg
Hill Country
Home & Garden Expo



March

2

Huntsville General Sam Houston Birthday Celebration, 1-800-289-0389, huntsvilletexas.com

4

Cypress [4-5] Quilt Show: If Quilts Could Talk, (281) 894-3900, tcqgtx.blogspot.com


Brownsville [4-6] Texas Scholastic Chess Championships, (956) 698-2019, 2016texaschessscholastics.com

5

Washington [5-6] Texas Independence Day Celebration, (936) 878-2214, wheretexasbecametexas.org

Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event for April by February 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar!



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Hill Country Gem

Mason combines history and natural treasures for a laid-back getaway

BY LYDIA SALDAÑA

MASON RETAINS A QUIET CHARM, MINUS the crowds of visitors that flock to other Hill Country destinations.

My partner and I start our visit on the town square in the 1910 Classic Revival Mason County Courthouse.

We meet County Judge Jerry Bearden, who gives us a quick tour. The courthouse is in line for a grant from the Texas Historical Commission's preservation program. In 2013, an emergency grant allowed for roof repairs and new paint for the porches and porticoes. "Our courthouse is the focal point for our citizens and tourists alike," Bearden says.

After a tasty lunch of sandwiches and German potato salad at the **Square Plate Deli** across Fort McKavitt Street, we stroll the square. First stop is the **Mason Square Museum**, a well-appointed repository of colorful local lore. The area was settled after Fort Mason was built in 1851. Gen. Robert E. Lee served at Fort Mason before the start of the Civil War, just one of a long list of distinguished generals who served here. The mid-1870s brought bloody strife between German immigrants and American settlers over cattle rustling, defining a little-known chapter in Texas history called the Hoodoo War.

Mom-and-pop stores line much of the square, along with the restored **Odeon Theater**. This 1928 gem is one of the oldest continually operating movie theaters in West Texas. In 1957, it hosted a premiere of the Disney movie *Old Yeller*, based on the novel by Mason native Fred Gipson. Residents rallied when the theater was almost sold in the early 1990s. The Odeon Preservation Association was born, and the theater has been rejuvenated. First-run movies still play once a month, and live music often emanates from beneath its neon sign.

A few blocks from the square, the **Reynolds-Seaquist House**, a remarkably lavish Victorian residence built in 1891, embod-



ies one of the best examples of Italianate architecture in the Hill Country. It features 22 rooms, 15 fireplaces, a third-floor ballroom and glowing stained glass throughout. The house, like the entire Mason courthouse square, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2014, Seaquist House was named one of the most endangered historic structures in the state by Preservation Texas. Once again, Mason residents rallied. The Seaquist House Foundation was created, and the structure is now on the road to restoration. Jan Appleby chairs the Mason County Historical Commission and is spearheading the effort to reopen the mansion for tours.

"Longtime residents of Mason remember coming to dances here back in the day," she says. "We're working to make these memories come alive again and share them with visitors to Mason."

Mother Nature is also a big attraction around Mason. Paddling the tranquil Llano River provides a more restful experience than navigating rivers closer to Texas cities and interstate highways. Stargazers are also drawn here; Mason has

joined with the cities of Llano and Fredericksburg to partner on a dark-skies initiative that is designed to reduce light pollution and keep night skies dark.

We end our Mason visit with a thrilling wildlife viewing experience: watching the dawn return of millions of Mexican free-tailed bats to the **Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve**. The Nature Conservancy property is stewarded by Vicki Ritter, whose knowledge of bats is surpassed only by her enthusiasm for them.

She offers an opportunity to view the bats' early-morning return on the third Saturday of every summer month. Visitors also can view the bat emergence at dusk Thursday through Sunday from May to October.

"This is such a different experience than a bat emergence," Ritter says. "It's like the cave is vacuuming the sky!"

Mason may be a bit off the beaten path, and that's what makes it special.

Lydia Saldaña is a Fort Worth writer.

WEB EXTRAS at TexasCoopPower.com



See more photos of the Mason area online.

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