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2017

holiday
CONTEST
WINNERS

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Black-tailed prairie dogs once inhabited 56.8 million acres in Texas.

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ON THE COVER *Warm Gingerbread With Lemon Basil Sauce by Rebekah Stewart of San Bernard EC wins the grand prize. Photo by Melissa Brisko*

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Youth Tour Optimism

I trust that this journey will have opened their eyes and hearts to the need that people of character be in office and guide our country in the right way [*The State With the Most*, October 2017].

JACKY MANCHESTER | VAN ALSTYNE
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Impressive group of young people. If the rest of the nation raises such fine students, the future of the country is in good hands.

PAUL VELEZ | KYLE
PEDERNALES EC

Día de los Muertos

I enjoyed reading *Día de los Muertos* [October 2017] and learning how to celebrate our friends and relatives who have passed on. I like the tradition. ¡Muchas gracias!

DAVID FISCHER | GEORGETOWN
PEDERNALES EC

From the TCP Kitchen

I was given Paula Disbrowe's *Cowgirl Cuisine: Rustic Recipes and Cowgirl Adventures From a Texas Ranch* cookbook when it came out. I have made a good impression following her recipes when I bring food to gatherings. Scorpion Tails [*Some Like it Hot*, August 2017] are labor-intensive but so worth it.

DO chill the filling overnight.
DO use the listed cheeses.
DO find the pequillo peppers for the sauce topping.

Broiling until browned, not blackened, makes a huge difference.

My cook's tip: Using a serrated grapefruit spoon to gut the jalapenos during prep is much easier than a paring knife.

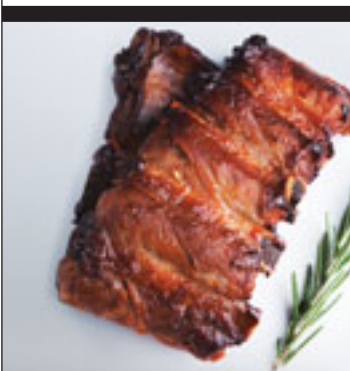
Never a Humdrum Day

One of our linemen, Edward Varnador, saw this hummingbird trying to fly in the truck barn at Medina EC, where I also work.

It had been in the barn for several days trying to get out, but it had string wrapped around its body and feet. The little bird was worn out from trying to fly and it fell to the ground. Edward picked it up and unwound the string from it before setting it free.

These rough, tough lineman hands were so tender and delicate to remove the string from this little fellow.

LINDA SPEED | PEARSALL | MEDINA EC



I made a huge batch of 30 recently for a fête and gobbled down five before I could stop myself.

SHELLEY MEYER | CANYON LAKE
PEDERNALES EC

We are fascinated with John Madison's ribs [above] but are hesitant to try it [*Smoky Fall-off-the-Bone Ribs*, October 2017]. Please explain the purpose of cooking the ribs in waxed paper. We barbecue often but have never heard of

this method. The paper does not melt or stick to the ribs?

SANDI APPELT | BRENHAM
BLUEBONNET AND PEDERNALES ECS

Food Editor Paula Disbrowe

responds: Madison's method of double-wrapping the ribs in waxed paper and aluminum foil was new to me, as well. Essentially, he's trying to preserve moisture by sealing in the juices. The waxed paper does not melt or stick to the ribs (thanks to the rendered meat fat); however, you also can use butcher paper or parchment—or simply use aluminum foil.

Yay for Snow Days

As a 7-year-old in 1957 in Arlington, Virginia, I remember we had a big blizzard that year, too [*Letters, Derailed by Blizzard*, October 2017]. I used to watch the weather report and

noticed our big snowstorms always came out of Texas.

To a little schoolboy, a foot of snow meant freedom. Too bad it started to snow on Saturday and not Sunday night.

MARK BORCHELT | ROBY
BIG COUNTRY EC

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Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

Heavenly Holiday in Hondo

HONDO, west of San Antonio, calls itself “God’s Country,” so naturally its annual yuletide festival is called **CHRISTMAS IN GOD’S COUNTRY**.

The celebration, **DECEMBER 8-9** this year, includes real snow, Santa Claus, a worship service, lighted night parade and vendor booths around the Medina County Courthouse square.

Medina Electric Cooperative is a sponsor of the event, and the co-op’s employees often volunteer to contribute to its success.

Just follow the holiday greeting signs, put up along U.S. Highway 90 by area businesses, to find your way.

INFO ▶ (830) 426-3037, hondochamber.org/events

WEB EXTRAS
▶ Find more happenings online.

LIFESTYLE

‘Volar un Papalote’

That’s how you would say “go fly a kite” in Spanish.

Two sections of the recently published children’s book *50 Cities of the U.S.A.* visit Texas cities where you might hear that phrase.

The pages on Austin note that the Zilker Kite Festival is the U.S.’s longest-running kite festival, dating to 1929. The Houston pages note there are 145 languages spoken in the area.



SPORTS SECTION

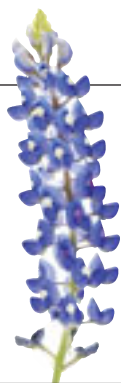
ICE IN THEIR VEINS

The legendary Ice Bowl, when the Green Bay Packers claimed the NFL championship with a 21-17 victory over the Dallas Cowboys in one of the coldest and most memorable games in league history, was played 50 years ago.

The game-time temperature December 31, 1967, was minus 13, with a wind chill of minus 48. Players said the turf at Lambeau Field in Green Bay was like a sheet of ice.

Quarterback Bart Starr, one of several players who suffered frostbite during the game, ran the ball into the end zone with just seconds left to clinch the Packers’ victory.

WORTH REPEATING



"My heart found its home long ago in the beauty, mystery, order and disorder of the flowering earth."

— LADY BIRD JOHNSON

The former first lady was born December 22, 1912, and the National Wildflower Research Center opened on that same date in 1982.

CO-OP PEOPLE

Knowing the Ropes

MICHAEL ZAMZOW can compete among the best when it comes to ropes and zeal. The HILCO Electric Cooperative lineman of two years won a share of a \$150,000 grand prize at the World Series of Team Roping Finale XI in Las Vegas in December 2016 and a second-place trophy at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo in Seguin in July 2017. He roped steer in one event and a mock-injured lineman in the other.

How did he do it? "Lots of practice and hard work," Zamzow says. "It takes a lot of time to get to where you want to be."

The Whitney native grew up riding horses and going to rodeos. He began practicing his roping skills daily and soon was traveling to compete in rodeos every weekend. Qualifying for the World Series was a dream.

"Man, it was pretty cool," he says of his first trip to Las Vegas. "I was in bed pretty early every night, getting ready to rope the next morning and take care of my horse."

Zamzow heads back to Vegas, to compete in the WSTR Finale XII, December 10–16.



NATURE

SEEDS OF AN IDEA

Legendary Trees, about 20 miles south of Athens, grows and sells saplings descended from Texas' historic trees. Among the 11 trees currently available, most are oaks such as Texas A&M University's Century Tree (the most popular), Comanche's Fleming Oak, Stephens County's Halfway Oak and New Braunfels' Church Oak.

The idea for the business came from these very pages. Company founders Chuck Cade and Bourke Harvey, members of Trinity Valley Electric Cooperative, read *Grow Your Own Tall Tale* in the April 2015 issue. That story described the special project to sell saplings from the historic La Bahia pecan, which overlooks the ferry crossing at Washington-on-the-Brazos, where it has stood since the days of the Texas Revolution.

Cade and Harvey decided to seek out acorns and pecans from historic trees in Texas and offer them for sale. Pecan lovers now can select the Goodnight-Loving pecan in Palo Pinto County where, legend has it, Charles Goodnight and Oliver Loving sealed their partnership in 1866.

Learn more at legendarytrees.com.



Christmas ❄️ IN THE ❄️



The holiday season brings visions of gathering with friends and family, participating in special traditions and creating wonderful memories. But it easily can turn into a frenzied time, involving excessive dashing hither and yon to shop, prepare and manage all the moving parts. And all that effort is just to achieve the “gathering” stage. It does not account for the stress of overspending, overeating and overexposure to those difficult relatives. Sometimes, the holidays lose their fun.

This year, consider an alternative. Step back—in some cases, way, way, back—to simpler days and enjoy the outdoors, fun activities and quality time with friends or family at special holiday events hosted by Texas state parks.

Consider the six favorites we describe here and check for additional holiday events at other parks on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department State Parks events page: tpwd.texas.gov/calendarstate-park-events.

BY MELISSA GASKILL

Parks



Goliad State Park

The Spanish colonial mission of Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga forms the centerpiece of this park on the banks of the San Antonio River in Southeast Texas. Originally established in 1722 near Matagorda Bay and moved to its present site in 1749, the mission also served as Texas' first large cattle ranch, supplying beef for Spanish settlements all the way to Louisiana.

Every December, park staffers decorate the whitewashed stucco chapel, reconstructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. Festive lights adorn outdoor arches; greenery and lights twine around altar railings inside; and glowing luminarias line the walkway to the chapel. Check the park website events page for holiday concerts at the mission, which boasts excellent acoustics.

Luminarias, left, and other lighting give Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga a festive feel.



South Llano River State Park

Walter Buck donated his 2,600-acre Central Texas ranch to the TPWD in 1977. The park includes campgrounds, picnic areas, riverfront and more than 18 miles of trails.

"The park headquarters is in the former ranch house," says interpretive ranger Holly Platz, "and we have it decorated all month for the holidays." Christmas at the Ranch, a one-day event December 2, celebrates ranching holiday traditions with events such as Dutch oven cooking, period music and horse demonstrations. "Entrance fees are waived for the day, so it's a great time for families to come," Platz adds.

Fly-fishing is just one of the activities that lures visitors to South Llano River State Park.



Monument Hill and Kreische Brewery State Historic Sites

The imposing circa-1850s home of German immigrant H.L. Kreische brings out the holiday spirit with traditional German-Texas Christmas trees, wreaths, lamps and candles. Thousands of festive lights shine along the half-mile Scenic and Historic Trail that traces a bluff with a view of the town of La Grange. Inside the grand old house, Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus wait to hear children's wish lists, and the Monument Hill and Kreische Brewery Docent Organization presents Christmas music and refreshments. These festivities take place December 2, 8, 9, 15 and 16, 6–8 p.m.

A decorated outdoor window sill at the Kreische Brewery



Battleship Texas State Historic Site

Commissioned March 12, 1914, the Battleship Texas took part in significant naval battles in World War I and World War II. Now retired, it docks on the Houston Ship Channel near San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site.

For Yuletide Texas, December 1–31, staff and volunteers dress up the ship. “We decorate it in the same way the crew serving aboard the ship would have,” says park employee Barbara Graf. “The sailors and officers were missing spending the holidays at home with their families and tried to make this time aboard the ship special.”

Graf says the highlight of the celebration is A Sailor's Christmas, 11 a.m.–3 p.m., December 9. It includes festive activities such as pictures with Santa and cookies served from the ship's galley. It's free with paid admission to the battleship.

The bell from the original USS Texas, top, commissioned in 1895, is displayed in the Battleship Texas, above.

- **Wyer Aerial Tramway, Franklin Mountains State Park**

- Bright yellow, Swiss-made gondolas travel a 2,600-foot steel cable to the top of Ranger Peak, 5,632 feet above sea level, where an observation deck offers a 360-degree view of El Paso, Mexico and the rugged Franklin Mountains. Activities include an Art in the Park event December 9 when kids of all ages can make a holiday-themed craft. Santa is expected to make a weekend visit to take pictures with tramway visitors. On December 31, join park staff sporting Santa hats on a morning hike up Ranger Peak—a great way to work off all the cookies and milk.

- **From atop Ranger Peak, visitors can see 7,000 square miles.**



- **Palo Duro Canyon State Park**

- The second-largest canyon in the country at 120 miles long, 20 miles wide and up to 800 feet deep, Palo Duro extends from Canyon to Silverton. About a million years ago, the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River began carving into the plains, exposing four geologic layers going back more than 200 million years.

On December 16, 5–8 p.m., this dramatic scenery provides a backdrop for Christmas in the Canyon, which features lighted hot air balloons that make a spectacular photo opportunity. “The balloons stay on the ground, but with the right conditions, they may lift off slightly,” says park interpreter Jeff Davis. The event at the Mack Dick Group Pavilion includes photos with Santa Claus, holiday crafts for the kids, entertainment from local bands and choirs, and a food truck serving hot drinks and food. Park entrance is free starting at 4 p.m. with a donation of canned goods for the local food bank.

- **The “Grand Canyon of Texas” features the iconic Lighthouse rock formation.**

Read more of **Melissa Gaskill’s** writing at melissagaskill.blogspot.com.



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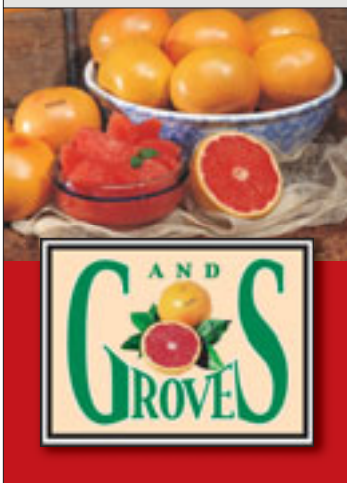
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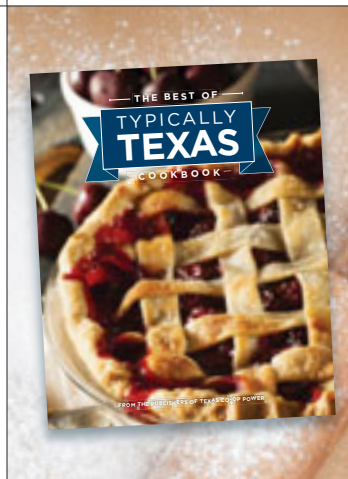
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HIGH PLAINS SENTINEL

Prairie dog “towns” survive in North Texas—but barely

“Right there,” I said as I pointed, motioning to my wife and kids as we cruised through a remote corner of Floyd County, northeast of Lubbock. Flanking the edge of a dry playa lake, conical mounds of fresh dirt offered confirmation that prairie dogs had started a settlement, called a “town,” on the slope overlooking the broad basin.

While most of the town’s residents seemed to be hunkered underground to escape the relentless March wind, a few of the rodents skittered about as we slowed to take a closer look.

The black-tailed prairie dog is one of four species of prairie dogs in North America and the only species found in Texas. The rodent, historically found west of the 98th meridian, once again

occupies pockets of its original range after a century of decline.

Floyd County straddles an ecological area that changes dramatically from west to east. On the county’s western side is the lower edge of the High Plains, a vast zone that gradually tilts downhill so sediment flows east from the Rocky Mountains as it has for eons. Below the Caprock Escarpment, rolling plains ripple eastward to the Texas Cross Timbers. On both sides of the ecological demarcation, prairie dog colonies pepper the landscape.

When I was a teacher, prairie dogs were an integral part of my wildlife education curriculum. Every year, my students mapped a prairie dog town and tested the soil and forage quality to determine the prairie dogs’ effect on the land.



Prairie dogs forage outside their burrows, marked by mounds with entrances.

“Like beavers, prairie dogs are known as ecosystem engineers because they dramatically change the landscape,” says Jonah Evans, state mammalogist with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. “The short grasses and burrow systems in prairie dog towns create important habitat that benefits multiple species, including pronghorn, burrowing owls, black-footed ferrets, Sprague’s pipit, horned lark and many more.”

As we drive, we see small towns here and there across the plains. The largest covers perhaps an acre. At every town, we see prairie dogs foraging or sitting up, keeping watch for predators

and crying out their high-pitched “chirk” at any hint of danger. The call alerts other prairie dogs, which scurry to the safety of their subterranean burrows to wait for the all-clear.

Even though prairie dogs are abundant in spots across Texas, their number and the range they occupy is only a tiny percentage of what it once was.

A CENTURY OF DECLINE

In the 1901 edition of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s *Yearbook of Agriculture*, C. Hart Merriam, chief of the Division of Biological Survey, submitted a report titled *The Prairie Dog of the Great Plains*. In his report, he cited a prominent Texas newspaper as editorializing:

“No man who has not gone through the portions of Texas infested by prairie dogs can conceive the enormous ravages they have committed. Millions of acres of land once covered with nutritious grasses have been eaten off by these animals, until the land is naked and worthless, and will remain worthless so long as the prairie dog remains. They invade the farms and eat down the growing crops. Here and there individual effort has been made to destroy them, without avail, and their numbers steadily increase, until they are a menace to the prosperity of the land.”

Four years later, Vernon Bailey released the *Biological Survey of Texas*, in which he described a prairie dog town that stretched 260 miles, from San Angelo to Clarendon. That town was about 100 miles wide and, in Bailey’s estimation, covered 16 million acres.

Black-tailed prairie dogs were tapped for eradication by the dawn of the 20th century. The rodents were plentiful and stood in the way of settlers taming the grasslands for fattening cattle or growing crops.

In 1898, B.A. Owen, a ranch manager, wrote, “I ordered 100 pounds of strychnine and 400 pounds of cyanide of potash through Doss Brothers of Colorado City. We got started about Dec. 1st and worked 15 men all that winter and had success. The next year we had a good season and the grass was knee high all over the ranch. Mr. Godair [the ranch owner] came to the ranch the next fall and asked me what I had to spend on the dogs. I told him approximately \$6,000 and he said he wouldn’t have them back for \$20,000.”

Over the next quarter century, black-tailed prairie dog numbers dropped 25 percent, as confirmed by official reports such as the *Yearbook of Agriculture*. In 1922, government agents poisoned more than 1 million acres of prairie dog country in Texas and eradicated 90 percent of the animals in the process.

In 1924, researchers sealed the prairie dog’s fate for the next generation of animals when they reported, “The prairie dog is one of the most injurious rodents of the Southwest and Plains region. These animals assemble in areas called towns, where populations become very high; thus, the removal of vegetation in

its entirety from the vicinity is common.” After the report was published, eradication

efforts continued across the Great Plains.

As the numbers of prairie dogs dropped precipitously nationwide, their eradication was nearly complete in Texas. In 1870, Texas prairie dogs were estimated to cover 56.8 million acres. By 1998, that number had been reduced to 22,500 acres—a 99.96 percent drop. Since then, prairie dogs have maintained a steady population.

ANATOMY OF AN EARTH MOVER

When prairie dogs colonize an area, their incessant digging creates habitat for other animals. Badgers, burrowing owls, snakes and rabbits are among those that occupy active and abandoned burrows. When the plains were full of prairie dogs, their presence helped maintain a complicated grassland ecosystem that supported the largest concentrations of mammals in North America, including vast herds of grazers such as bison and pronghorn.

Every prairie dog town is segmented into neighborhoods called coterie. These coterie are typically made up of related prairie dogs, and the inhabitants of each coterie don’t necessarily get along with those next door. Extra-coterie fighting occurs between prairie dogs to resolve territorial disputes.

Coterie typically cover an acre and include 50–100 burrows. The burrows aren’t interconnected, and many feature only a single opening. Most, however, have entrance and exit openings, and the two allow enough of a draft to keep the burrows’ subterranean temperature at a comfortable range of 50–70 degrees.

Inside the dirt mounds, females whelp three to five pups of mixed gender. The babies remain inside the burrow for the first six weeks and then emerge to integrate into the coterie. They spend their days playing and feeding on grasses, insects and prickly pears.

Even though they isolate themselves into small communities, prairie dogs have evolved to live communally in large groups because the larger community provides more eyes to watch for danger. When a prairie dog spots a predator such as a coyote or hawk, it makes a high-pitched alert called a chirp. The closer the danger, the faster the chirp. When the call goes out, other prairie dogs take notice.

Prairie dogs chirp until the last possible moment, when they duck into the burrow. When the danger is passed, they call out with a “jump-yip.” The jump-yip is an animated call created when a prairie dog rises on its back legs, throws its head back and announces that the coast is clear.

THE FUTURE OF PRAIRIE DOGS

Based on the species’ decline, it seems that prairie dogs should be listed as an endangered species, but they are not. In 1998, the

A prairie dog chirks to alert others to potential danger.



WEB EXTRAS

► Learn more fascinating facts about prairie dogs from the World Wildlife Fund and from *The Prairie Dog: Sentinel of the Plains*.

National Wildlife Federation petitioned the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to list the prairie dog as a threatened species. Threatened species status, while not as dire as endangered species status, still brings a degree of oversight on privately owned lands.

After hearings and lobbying on both sides of the prairie dog issue, the USFWS ruled that even though the prairie dog is warranted for inclusion on the threatened species list, its listing was precluded. Instead, the service opted on a plan in which individual states could submit restorative plans to manage and mitigate the prairie dog’s demise.

Texas’ plan, adopted in 2004, states, “The Management Plan is a step-by-step plan to reach the statewide goal of 293,129 acres of occupied prairie dog habitat by 2011.” Even though a count is in progress, it is not clear that the habitat goal was reached.

The approach to achieve the habitat goal was based on five points: understanding the exact population of the black-tailed prairie dog in Texas, implementing outreach and educational programs, developing management options that conserve prairie dog populations, tightening regulations that protect prairie dogs and establishing research programs that support long-term population viability.

It’s unlikely that the prairie dog will ever occupy the entirety of its original range. The agribusiness infrastructure and human settlement forbid it from a practical standpoint. However, there are still special pockets of rangeland where prairie dogs thrive.

In rural Floyd County, my family and I saw a few.

Writer and photographer **Russell A. Graves** is a member of South Plains EC and author of *The Prairie Dog: Sentinel of the Plains*.

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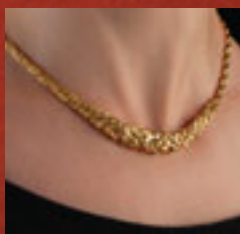
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The Many Devices of the Modern Family

IF YOU ARE STRUCK BY THE NUMBER OF screens, remote controls, gaming consoles, charging stations and cords that have become fixtures in your home, you are not alone. The typical American family is well-connected, thanks to a variety of electronic devices.

According to the Pew Research Institute, 95 percent of U.S. families have at least one cellphone, and 77 percent of Americans own a smartphone. Nearly 80 percent of adults own a laptop or desktop computer, while approximately half own tablets.

Consumer electronics coupled with a growing array of smart appliances and technology have steadily changed our homes and lifestyles. Our increased reliance on so many devices has new implications for home energy use and efficiency.

Using Smart Technology To Manage Energy Savings

So how can we save energy when we are using more electronic devices than ever before? The answer may lie with some of those same electronic devices that have become indispensable. In many cases, energy savings can be just a touchscreen away, as more apps enable you to monitor your energy use more closely.

From the convenience of your mobile device, smart technologies can maximize your ability to manage electricity use across several platforms—controlling your thermostat, appliances, water heater, home electronics and other devices.

One of the easiest ways to make an impact on energy efficiency is with a smart thermostat. Using your mobile device, you can view and edit your thermostat's schedule, monitor how much energy is used and make adjustments accordingly. For example, program your thermostat for weekday and weekend schedules so you are not wasting energy when no one is home. Be sure to check and adjust the program periodically to keep pace with changes in your household routines.

You also can ensure efficiency by purchasing Energy Star-certified appliances. Many new appliances include smart features, such as refrigerators that can tell you when maintenance is required or when a door has been left open. New washers, dryers and dishwashers allow you to program when you want



the load to start. This means you can program your tasks for off-peak energy hours—a smart choice whenever possible.

Old-School Energy Savings for New Devices

Of course, there are also the time-tested, “old-school” methods of energy efficiency that can be applied to myriad household electronic devices and screens. Computers, printers, phones and gaming consoles are notorious “vampire” power users, meaning they drain energy (and money) even when they’re not in use. If items can be turned off without disrupting your lifestyle, consider plugging them into a power strip that can be turned on and off or placed on a timer.

While modern life involves greater dependence on technology, your best resource for saving energy and money remains your local electric co-op. Your co-op can provide guidance on energy savings, energy use, local weather patterns and additional factors unique to your community.



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Shop Smart: Don't Wrap Up Unsafe Electronics

ELECTRONICS ARE AT THE TOP OF MANY WISH LISTS THIS YEAR. MAKE SURE THE ELECTRONIC gifts you choose will be safe for your loved ones.

If you're purchasing electronics for a child, that means making sure batteries, small pieces and cords do not present safety risks. Remember not to purchase electronics that plug into the wall for children under the age of 10.

Buying refurbished electronics can cut back on the costs; however, if you buy used products, buy them from brands and manufacturers that you know and trust. If the packaging seems tampered with or is already opened, make sure that the product is undamaged and still under warranty. Before you purchase electronics that already have been opened, be sure that all safety components are still in place.

Products packaged in boxes that do not display a brand name and do not have a certification mark could be counterfeit. These are often cheaply made and present safety concerns. Stay away from electrical products that are sold at temporary venues where you will be unable to make returns.

If the price is well below market value, there is a likelihood that it is a counterfeit. Although these products are often much less expensive, they lack the reliability of electronics that have been tested and marked by an independent laboratory.

Look for a certification mark indicating that a product complies with safety standards and has been approved for use based on quality tests. While these marks, often found on the bottom of a product, cannot guarantee safety, they do indicate compliance with preset standards. To help ensure safe use of a product, consumers also must maintain it properly and follow all manufacturers' directions for use.

Keep the following tips in mind to help weed out fake safety labels:

Look closely at the label for signs of quality. If the label is blurred or torn, do not trust it.

Check the packaging to ensure that there are no misspellings or incorrect information. This is a sure sign of a counterfeit product.

Buy from brands and certification laboratories you trust. If you come across a labeling standard you are unfamiliar with, check for the legitimacy online. Some common legitimate marks are UL, CSA and ETL.

A Full Dishwasher Can Save a Load

CHANCES ARE, YOU'LL RUN YOUR DISHWASHER several times on Christmas and New Year's Day.

Each time, stuff it as full as a turkey. If your dishwasher is loaded to capacity instead of half-full when you run it, you'll use less water and electricity.

Here are more energy-saving dishwasher tips:

Stop rinsing. Newer dishwashers do such a good job that you're simply wasting water and time by rinsing dishes before you load them. A surprise: Loading unrinsed dishes could save you up to 55,000 gallons of water over the life of your dishwasher.

Air-dry. Selecting the heat-dry option is unnecessary. If your dishwasher doesn't have an air-dry option, prop open the door once the wash cycle completes and let the load dry naturally.

Want to avoid spots during air-drying? Use a rinse aid. It speeds drying time and prevents spots on glasses and silverware.

Run the dishwasher after dark. Most families wash dishes right after dinner, so the demand on your electric cooperative is greatest then. Also, after a long day of cooking and a house full of company, the last thing your kitchen needs is the heat your dishwasher produces.



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John the Baptist

Neighborhood eccentric with shack in the woods fires childhood imaginations

BY BILL SANDERSON

JOHN'S WOODS WERE A FINGER OF WOOD-land that existed within and apart from Dallas' Pleasant Grove area. The woods provided a haven or hideout or no-man's-land or sacred spot where our group could hike, hang out or swing on the tree swing built by the resident hermit. The hermit lived in a ramshackle structure on the edge of the woods with his chickens, mixed-breed dogs and toothless uncle. We called him John the Baptist because he wrote Bible scriptures on pieces of pink paper and decorated the woods with them. In the spooky dark night of our imaginations, John sported a cap made of baby ears scrunched down over eyes that shone like Mercury dimes.

The woods were John's private fiefdom. He roamed the deep gullies and constructed a tree swing of steel cable so he could swing Tarzan-like from one cliff to the other. Beneath his house, it was said, began a tunnel that led to a system of tunnels catacombed throughout the woods.

Sometimes it seemed as if John the Baptist was just ahead of us, knifing through the brush and stabbing those Bible passages on the bushes. "The wages of sin is death," said one, and another said something about being cast into a lake of fire. There were a host of others, and our motley group collected them, making a game of who could gather the most in an afternoon.

We always thought John and his scripture-writing were our secret, unknown to the wider adult world of Pleasant Grove, but that wasn't the case. Betty Wadkins' backyard faced those woods. She was a leader of the San Jacinto Elementary School Parent

Teacher Association, and one Thanksgiving she was chosen to deliver a food basket to the hermit. The years have dimmed her memory of that charitable moment, except for one phrase: "John was weird."

Indeed, John was a mighty enigma, a whispered legend in his bramblebush kingdom. We would have explored there, anyway, because it was the largest stand of woods in the area, and it had that massive gully, at some points 25 feet deep and 35 feet across. John's woods were wild, thistly, thick and twisted, but the mystery of never seeing John was the real draw. The tension of knowing that someday we would see him grew slowly. We wondered what we would do and, more important, what he would do.

Then, one day, the toothless uncle surprised us while we were horsing around on the swing. One of our group reclaimed speech long enough to break the silence, asking what time it was, insinuating that we might just disappear into a light vapor if the uncle did as much as sneeze. The old man squinted up at the sun and said "half past five" in a funny, muffled, flappy sound.

We were grateful that John the Baptist's uncle didn't yank off one of our arms and bludgeon the whole pack of us with it.

But before we could hear anyone approaching, John himself appeared among us. And to our astonishment, John didn't have worms for eyelids or claim us as his sacrifices. He just stood there on the edge of the cliff, an unexpected combination of stealth and swagger, a hybrid hobo and panther. He didn't talk about Jesus or the devil or do anything weird.



He was about 40 years old with a beard and a kind of Willie Nelson cool, and he showed us some fancy tricks on the swing by hanging from his knees. All of a sudden, it was wonderful to be alive. We were watching the greatest tree swinger give us tips on finesse. We were sharing woods with a three-dimensional, sun-drenched legend. Heck, man, we were partying down with John the Baptist! From that day on, we called him “John” and felt the smugness of a tight and privileged society.

We even torqued up enough courage to approach his house, but he turned all his dogs loose, reminding us that we were just visitors. And, yes, religious-zealot hermits

really are different from you and me.

A couple of years later, John disappeared, and his uncle died, and the house burned down. We kept going to the woods. After a rain, we could slide down the cliff where the slope wasn’t sheer and get real muddy. The humidity and the thorns and the spiderwebs created a strange elixir.

But if you went down there by yourself, you could really be alone. You might not think about anything. You’d just sit there and then you’d go blank, and then some noise or movement would bring you back, and you’d get curious about whatever it was, or get scared or bored with it. Then you’d start the whole process over again.

As we became teenagers, the trips to the woods came less often. Once a group of us was arrested on a Sunday afternoon for possession of alcohol by a minor because one person had a beer and wouldn’t claim it, and macho kinship forbade anyone squealing.

Later on, we started having practice swing sessions in the evenings, building bonfires on the gully floor. We’d swing wildly over it at night, watching our shadows go through the fire, hoping we wouldn’t fall into the fiery pit below, making a prophet of John the Baptist.

Freelance writer and Texana author **Bill Sanderson** lives in the Pleasant Grove area of Dallas.

Pop and Spike

Widowed Indiana farmer moves to Texas, where new life blossoms

BY ELLEN STADER

TODAY I SAW A PHOTO ON FACEBOOK OF my 88-year-old father at a tattoo parlor. His roommate was staging a prank in which she pretended to tattoo him, and they were grinning at each other with mischievous glee. My heart leapt with gratitude, and I reflected on the long route he's taken to arrive at this point.

My mother died about a year ago. She'd already deteriorated due to an undiagnosed form of dementia before a broken hip put her in a nursing home. She objected, berated and suffered through the ordeal, and Pop visited her steadfastly in the chilly depression of her room.

As Mom declined, Pop did, too. His robust complexion and serene demeanor lost their vitality, replaced by sunken cheeks and a deadpan resignation. He began looking frail and moving slowly. When his weight bottomed out, 40 pounds lighter than normal, my brothers and I feared he would die first, as sometimes happens with elderly spouses during long illnesses.

But Mom went first. I'd never seen Pop cry that hard. They had been married for 66 years. I knew he was crying both for the woman she had been and the woman she'd become. A month later, when I returned to Indiana from my home in Austin to help him clean out Mom's closet, we had a conversation that surprised me.

"I loved your mother, and I'm sorry she's dead," he said. "But I'm still alive, and I want to live." I said I thought that was a good idea.

He said, "I think I want to come to Texas for the winter." I said I thought

that was another good idea.

Pop was a lifelong Hoosier and farmer. He'd farmed his family homestead and finished his career managing a chain of corn and cattle farms. Leaving everything he knew, even for a few months, wouldn't be easy.

The first step was the easiest. I asked around if anyone knew of a place in the country suitable for an elderly man. The first person to respond was my friend Spike, a writer who, through her unyielding compassion and dedication to local causes, is somewhat of an Austin folk hero. She had recently acquired a ranch outside of town, in Garfield, and offered my father a room in its cozy vacation-rental home. Spike was a former city dweller who had zero experience living in the country. Pop could give her some tips, she reasoned.

Two months and a thousand-mile road trip later, the fledgling snowbird and I rolled in at the Tiny T Ranch. While we unpacked, I filmed Pop sitting in his new walk-in closet, playing *There's No Place Like Home* on his harmonica. Moments after I texted the video to Spike and she shared it with her thousands of Facebook followers, a local internet star was born.

Ignoring a 35-year age difference, Pop and Spike became fast friends, and their connection attracted others. The ranch's chickens fell under Pop's animal-whisperer spell and followed him everywhere. A neighbor who was moving away brought over two horses to stay, and they began following him around, too.

"If I was still at home, I'd just be sitting in my chair, waiting," Pop told me once.



“But down here, I’ve got things to do. I gotta mow, I gotta finish that fence, move the feed buckets to the barn...” He gazed around at 30 acres of to-do list. “If I didn’t have work to do, I’d just wind down and stop like an old clock.”

The Tiny T sees a parade of visitors. Locals come to visit, attend writing or meditation workshops, or hold weddings at the property’s little chapel. Out-of-towners come to vacation or attend festivals in Austin. Many come just to wander the quiet, open spaces and feed apples to the horses.

Nearly every guest through the gate gets to know Pop. Many recognize him from Spike’s Facebook page and can’t wait to meet “the famous Bob.” At one point,

he said, “I’ve met more people during six months in Texas than during my whole life in Indiana. There’s a lot of good people down here, you know it?” I said I knew it.

WEB EXTRAS

▶ See Pop play *There’s No Place Like Home* on his harmonica.

Of course, Pop’s greatest ally is his new roommate. After a month, Spike invited him to live out his days at the ranch, and he accepted the offer. Now the best friends leave each other notes by the coffee maker each morning and play checkers every night.

They pull pranks, like the fake tattoo photo and another where they appeared to have gotten matching facial piercings. Their pleasure in each other’s company is a joy to behold.

I attribute this success to a few factors:

Spike and Pop at the Ranch

my friend’s generosity and kindness; my father’s willingness to take huge risks at an age when many people

wouldn’t even vary their route from refrigerator to recliner; and the alchemy that happens when two souls stumble into a deeply complementary arrangement.

I suppose I could be jealous of “my father’s new daughter,” but I’m too busy marveling at how lucky we all are. After decades of separation, I get to relish my dad’s presence in my life. Spike gets to experience the joys of a loving father figure. And Pop gets to live a new life that he’s created for himself, full of love, action and purpose—and chickens and horses.

Ellen Stader is a Texas Electric Cooperatives senior communications specialist.

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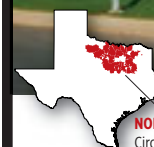
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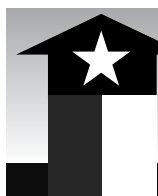


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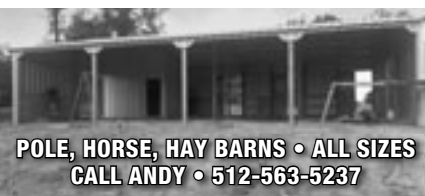
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Bauer **SUPER COUPON**

20 VOLT LITHIUM CORDLESS 1/2" COMPACT DRILL/DRIVER KIT

Customer Rating ★★★★★

450 in. lbs. of torque
1.5 amp hour battery
Weighs 3.4 lbs.

NEW

COMPARE TO PORTER-CABLE \$99
MODEL: PCC601LB

SAVE \$39

\$59.99

RISK FREE TRIAL
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

ITEM 63531

35389777

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

U.S. GENERAL **SUPER COUPON**

56", 11 DRAWER INDUSTRIAL QUALITY ROLLER CABINET

Customer Rating ★★★★★

25,363 cu. in. of storage
3458 lb. capacity
Weighs 400 lbs.

COMPARE TO SNAP-ON \$3,495
MODEL: KAS311PFD0

SAVE \$2845

\$649.99

ITEM 69395/67681 shown

35259417

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

SUPER COUPON

FREE

WITH ANY PURCHASE

CENTECH

7 FUNCTION DIGITAL MULTIMETER

COMPARE TO PROSKIT \$135.1
MODEL: MT-5210

3.5" LCD Display
Battery Included

ITEM 63604/63758

98025/69096/63759/90899 shown

35121780

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ANY SINGLE ITEM

35121589

LIMIT 1 coupon per customer per day. Save 20% on any 1 item purchased. *Cannot be used with other discount, coupon or any of the following items or brands: Inside Track Club membership, Extended Service Plan, gift card, open box item, 3 day Parking, Lot Sale item, compressor, floor locks, saw mill, storage can lids, chains or carts, trailers, wrenches, welders, Admiral, Sauer, Cobra, CoverPro, Daytime, Carphone, Remodel, Jupiter, Lynxx, Positan, Predator, Tallgrass, Viking, Vulcan, Zurich. Not valid on prior purchases. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 4/7/18.

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

1 TON CAPACITY FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Boom extends from 36-1/4" to 50-1/4"
Crane height adjusts from 82" to 94"

COMPARE TO IRONTON \$179.99
MODEL: 46218

SAVE \$80

\$99.99

ITEM 69512/61858/69445 shown

35130875

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

CENTRAL PNEUMATIC **SUPER COUPON**

21 GALLON, 2.5 HP, 125 PSI VERTICAL OIL-LUBE AIR COMPRESSOR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Air delivery:
5.8 CFM @ 40 PSI,
4.7 CFM @ 90 PSI

COMPARE TO HUSKY \$219
MODEL: C201H

SAVE \$69

\$149.99

ITEM 69091/61454

62803/63635/67847 shown

35150438

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

3-POINT QUICK HITCH • 2000 lb. capacity • 27-3/16" clearance

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$120

\$199.99

ITEM 97214

COMPARE TO DOUBLE HH \$199.99
MODEL: 10712

35402715

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

STEP STOOL/WORKING PLATFORM

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE 65%

350 lb. capacity

ITEM 62515

66911 shown

COMPARE TO GPL \$57.55
MODEL: H-21

35164212

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

COVER PRO **SUPER COUPON**

10 FT. x 20 FT. PORTABLE CAR CANOPY

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$106

\$205.99

ITEM 63054/62858 shown

35404142

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

SUPER COUPON

4 PIECE ANTI-FATIGUE FOAM MAT SET

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Each pad measures 25" x 25"

ITEM 61607/62389 /94635 shown

35422528

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

BADLAND ZXR Battle Tested **SUPER COUPON**

12000 LB. OFF-ROAD VEHICLE ELECTRIC WINCH WITH AUTOMATIC LOAD-HOLDING BRAKE

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Weighs 86.4 lbs.
21" L x 10-1/8" H

COMPARE TO WARN \$699.99
MODEL: 59667

SAVE \$400

\$299.99

ITEM 64046/64045/63770 shown

35388003

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HARDY **SUPER COUPON**

POWDER-FREE NITRILE GLOVES PACK OF 100

Customer Rating ★★★★★

5 mil thickness

COMPARE TO VENOM \$13.32
MODEL: VEN4145

SAVE 55%

\$7.99

ITEM 61363, 68497, 61360, 61359, 68496, 68498 shown

35211812

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

SUPER COUPON

10" PNEUMATIC TIRE

Customer Rating ★★★★★

300 lb. working load

COMPARE TO FARM & RANCH \$10
MODEL: FR1055

SAVE 60%

\$3.99

ITEM 69385/62388/62409

62698/30900 shown

35215631

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

CENTRAL MACHINERY **SUPER COUPON**

10 TON HYDRAULIC LOG SPLITTER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Accepts logs up to 18" long and 6-1/2" diameter

COMPARE TO SUN JOE \$132.55
MODEL: L110M

SAVE \$42

\$89.99

ITEM 62291

67090 shown

35216516

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

TORQUE WRENCHES

Customer Rating ★★★★★

Accuracy within ±4%

COMPARE TO HUSKY \$84.97
MODEL: H207WA

SAVE 88%

\$99.99

ITEM 62291

67090 shown

35224685

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

Lynxx **SUPER COUPON**

40 VOLT LITHIUM CORDLESS BRUSHLESS BLOWER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$79

\$199.99

ITEM 63284

35421369

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

Bauer **SUPER COUPON**

10 AMP DEEP CUT VARIABLE SPEED BAND SAW KIT

Customer Rating ★★★★★

NEW

SAVE \$199

\$139.99

ITEM 63763/63444 shown

35228772

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

3 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL JACK STANDS

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE \$23.99

\$17.99

ITEM 62392/69597

38846/61196 shown

35239951

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

WARRIOR **SUPER COUPON**

29 PIECE TITANIUM DRILL BIT SET

Customer Rating ★★★★★

SAVE 83%

\$99.99

ITEM 62281/61637 shown

35408073

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

SUPER COUPON

TILTING FLAT PANEL TV MOUNT

Customer Rating ★★★★★

HOLDS FLAT SCREEN TV, UP TO 70 INCHES

176 lb. capacity

COMPARE TO ROCKETFISH \$79.99
MODEL: RF-TVM1P03

SAVE 81%

\$24.99

ITEM 62289/61807 shown

35243246

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PREDATOR **SUPER COUPON**

8750 MAX. STARTING/
7000 RUNNING WATTS
13 HP (420 CC) GAS GENERATOR

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$529.99

COMPARE TO HONDA **\$2,700**

WHEEL KIT AND BATTERY SOLD SEPARATELY.

ITEM 68530/63086/69671/63085 shown

ITEM 68525/63087/63088, CALIFORNIA ONLY

35262627

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PORTLAND **SUPER COUPON**

7 AMP ELECTRIC POLE SAW
9.5" BAR

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$64.99

SAVE \$34

COMPARE TO WORX **\$99.98**

ITEM 68862/63190/62896 shown

35263526

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

#1 SELLING JACKS
IN AMERICA

RAPID PUMP®
4 TON HEAVY DUTY
STEEL FLOOR JACK

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$109.99

COMPARE TO BANNER **\$179.99**

WEIGHS 105 LBS.

ITEM 60706/62319/68056 shown

35273129

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

CENTRAL MACHINERY **SUPER COUPON**

8", 5 SPEED
BENCHTOP
DRILL PRESS

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$499.99

SAVE \$53

COMPARE TO BUFFALO BLACK **\$102.99**

ITEM 62520/60238 shown

35274204

LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

CENTRAL MACHINERY **SUPER COUPON**

20 TON SHOP PRESS

Pair of arbor
plates included

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$149.99

COMPARE TO MAXWORKS **\$222.49**

ITEM 32879
60603 shown

35287753

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

72" x 80"
MOVING
BLANKET

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$5.99

COMPARE TO BLUE HAWK **\$19.99**

ITEM 69505/62418/66537 shown

35292004

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

VIKING **SUPER COUPON**

JUMP STARTER AND POWER PACK

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$69.99

COMPARE TO SCHUMACHER **\$129.99**

ITEM 62749

35295007

LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

drillmaster **SUPER COUPON**

4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$9.99

COMPARE TO PERFORMAX **\$25.80**

ITEM 69645/60625 shown

35322548

LIMIT 8 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

luminaR **SUPER COUPON**

24 FT., 18 BULB, 12 SOCKET
OUTDOOR STRING LIGHTS

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$19.99

COMPARE TO PORTFOLIO **\$39.98**

ITEM 63483

35420794

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

FISCHER **SUPER COUPON**

HIGH PERFORMANCE LIFT SOLUTIONS

750 LB. HEAVY DUTY ATV/MOWER
HIGH LIFT JACK

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$179.99

COMPARE TO MOJACK **\$425.75**

ITEM 63298

35334552

LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

U.S. GENERAL **SUPER COUPON**

26", 4 DRAWER
TOOL CART

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$99.99

COMPARE TO HUSKY **\$179**

ITEM 61634/61952/95659 shown

35338148

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

12 VOLT, 150 PSI
PORTABLE
INFLATOR

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$6.99

COMPARE TO CUSTOM ACCESSORIES **\$16.89**

ITEM 63109/4077/63152 shown

35354161

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

CHICAGO **SUPER COUPON**

ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

10" SLIDING COMPOUND
MITER SAW

Powerful
15 amp motor

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$84.99

COMPARE TO KOBALT **\$199**

ITEM 61971/61972/98199 shown

35354794

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

4 PIECE, 1" x 15 FT.
RATCHETING TIE DOWNS

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$6.99

COMPARE TO MOJACK **\$425.75**

ITEM 63056/63057/63094/63150/61524 shown

35360390

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PREDATOR **SUPER COUPON**

6.5 HP (212 CC) OHV
HORIZONTAL SHAFT
GAS ENGINE

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$99.99

COMPARE TO HONDA **\$329.99**

ITEM 60363/69730
ITEM 69727 shown
CALIFORNIA ONLY

35415439

LIMIT 6 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

TRI-FOLD
ALUMINUM LOADING RAMP

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$74.99

COMPARE TO REESE **\$149**

ITEM 69595/60334/90018 shown

35376243

LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

PITTSBURGH **SUPER COUPON**

VEHICLE
POSITIONING
DOLLY

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$69.99

COMPARE TO GOJAK **\$269**

ITEM 62234/61917 shown

35376434

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

EARTHQUAKE XT **SUPER COUPON**

NEW 1/2" COMPOSITE PRO EXTREME
TORQUE AIR IMPACT WRENCH

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$129.99

COMPARE TO SNAP-ON **\$524.95**

ITEM 62891

69429420

LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

HaulMaster **SUPER COUPON**

18" x 12"
MOVER'S DOLLY

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$7.99

COMPARE TO MILWAUKEE **\$19.97**

ITEM 61899/63095/63096
60497/63098/63097/93888 shown

35409861

LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 4/7/18*

SUPER COUPON

.50 CAL METAL AMMO CAN

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

\$12.99

COMPARE TO BLACKHAWK **\$19.99**

ITEM 63750/63181 shown

35386027

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Hochheim's Namesake

German immigrant Valentine Hoch started DeWitt County settlement

BY GENE FOWLER

EARLY SETTLERS OFTEN MADE GREAT sacrifices to get to Texas. That's certainly the case with Valentine Hoch, the German namesake of the DeWitt County hamlet of Hochheim.

Most of DeWitt County is in the Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative service territory.

The stories about Hoch's trek to Texas and subsequent settlement on the coastal plains vary slightly, but all accounts agree that shortly before Hoch and his wife, Margarethe, sailed for the New World in 1845, one of their children died. According to an account by Hoch's great-granddaughter, Mildred Allen Duhon, another child died during the voyage and was buried at sea. Heartsick, Margarethe herself died shortly after the family landed at the Texas port of Indianola. Hoch buried her in a wooden coffin that he built himself.

Duhon described her ancestor as a stonemason and a nail smithy, mechanic, baker, lay minister for the Lutheran church and, by necessity, a farmer and tender of livestock. Great-grandson H.R. Hoch told the *Houston Post* in 1964 that the Lutheran minister immigrated to Texas to escape religious oppression. Hoch purchased land in Texas from an agent who was visiting Europe on a mission to entice settlers. Instead of proceeding to this land, Hoch and other Germans followed trails inland to nearby territory that would become DeWitt County in 1846. Hoch and his surviving children stayed with others from the Old Country in another DeWitt County settlement called Concrete.

Hoch purchased land near the Guadalupe River. Working with another immigrant mason, Augustus Weig, he began building a home that still stands today along U.S. Highway 183. They quarried sandstone in the Guadalupe River valley and hauled it to Hoch's land on a slide hitched to "an old



gray horse" he had acquired in Indianola.

In 1854, Hoch heard about a widow in Indianola named Johanna Fleming and went to visit her. She had immigrated from Germany with her husband after losing three children to diphtheria, according to an account provided in 1932 by her son. Another baby died at sea and then, after landing with four children, Johanna's husband died of yellow fever, and she lost still another child. She was struggling to survive as a single mother with three young children when Hoch came courting.

Their combined family grew to 10 children, and Hoch continued to labor on the rock house. Girls occupied the second floor, and boys slept in the attic. Inscriptions dated 1856, 1857 and 1866 indicate completion dates for sections of the 2½-story home. Lime mortar for the stones was made by burning stacked layers of wood and sandstone. Hoch made lath for interior walls by twisting willow sticks and walnut shoots with mortar, mud and moss. For wall plaster, he mixed pulverized limestone with sand, fine gravel and ashes. Hoch fastened the hand-hewn timber rafters with wooden pegs.

In 1857, the Hoch residence became a stagecoach stop on the Austin-to-Indi-

anola road. As more folks settled nearby, Hochheim grew into a thriving trade center. By 1895, the town had two general stores, a hardware store, saddler, blacksmith, saloon, drug store and hotel.

Today, the only survivor of those structures is Hoch's stage stop. A 1950s restoration by then-owners Ross and Lucille Boothe of Gonzales received an award from the San Antonio Conservation Society. The Bootches hosted several hundred Hoch descendants during the stage stop's centennial, and researchers at the time noted some 3,000 descendants of the home's original family. The Hochheim Historical Foundation received the property through a 2001 donation, and the organization completed additional restoration work.

Doug Kubicek, a retired history teacher in Yoakum, taught one Hoch descendant in the seventh grade. "We had a program where the kids dressed up as pioneer figures and gave reports," he recalls. "Most wanted to be Bowie or Crockett, but the descendant dressed up like Valentine Hoch." Asked what he learned about his ancestor, the student replied, "Oh, he's cool."

Gene Fowler is an Austin writer who specializes in history.



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Cream Cheese
Pie



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WINNER**
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WINNER**
Paulina's
Meatballs

2017

Holiday Recipe Contest

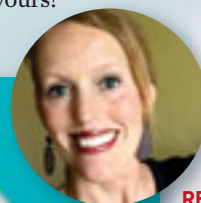
AMONG THE FANTASTIC RECIPES submitted by readers for this year's contest, our staff most loved the Warm Gingerbread With Lemon Basil Sauce by Rebekah Stewart, a member of San Bernard Electric Cooperative.

Some testers said they could drink the accompanying lemon basil sauce, while others would be happy just to have the warm gingerbread with cinnamon whipped cream. You can choose to plate the recipe with all its components or let guests pick and choose from among the three toppings. We guarantee they'll all be happy.

Stewart wins \$3,000, and four other co-op members each win \$500 for their recipes, two sweet and two savory. Happy holidays from our table to yours!

SHANNON OELRICH, GUEST FOOD EDITOR

**\$3,000
GRAND
PRIZEWINNER**
Warm Gingerbread
With Lemon Basil
Sauce



REBEKAH
STEWART

Warm Gingerbread With Lemon Basil Sauce

REBEKAH STEWART | SAN BERNARD EC

"I love to use cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves in my holiday desserts," Stewart says. "In this recipe, I've combined the flavors of gingerbread and apples and made it extra special by adding a delicious lemon basil sauce. This dessert is wonderful served warm, and the flavors complement each other perfectly."

- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon

APPLE COMPOTE

- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and cubed
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ⅛ teaspoon fresh lemon juice

GINGERBREAD

- 1 cup sugar
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 egg
- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup molasses
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt

LEMON BASIL SAUCE

- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 cup hot water
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- Juice from 2 lemons
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3 tablespoons heavy cream
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil



FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY: MELISSA BRISKO. BACKGROUND: NYS | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. ORNAMENTS: OKSANCIA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. STEWART: COURTESY REBEKAH STEWART

CINNAMON WHIPPED CREAM

- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon

1. **GINGERBREAD:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Apply cooking spray to an 8-by-8-inch or 9-by-9-inch baking dish.
2. In a large mixing bowl, cream together sugar and butter 2 minutes. Add egg and mix until light and fluffy. Add sour cream, molasses and milk, and mix 1 additional minute.
3. In another large bowl, combine all the dry ingredients thoroughly, then slowly mix into the wet ingredients. Mix just until smooth. Pour batter into baking dish.
4. Bake 35 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean when inserted. Make compote, sauce and whipped cream while it bakes, so you can serve with warm gingerbread.
5. **APPLE COMPOTE:** In a small saucepan, mix the cubed apples, butter and lemon juice. Cook on low heat, stirring occasionally, until apples are soft. Keep warm.
6. **LEMON BASIL SAUCE:** In a medium saucepan, mix sugar, cornstarch and nutmeg. Slowly whisk in hot water and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until sauce thickens. Once thickened, remove from heat and whisk in lemon zest, lemon juice, butter and heavy cream. Put saucepan back on medium heat, stir and cook 1 more minute. Remove from heat and stir in chopped basil. Keep warm.
7. **CINNAMON WHIPPED CREAM:** In a medium bowl, whip together heavy cream, powdered sugar and cinnamon. Once it's whipped, place in a piping bag to pipe onto each serving, if desired.
8. Serve gingerbread with a spoonful of compote and a drizzle of sauce, and top with whipped cream—or make your own combination. Serves 16.

**\$500
SAVORY
WINNER**



Savory Grits With Beer-Battered Shrimp

KATHY KAHN | DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

"I had cheesy grits with a gastrique at a cooking demonstration, and I wanted to try it at home, so I started playing around with the flavors," Kahn says. "I added the shrimp because my mother-in-law always made beer-battered shrimp, and we loved it. Once I tried the bacon, I knew that was it."

GRITS

- 2 cups half-and-half
- 1½ cups chicken broth
- ½ cup instant grits
- ¼ cup butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ small purple onion, finely diced
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup shredded white cheddar cheese

SHRIMP

- 1 pound medium shrimp
- 1 teaspoon Creole seasoning
- 1 can beer
- 1 quart canola oil
- 1 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper

GASTRIQUE

- 4 strips bacon
- 1 tablespoon bacon fat
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tablespoon water, or more as needed
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar

1. **GRITS:** In a 2-quart saucepan, bring half-and-half and chicken broth to a simmer over medium-high heat. Add grits, butter, garlic, onion, red pepper flakes, salt and pepper. Stir until grits are fully cooked and mixture is smooth, about 5 minutes. Fold in shredded cheese and season to taste. Remove pan from heat, cover and set aside.
2. **SHRIMP:** Peel, devein and clean shrimp. In a bowl, toss shrimp with Creole seasoning. Set aside 15–30 minutes in the refrigerator. Pour beer into a separate bowl and stir about 2 minutes to make it go flat, then set aside. Pour oil into a deep-sided 5-quart frying pan or Dutch oven and heat to 375 degrees.
3. In a bowl, stir together flour, salt and pepper. Add flattened beer to flour mixture a little at a time to make a slightly runny batter. Remove the shrimp from the refrigerator and dip into the batter, shaking the excess off. Fry shrimp in oil, 2–3 minutes, or until golden brown. Set cooked shrimp on a rack lined with paper towels to drain.
4. **GASTRIQUE:** Cook bacon, crumble finely and set aside, reserving bacon fat. Place sugar in a heavy-bottomed, 2-quart saucepan and add enough water to make a mixture resembling wet sand. (The tip of a spoon pulled through the mixture should leave a trail.) Cook over medium heat until sugar dissolves and bubbles form, swirling the pan gently instead of stirring to cook the sugar evenly. Continue cooking, watching closely as the sugar mixture darkens, about 5 minutes.
5. When mixture is golden brown, add balsamic vinegar all at once. Pour carefully, as it might spatter. The mixture will harden, but keep stirring with a wooden spoon until it liquefies again. Add the bacon fat and bacon, reduce heat and continue stirring. Once the sauce thickens slightly, remove from heat.
6. Serve the shrimp atop the grits with the gastrique drizzled over the top. Serves 8–10.

Celebrate the Season!

When your family and friends gather this holiday, ask everyone to bring their favorite recipe—one with a holiday connection or one that's just extra-special. You'll start a new tradition and have a head start for next year's *Texas Co-op Power* Holiday Recipe Contest!

\$500 SAVORY WINNER



Paulina's Meatballs

PAULINA PARKER | SAM HOUSTON EC

"I made these for my mom and dad in 1962," Parker says. "They liked them so much, but minus the pepper and jalapeño jelly, as they did not like spicy food. My mother had me make them again while she wrote down all the ingredients—otherwise, I would not have the recipe today!"

- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped green bell pepper
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 2 pounds lean ground beef
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup seasoned breadcrumbs
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons Italian seasoning
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons dried mustard
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten
- 2 cans (8 ounces each) refrigerated crescent dinner rolls
- 10 teaspoons jalapeño jelly, plus more for serving
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
- Dash cayenne pepper
- Pizza or pasta sauce for serving

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a skillet, sauté onion and bell pepper in olive oil until soft. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, mix ground beef, breadcrumbs, Italian seasoning, salt, pepper, dried mustard, garlic powder, red pepper flakes, brown sugar and eggs. Add onion and bell pepper, and mix thoroughly.
3. Form beef mixture into $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch meatballs and set on a rack with a baking pan underneath to catch grease. Bake meatballs 18–25 minutes, then remove from oven and let cool.
4. Roll out 1 can of crescent dough into a solid piece. Cut squares big enough to wrap each meatball completely. Repeat with second can, as needed.
5. Place a meatball on a square of dough, then spoon $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon jalapeño jelly on top. Pinch dough closed on top to seal. Repeat until all meatballs are used. Brush tops with melted butter and sprinkle with cayenne pepper. Bake until lightly browned, 15–20 minutes.
6. Serve with more warm jalapeño jelly or pizza sauce. Serves about 20 as appetizers or 10 as dinner entrées.

COOK'S TIP Splenda can be substituted for brown sugar in the meatballs, if desired.

\$500 SWEET WINNER



Cherry Nut Coffee Cake

ARTIE STOCKTON | PEDERNALES EC

"This coffee cake is a treat for Christmas morning," Stockton says. "The cake freezes beautifully, so it can be made ahead of time. I have made this coffee cake each Christmas season for the last 20 years. It is still the favorite of my adult children as well as my grandchildren."

DOUGH

- 1 package dry yeast
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm water
- 1 cup whole milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 eggs, well-beaten
- 4 cups all-purpose flour

FILLING

- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried cranberries
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sweetened flaked coconut, toasted
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cherry preserves
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped pecans
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup ($\frac{1}{2}$ stick) butter, melted
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
- 1 egg, well-beaten, for egg wash

ICING

- $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons half-and-half
- 1 tablespoon juice from jar of maraschino cherries

DECORATIONS

Maraschino cherry halves
Pecan halves

Recipes

1. DOUGH: Dissolve yeast in warm water, 105–115 degrees; set aside. Heat milk in saucepan over low heat. Add sugar, butter and salt, stirring until butter is melted and sugar is dissolved. Pour milk mixture into mixing bowl and cool to lukewarm.

2. Mix two beaten eggs and dissolved yeast into lukewarm milk mixture. Add flour, a little at a time, beating well until dough resembles a soft sponge. Cover bowl and chill dough in refrigerator overnight.

3. FILLING: In a bowl, combine cinnamon, dried cranberries, coconut, cherry preserves and chopped pecans.

4. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Roll out dough on floured surface to a rectangular shape, about 1/8 inch thick. Brush dough with 1/4 cup melted butter, then sprinkle with 1/2 cup sugar. Dot the filling on the dough until covered, leaving about an inch on each side free of filling.

5. Roll up dough lengthwise, then transfer to a baking sheet with the seam-side down. Shape like a horseshoe and tuck ends under to seal. Let rise in a warm place about 25–30 minutes.

6. Brush egg wash over top of dough. Bake 20–25 minutes or until golden brown.

7. ICING: In a mixing bowl, combine powdered sugar, half-and-half and cherry juice. Mix well, then drizzle on cake.

8. DECORATIONS: As the icing firms up, decorate with cherry and pecan halves. Serves 16–18.

COOK'S TIP Note that since the dough needs to chill overnight, this is a two-day process.

**\$500
SWEET
WINNER**



SWEET WINNER Pineapple Cream Cheese Pie

DAWN HODGES | SAN BERNARD EC

"I started with a similar recipe as a guide and just added flavors that seemed to go with the plan," Hodges says. "Since that first pie, I have added more 'goodies' to it. I am one of those who thinks if a little is good, a lot is even better!"

CRUST

- 1 sleeve graham crackers
- 1/4 cup chopped pecans
- 1/4 cup sweetened flaked coconut
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar
- 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter, melted

FILLING

- 1 can (8 ounces) crushed pineapple
- 1 1/2 packages (12 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon lime or lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon grated lime or lemon zest
- 1/2 cup sweetened flaked coconut
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla or coconut extract

TOPPING

- Reserved pineapple liquid
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup powdered sugar
- Extra sweetened flaked coconut, toasted
- Extra grated zest for topping

1. CRUST: Pulse graham crackers in food processor until they are fine crumbs. Pour them into a 9-inch pie dish, then place pecans and coconut in food processor (no need to clean it first) and pulse until finely chopped.

2. Add pecan mixture and powdered sugar to graham crackers and mix with a fork. Drizzle melted butter into mixture, then stir to combine thoroughly. Press mixture into bottom and up sides of pie pan.

3. FILLING: Over a bowl, drain pineapple, reserving liquid. Set both aside. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

4. In a mixing bowl, combine cream cheese, egg, sour cream, sugar, juice and zest. Beat with a mixer until creamy. Add drained pineapple, coconut, nutmeg and extract, and stir to combine thoroughly.

5. Pour mixture into crust and bake 20 minutes or until no longer wobbly in middle. Cool and refrigerate.

6. TOPPING: In a small saucepan, mix reserved pineapple liquid with sugar and cook over medium heat until mixture thickens into a runny syrup. Set aside.

7. Whip heavy cream in a food processor. Add powdered sugar and whip until thick, about 1 minute. Spread over cooled filling and top with toasted coconut.

8. To serve, drizzle some of the thickened pineapple juice over the top. A little grated zest on top is great, also. Serves 8.

COOK'S TIP You can purchase a graham cracker crust, but it won't be as flavorful. Also, whipping the cream in the food processor makes a heavy, stiff whipped cream that holds its shape nicely.

WEB EXTRAS at TexasCoopPower.com

See previous winners and recipes from the Holiday Recipe Contest.

\$100 Recipe Contest

May's recipe contest topic is **Cake Walk**. Send us your cherished recipes (from cupcakes to fancy layer cakes) for celebrating special occasions. The deadline is **December 10**. Readers whose recipes are featured will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

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.



Stairways

THERE ARE MANY STEPS TO GREATNESS, but our readers go above and beyond! On the stairway to heaven, or just enjoying a little piece of heaven on Earth, Texans love a good two-step. **GRACE ARSIAGA**

WEB EXTRAS ▶ See more photos online.

◀ **MICHELLE BERTA**, HILCO EC: "I love reading great literature. These are some of my favorite books. Each step is hand-painted."

▲ **LETICIA NAVARRO**, Bandera EC: When nature takes over



▲ **JUDY O'KELLEY**, Nueces EC: "When we traveled from South Texas to San Francisco, we saw this mosaic tiled staircase ... a popular tourist attraction."

UPCOMING CONTESTS

APRIL WESTERN WEAR	DUE DECEMBER 10
MAY PROM NIGHT	DUE JANUARY 10
JUNE TRACTORS	DUE FEBRUARY 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.



▲ **MARK HOLLY**, Bandera EC: After a remodel of the Lampasas County Courthouse

▼ **CHARLES BAXTER**, CoServ: Rusty oil tanks along Highway 380 in West Texas



Pick of the Month Main Street Bethlehem

Burnet December 1-3, 8-10
(512) 756-4481, fbcburnet.org

Main Street Bethlehem, celebrating its 25th year and staged by First Baptist Church, recreates the town of Bethlehem on the night Christ was born. It features about 125 volunteers, many of whom are members of Pedernales EC, costumed and in character, and animals depicting life more than 2,000 years ago. It attracts more than 25,000 visitors every year.



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December 1

Natural Bridge Caverns [1-31]
Christmas at the Caverns, (210) 651-6101,
naturalbridgecaverns.com

7

Freeport **Holiday on the Brazos**,
(979) 233-3306

Granbury **S'mores with Santa**,
(817) 326-6005, actontx.com/events

Jasper **Christmas Parade**, (409) 384-2762,
jaspercoc.org

Kerrville **Gloria: Celestial Holiday Music**,
(830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

Clute [7-9] **Christmas in the Park**,
(979) 265-8392, goclude.com

8

Bryan **Downtown Christmas Parade**,
(979) 822-4920, downtownbryan.com

Crockett **Russian Grand Ballet's *The Nutcracker***, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org



December 7
Granbury
S'mores with Santa

Bastrop [8-9] **Merry Market**, (512) 988-0034

Fredericksburg [8-9] **The Christmas Journey**, (830) 997-2069,
bethanyfredericksburg.com

Montalba [8-10] **A Walk Through Bethlehem**,
(903) 764-8048, visitpalestine.com

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GET BACK TO THE COAST

April issue: what's open and where to go to enjoy our Gulf Coast, from South Padre to the Sabine River.

WESTERN WAYS

September: Lone Star destinations for the rugged leather feel of Texas culture.

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9

Beaumont Christmas in Boomtown, (409) 880-1750, beaumontcvb.com

Bulverde Living Christmas Drive Through Presentation, (830) 980-2813, redroofchurch.org

Chappell Hill Garden Club Christmas Home Tour, (713) 562-6191, chappellhillgardenclub.com

Forney Candlelight Tour of Historic Homes, (972) 552-2400, spellmanmuseum.com

Round Top *The Nutcracker* Ballet, (979) 249-3129, festivalhill.org

San Saba Lighted Christmas Parade, (325) 372-5141, sansabatexas.com

Santo Community Craft Show, (940) 659-3990

Snyder Big Country Christmas Ball, (325) 660-8338, westtexasrehab.org

Washington Christmas on the Brazos, (936) 878-2214, wheretexasbecametexas.org

Waxahachie YMCA Santa Run, (469) 309-4045, ymcadallas.org

14

Elgin Sip, Shop & Stroll, (512) 229-3213, elgintx.com

Palo Pinto Frontier Christmas, (940) 659-3573, palopintohistory.com

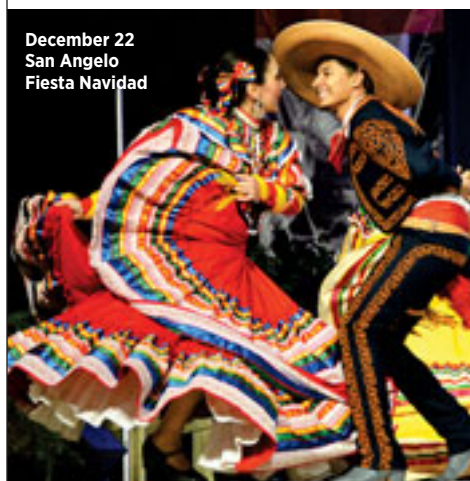
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Palestine [15-17] Irving Berlin's *White Christmas*, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

16

Big Spring Big Spring Symphony: *The Nutcracker* with Midland Festival Ballet, (432) 263-8235, visitbigspring.com

College Station Wreaths Across America: Brazos Valley, (757) 478-4747, brazosvalleywaa.org/ceremony



December 22
San Angelo
Fiesta Navidad

Del Rio Posada, Tamalada, Bailes y Cantos, (830) 768-2287, casadelacultura.com

Lake Jackson Bird Banding, (979) 480-0999, gcbo.org

Lockney Country Christmas Ball, (806) 983-6228

Morgan Mill Live Nativity, (254) 728-3107, morganmillumc.com

Boerne [16-17] Cowboy Christmas Market Days, (210) 844-8193, visitboerne.org

22

San Angelo Fiesta Navidad, (325) 284-3825, sanangelopac.org

January

5

Odessa [5-13] Sandhills Stock Show and Rodeo, (432) 366-3951, sandhillsstockshow.com

Submit Your Event!

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

AROUND TEXAS EVENT CALENDAR

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20328 R9-16

An Environmental Legacy

Experience an authentic native landscape in Goldthwaite's Legacy Plaza

BY MELISSA GASKILL

UP UNTIL ABOUT 600 YEARS AGO, THE early residents in what is now Mills County gathered seeds and ground them on stone surfaces, established camps, chipped projectile points from flint and cooked food in earthen ovens. Much of the land remains relatively undisturbed, and many ancient relics lay untouched until modern times. A few artifacts ended up in local collections. Now, some of these items are on display in **Legacy Plaza**.

Filling a city block near the center of Goldthwaite on U.S. Highway 183, the plaza contains a welcome center and a botanical garden, including a play area, educational displays and an event pavilion.

Legacy Plaza's landscape designer, Tab Ledbetter, set out to replicate a portion of the Colorado River (which flows within about 10 miles of Goldthwaite) as it would have looked to early residents who hunted and gathered in the region.

"An authentic native landscape occupied by early inhabitants would have included natural sources of food, water and shelter commonly found here," Ledbetter says. "So I created a stream flowing through a small canyon, lined with native plants such as pecan trees, dogwood, Texas redbud, agarita, sideoats grama, upland switchgrass and buffalo grass." Implementing Ledbetter's plan required 27 truckloads of rock.

The garden incorporates several authentic bedrock mortars, bowl-shaped depressions in rocks created by the repeated grinding of nuts and grains. "Any items used here had already been removed from their natural locations," stresses Jan Fischer, Legacy Plaza executive director. "So as to not disrupt the integrity of surviving prehistoric sites, we only brought



things here that had already been moved from their original site."

Eventually, the Legacy Plaza block will include a two-story Native American cultural center, designed in consultation with the Smithsonian Institution's **National Museum of the American Indian** and the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma. Along with the existing pavilion, the center will provide space for conservation and ecotourism programs, such as classes on rainwater harvesting and native plants.

Mills County, named for Republic of Texas Judge John T. Mills, was carved from parts of Brown, Comanche, Hamilton and Lampasas counties in 1887. San Antonio architect Henry T. Phelps designed the county's red-brick, Beaux Arts-style **courthouse**, built in 1913. The Texas Historical Commission funded a renovation that was completed in 2011.

Across the street from the courthouse, the **Mills County Artisan Guild Gift Shop** offers photographs, paintings, stained glass, jewelry, quilts, pottery and fabrics made by more than 30 Texas artisans.

For an edible souvenir of Mills County and Goldthwaite, consider pecans from **Pecans.com**, a shop just a few blocks from Legacy Plaza. Pecans.com sells fresh,

Legacy Plaza's botanical garden replicates ancient Mills County terrain.

shelled pecans as well as candies, fudge and pies. Samples are almost always available.

About 20 miles from town, you'll find one of the few drivable suspension bridges in Texas. Called Regency Bridge or the Swinging Bridge, this single-lane structure is suspended from cables that cross the Colorado River at a height of 325 feet. First built in the 1920s, demolished by a flood in 1936 and rebuilt mostly by hand in 1939, the bridge was refurbished in 2014. There is space on its south side to park and walk out onto the span. This view provides a learning opportunity: To compare the contemporary appearance of the Colorado River with the historic version recreated at Legacy Plaza. On its way to the bridge turn-off, scenic County Road 574 curves over picturesque hills and winds past rambling ranches with fancy gates. An ideal way to see an out-of-the-way piece of Texas.

Read more about **Melissa Gaskill's** work at melissagaskill.blogspot.com.



WEB EXTRAS ▶ See more photos of Legacy Plaza online.

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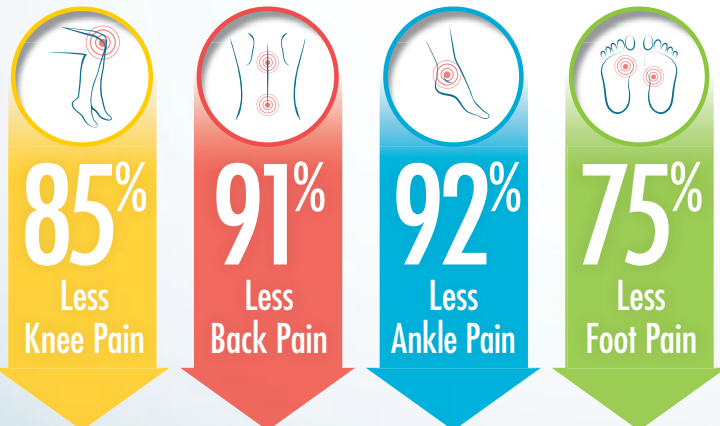


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