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A great blue heron at Boca Chica Beach near the U.S.-Mexico border

FEATURE

8 Back to the Beach The Texas coast, battered by Hurricane Harvey in some spots, perseveres and lures beach dwellers and visitors alike.

Story and photos by Julia Robinson

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Texas USA

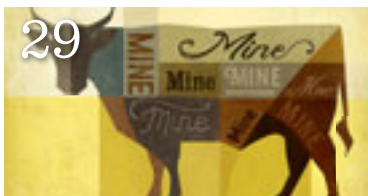
A Mother's Day Haven
By Paige Eaton

Observations

Five Finds on the Beach
By Melissa Gaskill

NEXT MONTH

Naturally Protective *Texan by Nature—a conservation-minded organization founded by Laura Bush—aims to “keep Texas, Texas.”*



HERON: JULIA ROBINSON. BUTTERFLY: AMY TSENG | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



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ON THE COVER *A clean, groomed beach and colorful umbrella await visitors in Port Aransas.* Photo by Julia Robinson

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Thursday Night Legend

Growing up in Abilene, we were integrated from junior high onward, so this was educational [*Thursday Night Lights*, February 2018], and I look forward to the book.

I was delighted to see mention of Alphonse Dotson, who played for Houston Yates, Grambling State and the Oakland Raiders. We met Alphonse at the tasting room for his amazing Dotson-Cervantes wines. What a talent and a true gentleman. If you find yourself in Pontotoc and the tasting room is open, stop in to meet a Texas legend.

LINDA NESMITH | AUSTIN
PEDERNALES EC

Texas Pride is OK, Too

A recent letter to the editor from Luke D. Jessup was hurtful [*OK With Us*, February 2018]. He states that he dislikes all things Texas and never says why. I was born in Texas and have lived in other places, but my heart is in Texas.

JUDY PICKEL | MAGNOLIA
SAN BERNARD EC

I have to say, Luke from OK, you prefaced your letter most distinctly. I understood your feelings when I saw your location, and I'm assuming the contempt stems from the Texas-Oklahoma football rivalry. I have a coworker who is a devout Longhorn fan, and I've often sat and listened to him tell his tales with spirited vigor.

That aside, your note was refreshing to read. I don't harbor any hate or ill feelings toward any of our 50 states, but I'm certain the good ol'

Remembering Those Thursday Nights

I remember going to segregated football games as a child but forgot what night they were played on [*Thursday Night Lights*, February 2018]. The players in their uniforms along with the game noises from the band, people yelling and visiting, and announcers calling the plays all made for a fun night.

It is always good to learn about a part of Texas history that we forgot and how far we have come in becoming a truly integrated nation.

CYNTHIA L. MATLOCK | TROUP
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC



USA is strong enough to weather our love-hate sibling relationships without flinching.
ANTHONY PIWETZ | VICTORIA
NUECES EC

Spreading the Love

Nancy Johnson [*Open Hearts*, February 2017] has done a wonderful job in spreading the need for sending a little love



to these special children with heart defects. It truly touched me that such a small act could impact so many lives. Several years ago, a dear friend of ours lost their baby girl to a heart condition. The Driscoll Children's Hospital in Corpus Christi took such good care of not only the baby but the family as well.

I have begun crocheting hats for Nancy. Each time I work on a red hat, I think about and pray for the baby who will wear it. Thank you for bringing her mission to all of your readers.
NORMA GAYLE | CONCAN
BANDERA EC

Old Theaters Revived

Great article about the Globe Theatre [*Saving the Globe*, January 2018]. I wish you could have mentioned the Lyric Theater in Flatonia. Much like

the Globe, it sat idle—from 1967 until 2007. Finally, on April 7, 2017, it hosted its first film, *Secondhand Lions*, with tickets at the old cost of only 35 cents.
JAMES LONGMIRE | FLATONIA

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   Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

Painting the Heavens Blue

The skies over Waco will rumble **APRIL 7-8** when the Blue Angels bring their precision aerobatics to the **HEART OF TEXAS AIRSHOW** at Texas State Technical College.

The team of U.S. Navy pilots and their F/A-18 jets perform around the world, flying at speeds approaching 700 mph and sometimes just 18 inches apart.

The Blue Angels were formed right after World War II when Chester W. Nimitz, chief of naval operations, ordered the creation of a flight demonstration team to showcase and promote naval aviation. Nimitz, born in Fredericksburg, commanded all land and sea forces in the Pacific during the war.

The show will include a C-130 nicknamed “Fat Albert,” the U.S. Army Special Operations Command Parachute Demonstration Team (known as the Black Daggers) and other flying performances. In the 72 years since the Blue Angels formed, more than 500,000 people have seen their shows.

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NATIONAL LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

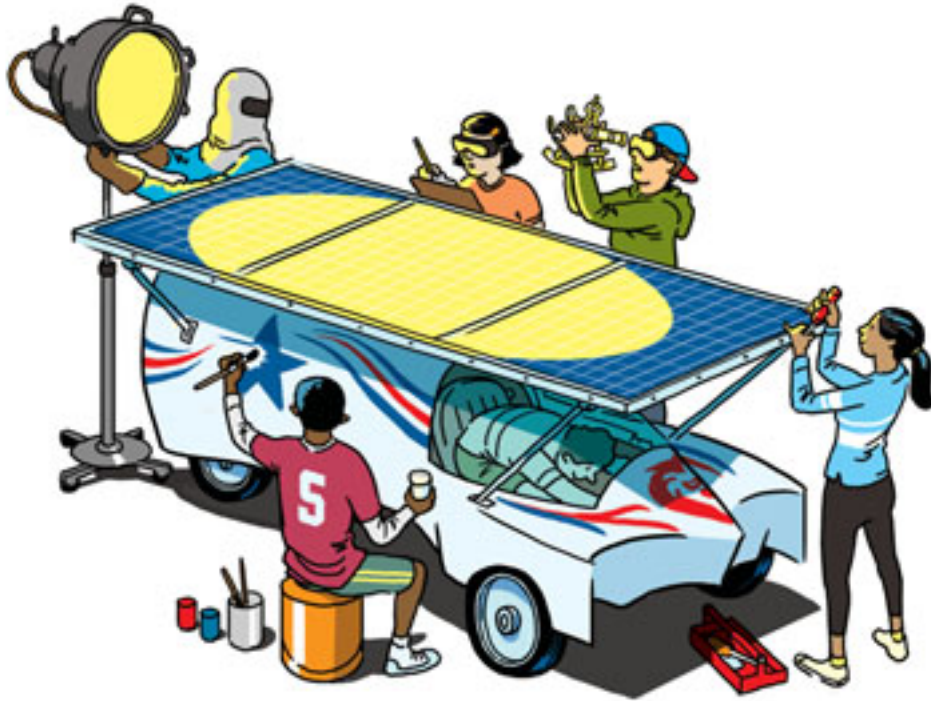
National Lineman Appreciation Day, April 9 this year, celebrates the highly trained workers who keep the electricity flowing to our homes in the face of all kinds of nasty conditions.

Days after Hurricane Harvey struck last August, mosquitoes took over the Texas Coast. “These mosquitoes were huge. They were like small hummingbirds,” says journeyman lineman Corey Turner, above, a foreman at Victoria Electric Cooperative. “They’re just all over our faces—in your eyes, in your ears. They go in our mouth, up our nose. We ate plenty. I promise you that.”

What is it about linemen that makes them willing to deal with challenges like mosquitoes and foul weather as part of their job?

“**I think if you get** in this line of work and you commit to it, I think you finally get it in your head: You know what, I’m a lineworker. I’m going to do this,” Turner says. “We’ve got people with no lights. And as long as there’s people with no lights... you’re not going to go home and feel good about yourself.”

mosquito: MOSQUITO; NECHAEVON | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; TURNER: VICTORIA EC; SUTHERLAND SPRINGS; SCOTT OLSON | GETTY IMAGES; SAND DOLLAR; MCCURE | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; AIRSHOW & SPEEDSTERS: DAVE URBAN



CO-OP PEOPLE

Solar-Powered Speedsters

DEDICATION, COMMITMENT AND INTEGRITY have propelled a team of Greenville High School students to multiple championships, says Joel Pitts, a Farmers Electric Cooperative member and advisor of the school's solar car team, which hopes to notch another win at this year's Solar Car Challenge, July 17-23.

Since 2012, the Greenville Iron Lions have designed and built solar-powered cars to compete in the annual race that attracts high school teams from across continental North America and the Caribbean. Greenville's first win came in 2016 in a cross-country race from Fort Worth to Mendota Heights, Minnesota, where it beat the nearest competitor in its division by more than 121 miles. The following year, in closed-track events at the Texas Motor Speedway, it placed first in two divisions.

The Iron Lions are currently re-engineering some aspects of their car, which they hope will lead the pack in this year's 1,400-mile race, from Fort Worth to Palmdale, California. "I think our chances are really good," Pitts says.

But competition goes beyond getting to the winner's podium, he says. It's also about providing students with lifelong skills and fostering their growth through problem-solving. "Because ultimately, this project is not so much about winning than it is about the learning process."

CO-OPS IN THE
COMMUNITY

RESPONDING TO TRAGEDY

Tragedy struck the small town of Sutherland Springs on November 5, 2017, when a gunman opened fire on the First Baptist Church, killing 26 men, women and children. Within hours of the shooting, thoughts, prayers and material support for the victims and their families poured in from across the country. Of course, the call to action was loudest for those closest to the catastrophe, including Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative.

GVEC employees sprang to action by contributing equipment to help power care stations for first responders and grieving families. In the weeks that followed, co-op employees donated \$4,270, which GVEC matched dollar-for-dollar, to victims' families. The \$8,540 total went into an account to be distributed evenly among those affected.



"When we learned of the tragedy in the Sutherland Springs community, there was no question we needed to move to action," says Darren Schauer, GVEC general manager and CEO.

ALMANAC

Texas' Shore Thing



Padre Island National Seashore turns 50 this month. On April 8, 1968, Lady Bird Johnson dedicated the park, the longest seashore in the national park system.

THE TEXAS COAST, BATTERED BY HURRICANE HARVEY IN SOME

BACK
= *to the* =
BEACH



SPOTS, PERSEVERES AND LURES BEACH DWELLERS AND VISITORS ALIKE

I

have always wanted to touch the very edges of Texas—to stand on the corners of this great state to see what I could see. After Hurricane Harvey, the mission became a quest to see what's still standing along the Gulf after the largest storm in state history.

When Harvey made landfall August 25, 2017, in the San Patricio EC service area, the Category 4 storm ravaged the central coast before dumping biblical torrents of rain on Houston, Beaumont and some East Texas co-ops. The Texas Gulf Coast has seen more than 40 hurricanes in the past century, but Harvey tops the list of damage inflicted, with estimates of \$125 billion, far outpacing second-place Hurricane Ike's \$30 billion in 2008.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

My Gulf Coast trip begins in early January at the point where the Rio Grande merges into the Gulf of Mexico. I drive through Brownsville, past Magic Valley Electric Cooperative, and I play hide-and-seek with bits of a border wall as I drive south on Boca Chica Boulevard, State Highway 4.

I stop at the historic marker for the Battle of Palmito Ranch. This remote patch of coastal marsh, salt prairie, mesquite and palm is the site of the last land battle of the Civil War. More than a month after Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, Union troops advanced to retake Brownsville from the Confederates they thought were retreating. The battle of advances, retreats and skirmishes lasted a few hours, but the Union lost more than 30 soldiers. The Confederates won the day, but the war was already lost.

Just a few miles farther, the Gulf of Mexico opens up, wide and sunny. I take a right onto Boca Chica beach, and in another mile or so, the Rio Grande is shallow and muddy. Black skimmer terns congregate in the middle of the river while herons and egrets stalk the shallows. I wave across the water, a dozen short yards to Mexico, where families and fishermen enjoy their day at the beach. A family visiting from Toronto drives up from the Texas side, curious to see the much-debated border. We sit and watch the birds, the cast of fishing nets, the steady breeze off the Gulf, then slowly drive back down the beach.

It's three hours north on U.S. 77 to Padre Island National Seashore, where I pitch a tent for the night on South Beach. This 70-mile stretch of coastline is the longest undeveloped barrier island in the world. You need four-wheel drive to make it past the five-mile marker, but even a couple of miles down, the beach feels isolated. I find a flat spot at the base of the dunes and settle in for a gorgeous sunset. A half-mile away, I spot a family who ascends the dunes and marvels at the color and expanse of the Texas sky. The Gulf waters turn a shadowy blue as the heavens take on pastels of pink, purple and orange.

A family feeds sea-gulls near Historic Pleasure Pier on Galveston Island.

In the morning, I take my coffee on a bench of driftwood and watch a great blue heron wade through the waves in search of breakfast. At the national seashore's Malaquite Visitor



A path leads to the Gulf at Padre Island National Seashore, which protects 70 miles of coastline.

Center, I find a ranger-led birding tour starting on the expansive deck. Patrick Gamman, chief of interpretation, tells me they dodged a bullet with Harvey. “I expected to come back and see nothing of the visitor center, but Harvey moved just a little bit north and hit Rockport instead.” The park reopened three days after the storm with minor damage to the bayside campgrounds.

2018 marks the 40th year the park has been protecting and releasing sea turtles. Kemp’s ridley hatchlings emerge from late June through mid-July and crawl their way into Gulf waters. This is the only place in Texas where five of the seven species of sea turtles can be found.

Just 20 miles farther north, Mustang Island was not so lucky. Harvey destroyed the bathhouse and damaged roads, jetties and campgrounds. Port Aransas, Corpus Christi and Rockport also suffered major damage. Now, four months after the storm, piles of debris line the roads as families and businesses gut their wind- and water-damaged structures. Everyone is in a hurry to be up and running by spring break.

In Port Aransas, Harvey’s winds peaked at 132 mph, and the damage increases in size and scope. No one is untouched, but everywhere there is renewal. The salty smell of the Gulf is interrupted by roofing tar and sawdust.

Patrick Gamman, below left, chief of interpretation, says Padre Island National Seashore dodged a bullet with Hurricane Harvey. In Port Aransas, right, a business recovers along Alister Street.

The sounds of hammers and power tools punctuate the cries of gulls. A new fleet of shiny, candy-colored golf carts awaits beachgoers.

The Port Aransas Museum complex includes a kit house erected in the early 1900s that has survived

“WE’RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT. IF THERE’S A NICE PART, IT’S THAT WE ALL PULLED TOGETHER AND THAT WE’RE PRETTY TOUGH.”

seven hurricanes, including the 1916 storm that wiped out much of the city. Rick Pratt, museum director, says staff prepared the buildings then evacuated and hoped for the best.

“Once we got back into town, we got a lot of volunteers together and we worked 85 or 90 straight hours,” Pratt says. The group removed 3 inches of mud in the boat shop and salvaged what tools they could. “We’re open. We’re not repaired, but we’re open.

“We’re all in the same boat. If there’s a nice part, it’s that we all pulled together and that we’re pretty tough.”

Historic photos lining the walls show resilient islanders recovering from previous storms, the surf culture of the 1960s and 1970s, and the fishing industry that goes back to the 19th century.

Farley Boat Works, an extension of the museum a few blocks away, suffered structural damage and flooding. The active boat-building workshop honors the history of the Farley family, which produced hundreds of wooden skiffs and other craft from 1915–1970. Boat works manager Frank Coletta gives me a short tour of the workshop. A dirty waterline marks the peak of the flood 2 feet above the floor. They already have replaced tools and reopened classes where kids and adults can make model boats, kayaks, stand-up paddleboards and full-sized skiffs.





**A surfer leaves the water
after a late afternoon
session in Galveston.**

Drinking coffee on a picnic table outside are volunteers Steve Potter and George McDermid, winter Texans from Michigan. The two have been helping build and repair boats at Farley for several years. “If God had intended boats to be made of fiberglass, he would have planted fiberglass trees,” explains McDermid. “Plastic boats are for nothing,” agrees Potter. “Working with wood gets in your blood. We started coming down here in 2002.”

North of Port Aransas, the coastal oaks are stripped of leaves

ornate architecture and stained-glass windows give the aura of a royal residence.

Nearby Reedy Chapel and Ashton Villa witnessed another great moment of American history. On June 19, 1865, Union Gen. Gordon Granger read aloud, according to some accounts, from the balcony of the villa General Order No. 3, which announced the total emancipation of all slaves, more than two years after it was first issued by President Abraham Lincoln. The order was read

again on the steps of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, later called Reedy Chapel.

Down on the seawall, teenagers rush to the Historic Pleasure Pier for rollercoasters and bumper cars. As the sun sets over the water, the lights from the midway splash across the quickly darkening waters.

Back on the mainland, I head to Beaumont to visit the



The Port Aransas Museum, left, contains artifacts from the island's settlement and rich surfing and fishing history. A fisherman, below, casts a net from the Mexico side of the border into the Rio Grande delta as it pours into the Gulf of Mexico.

and limbs. A huge pile of debris lines the median of State Highway 35. The pile is crushed down daily, but the mountain is substantial and still growing as rebuilding continues.

In Rockport, the Fulton Mansion State Historic Site is closed for repairs to the roof while the education center and interactive exhibits remain open. This stately home from the late 1800s has seen many storms over the years and will see many more to come. At nearby Goose Island State Park, the 1,000-year-old live oak called the Big Tree survived the winds and rain even as dozens of younger trees fell.

Galveston is famously the site of the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history, when the hurricane of 1900 came ashore as a Category 4. The residents had little warning of the approaching storm that destroyed most of the town and killed at least 6,000 people. The Galveston Historical Foundation shows a 30-minute documentary called *The Great Storm* at Pier 21 Theater with photos and voices narrating eyewitness accounts.

The Moody Mansion and Gresham's Castle offer visitors a glimpse of Galveston's gilded era in the East End Historic District. The Gresham family welcomed hundreds of survivors into their home, later called Bishop's Palace, after the 1900 hurricane. The





The Moody Mansion, left, in Galveston survived the great hurricane of 1900. The Spindletop Gladys City Boomtown Museum, below, recreates a small, turn-of-the-century town during the oil boom of Beaumont in 1901.

birthplace of the Texas oil boom. The Spindletop Gladys City Boomtown Museum memorializes the day in 1901 when the Lucas geyser erupted over 100 feet in the air from the salt dome flats. The population of Beaumont quintupled in a few short months. Land that didn't sell for hundreds of dollars in 1900 suddenly sold for tens of thousands.

The replica oil town has 15 buildings, blacksmith demos, a barbershop and saloon, gunfights and a geyser blast of water that recreates the Lucas gusher of 1901.

Swamps and bayous become more prevalent the closer you get to the Louisiana border. I drive through what was the epicenter

WEB EXTRAS

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of Harvey floodwaters—more than 60 inches of rain fell in Nederland near Beaumont—to get to Sea Rim State Park. This 4,000-acre marshland offers 5 miles of beachfront and 10 miles of unique paddling trails.

I take a stroll on the ¾-mile Gambusia Nature Trail, a looping boardwalk suspended a few inches above a marsh lagoon. Seaside sparrows and sedge wrens vie for bugs in the waning afternoon light. An alligator slinks through the shallows, momentarily stopping my heart.

I end my Texas coast journey on the beach again, more than 300 miles from the Rio Grande. I have seen miles of debris and hollowed-out homes but also the resilience and perseverance of thousands of Texans.

Learn more about [Julia Robinson](http://JuliaRobinsonPhoto.com) at JuliaRobinsonPhoto.com.



The boardwalk of the Gambusia Nature Trail runs for three-fourths of a mile above the salt marsh at Sea Rim State Park near Sabine Pass.



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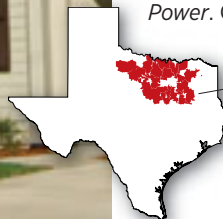
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This knife boasts a full tang blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to Gear Patrol, a full tang blade is key, saying "A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."

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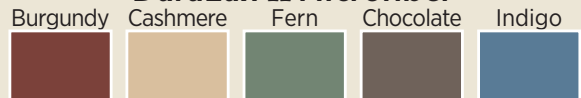
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Seven Steps to a Safer, Spotless Spring

HERE ARE SEVEN WAYS TO AVOID MISHAPS, maximize efficiency and beautify your home as you embark on spring cleaning and other projects this month.

1. When using a ladder or step stool, ensure it is placed on a stable surface and that you are wearing nonslip shoes. Be mindful of any health conditions or medications that may cause dizziness or vertigo. And be certain there are no power lines nearby.

2. Mirrors are a lovely way to increase light and open up a smaller space. Placed strategically, these affordable accent pieces can add a breath of fresh air to your home. For the most impact, situate mirrors across from visually appealing or interesting items—a fireplace or window is ideal.

3. When applying insecticide in or around your home, be sure it is human- and pet-friendly if you have small children or four-legged family members. The same goes for plants—many beautiful succulents can be toxic to pets. Doing a little research before adding to a garden can help protect your loved ones.

4. Make sure to wake up on the right side of the bed each morning after a good night's sleep by investing in blackout draperies or shades for bedrooms, increasing efficiency and comfort by reducing heat gains.

5. Dust ceiling fan blades and attached light fixtures and bulbs. While doing this, you also can change the direction the blades move by flipping the small switch just above the blades. In preparing for summer heat, you want the fan to push air down into the room to help cool it off, which is achieved with a counterclockwise spin. In winter, the reverse applies.

6. Salt is an excellent multipurpose home cleaning product. Use a handful dissolved in 1 gallon of warm water to clean a refrigerator's interior nonabrasively and without releasing any chemical fumes. You also can apply salt to a cut lemon half to lightly scour and polish brass. Just rinse with warm water when finished, and it should shine like new. A similar method works to clean wooden cutting boards. Sprinkle coarse salt onto the surface, squeeze juice from a lemon onto it, then scrub with a small brush to work the mixture into the cutting board. Finish by rinsing in hot water, and after allowing it to dry, enjoy your



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HAVE A FRIDGE IN NEED OF DEEP CLEANING? BREAK DOWN THE TASK INTO MANAGEABLE PIECES USING THESE STEPS.

1. Clear everything out of the refrigerator, taking care to separate items that will be thrown out from those you will be keeping.
2. Remove shelves (if possible).
3. Using a solution of salt and hot water, wipe down all interior surfaces.
4. Wash shelves in warm, soapy water and dry before replacing.
5. With a damp cloth, wipe down exterior of all items before returning them to the fridge.

newly disinfected meal prep tool.

7. Save more than a few pennies by investing in a programmable thermostat. While some “smart” models cost more, a basic programmable thermostat can cost as little as \$30 and, used properly, can net a 10 percent savings on the heating and cooling portion of your electric bill. Set it to around 68 degrees during waking winter hours (and lower while asleep or away), and set it to 78 degrees in summer (and higher while asleep or away).



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Saving Money Is No Joke

WE'VE ALL HEARD THIS ONE: HOW MANY (INSERT TYPE OF PERSON HERE) DOES IT TAKE to change a lightbulb? While the comedic value of the answer sometimes leaves a bit to be desired, the underlying principle—simple changes can become needlessly complicated—stays the same.

The average home contains 40 light fixtures, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Thanks to a series of staggered federal standards and more lighting choices than ever before, the average homeowner could save \$50 or more each year by using more energy-efficient lightbulbs.

Federal regulations now prohibit the manufacture of any bulb not meeting specific energy efficiency standards. This doesn't mean traditional incandescent bulbs went away, but keep in mind that those bulbs waste 90 percent of your lighting costs as heat.

Compact fluorescent lightbulbs slash energy use by 75 percent compared to incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer.

But for folks who don't like the pigtail CFL shape or who worry about the very small amount of mercury in these bulbs, another, brighter option is available: LED bulbs. These bulbs require 75–80 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs and can last 25 times longer—by far the longest life span yet. While the upfront cost for LEDs is slightly higher, the savings over the 20 years or more the bulb will last makes it a great investment. They are particularly advantageous for light fixtures that are difficult to access.

CFLs and LEDs are available in a variety of brightnesses, come in several hues and offer styles for all types of light fixtures—from chandeliers with dimmers to floodlights.

So what's the punchline? Every time you change a lightbulb, buy a more efficient replacement. No matter which you opt for, you'll save money every time you flip a light switch—and that's nothing to chuckle about.

Boost Efficiency Outdoors

COULD YOUR GARAGE, SHED, BARN OR other outdoor building use an energy efficiency boost? Try these tips to save energy and money:

- ▶ The same rules apply for outdoor buildings as houses: Add insulation, install energy-efficient windows and seal ductwork.
- ▶ Unplug power tools and battery chargers when not in use.
- ▶ Install an insulated door and seal the sides and bottom around it to reduce air leaks.
- ▶ Install motion sensors on outdoor lights.
- ▶ Look into LED retrofits for outdoor security lights. The bulbs cost more upfront, but payback takes only a few years, and LEDs can last up to 20 years.



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A Mother's Day Haven

Share the ritual of afternoon tea in a garden-like Northeast Texas setting

BY PAIGE EATON

THIS MOTHER'S DAY, A WEEKEND JAUNT into an East Texas countryside steeped in history, nature and tradition promises a memorable afternoon ritual. The now-quaint English custom of high tea has mostly evaporated from our modern, fast-paced society. Scarbrough Haven is reviving that sophisticated celebration with a genteel afternoon of sweets and savories to honor Mother's Day.

The garden-like Scarbrough Haven is a carefully manicured retreat created by Janie and Bob Scarbrough, a Dallas couple who share part of their 800-acre property by staging Mother's Day festivities as well as tours and events. Scarbrough Haven, in the Farmers Electric Cooperative service area between Lake Tawakoni and Lake Fork east of Emory, features gently rolling pastures forested with native blackjack oak, post oak, hickory and elm. Dogwoods and redbuds create a flowering understory beneath the hardwoods and, with spring-time glee, tattoo the verdant woods with pink and white blooms.

The Scarbroughs purchased the first 41-acre parcel of their haven in 2007, following a notion that they'd enjoy a quiet escape from bustling Dallas. Since then, the Scarbroughs added contiguous parcels of meadowland as well as more woodland and orchards. Their philosophy has been to maintain the land's natural appearance and enhance the landscape where appropriate with azaleas, cypress and blooming trees.

"Ten years ago, we purchased the property as a way to get away from it all," Janie Scarbrough says. "However, instead of 'get-

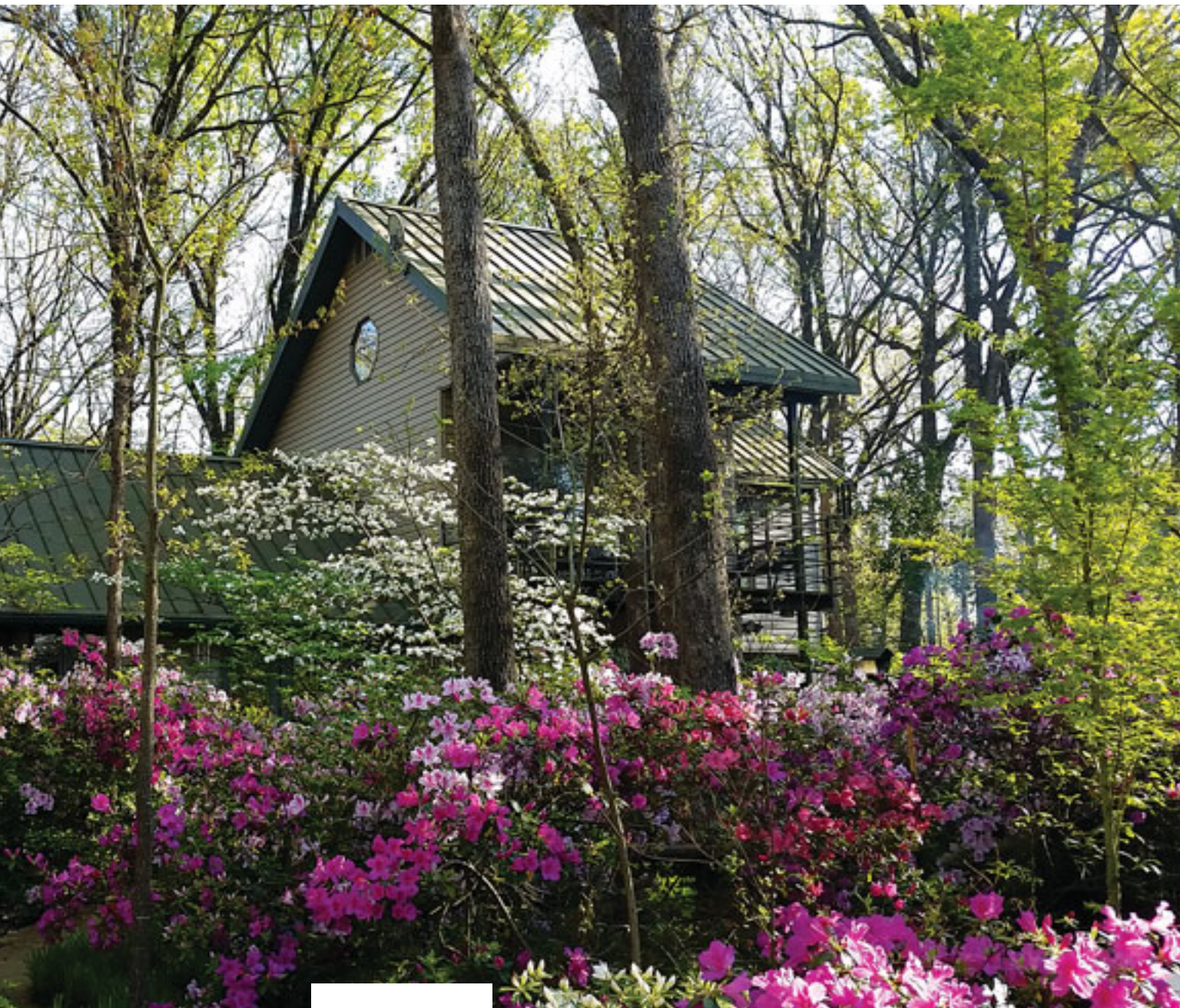
ting away,' we feel we have found a special place that has given so much to our family."

Scarbrough Haven expresses a manicured wildness where graveled paths lead visitors through natural woodland containing more than 100 birdhouses and nest boxes, which harbor native bluebirds, finches, wrens and wood ducks. Trail travelers will appreciate a collection of sculptural whimsy tucked among bends and clearings around the property. Deadfall trees have been fashioned into benches for quiet reflection and watching local inhabitants such as rabbits, white-tailed deer and other wildlife. Adirondack chairs overlooking Lake Fork offer an observation point where guests can view graceful water birds and watch flyovers from the unmistakable and impressive bald eagles that nest and hunt in the area.

"With such a magical piece of land, we wanted to responsibly develop and share it with others, while respecting the natural environment," Scarbrough says.

Beyond nature's gifts, Scarbrough Haven harbors some architectural surprises, including the 19th-century Emory Train Depot that was abandoned in the 1950s. The depot was moved onto a parcel of land that is now part of Scarbrough Haven. The Scarbroughs restored the building in 2015 and added a decommissioned train caboose nearby.

Another unexpected landmark on the property, more typical of a Western tableau, is an antiquated jail cage. An enchanting greenhouse, newly built with old-world style, was creatively constructed from reclaimed materials. The greenhouse incor-



porates an inventive and whimsical pulley-and-gravity-fed system that draws water from a rooftop rain barrel and pours it from the ceiling via an accumulation of vintage watering cans.

You'll find Scarbrough Haven and Emory about 75 miles east of Dallas. Weekenders can lodge at the Best Western Plus Emory at Lake Fork Inn & Suites during a visit to Scarbrough Haven or nearby Lake Tawakoni State Park or Lake Fork. Emory serves as the seat of Rains County, one of the smallest counties in Texas. The town and county take their names from Texas Republic Sen. Emory

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to learn more about Mother's Day Weekend Tea.

Rains, who rode a mule to Austin in 1866 with the mission of forming the county.

The Scarbroughs are reconstructing a hand-hewn barn that will house an events venue, and they're completing a 300-seat amphitheater

where they will stage concerts. Meantime, they are inviting the public to Scarbrough Haven for scheduled events. They will host reserved tours for artist groups, master gardeners, master naturalists, classes and school groups.

Paige Eaton is director of communications at Wood County Electric Cooperative.

Every view from the main house, surrounded by towering trees and blooming plants, is picturesque.

Five Finds on the Beach

A curious beachcomber's guide to sea life

BY MELISSA GASKILL



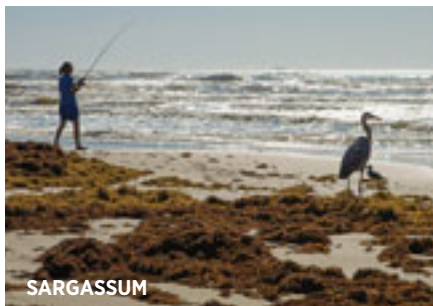
JELLYFISH

THE BEACH, WHERE LAND MEETS SEA. A place of beauty, wildness and, sometimes, mystery. When I'm beachcombing, I keep an eye out for these favorites:



SAND DUNES

JELLYFISH Not actually fish but invertebrates (animals without a spine), jellyfish are alien-looking relatives of sea anemones, corals and Portuguese man-of-wars. Species common on Texas shores include moon jellyfish, cannonball jellyfish and sea nettles. Moon jellyfish and sea nettles resemble transparent sand dollars with tentacles on their edges, while cannonballs look like white Snapchat logos.



SARGASSUM

In *Spineless: The Science of Jellyfish and the Art of Growing a Backbone*, author Juli Berwald reports that, while appearing to drift aimlessly, jellyfish actually employ the most efficient swimming method and achieve the fastest motion in the animal kingdom by firing their stinging cells. Fish, leatherback sea turtles and humans eat jellyfish. More than 1,000 animals feed on their carcasses, too, according to Maria Pia Miglietta, assistant professor at Texas A&M University at Galveston.



SEA TURTLE

Do not touch jellyfish, even dead ones, Miglietta says. Wash stings with vinegar, remove tentacles with tweezers, and apply a baking soda and sea water mix. Do not rub the sting or use fresh water, as both can activate unseen stinging cells.

SAND DUNES Wind sculpts these ever-changing piles of sand, and they continue to move until vegetation covers them. Once vegetation takes root, so do the dunes. Grass-covered dunes typically line

the beach, while large expanses of barren sand, known as dune fields, sometimes form behind them.

In addition to protecting the coast against storm surge and waves, dunes provide habitat for plants and animals. Lizards, snakes, rabbits, coyotes and other creatures leave ephemeral tracks in the bare sand of the dunes. A variety of distinctive plants grows on and between dunes, and many birds feed and take shelter in them.

SARGASSUM Even though people generally dislike seaweed on the beach, everything living there loves it. What we call "seaweed" actually is floating algae called sargassum, which provides food and shelter for fish, sea turtles and other waterborne creatures. Migrating tuna, humpback whales and birds depend on sargassum for food, and about a dozen marine species spend their entire lives in the woven mats. Particulates known as marine snow rain down from sargassum toward the ocean floor, feeding many species along the way. Sargassum also produces oxygen and sequesters carbon.

On the beach, dead seaweed feeds insects and creatures such as lizards. It also nourishes plants, boosting their growth by up to 70 percent. Texas A&M Galveston tested compacting washed-up sargassum into bales used to create dunes and found it increased vegetation growth and dune stability. About a million tons of the stuff grows in the Gulf of Mexico each year, says Larry McKinney, director of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of



WRACK LINE

Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. In Galveston, learn more about sargassum and what lives in it on Artist Boat Bucket Brigade tours.

WRACK LINE High tide literally draws a line on the beach. Using plants (including sargassum), crustacean shells, feathers and even trash, the tide defines its daily reach. Some wrack lines have more surprising contents thanks to wind and currents that bring pallets, logs and fishing gear from untold distances.

It might look like refuse, but the wrack line feeds and shelters insects, crabs and birds, says Mark Fisher, science director of coastal fisheries at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Wrack also acts as a nursery for grasses and other plants and so helps to anchor dunes. Trash and debris in the wrack line can hinder natural move-

ments of wildlife, though. Sea turtle hatchlings struggle to safely cross trash-filled wrack lines and may exhaust themselves or fall victim to predators. The wrack line harbors the small and vulnerable, so don't walk or drive on it.

NESTING SEA TURTLES Very few Texans have experienced the thrill of chancing upon a sea turtle nesting on the beach. "It's not something you see every day," says Donna Shaver, chief of sea turtle science and recovery at Padre Island National Seashore. The only sea turtles to nest during the day, Kemp's ridleys come ashore April to July.

Kemp's ridleys have existed for millions of years but largely disappeared from Texas beaches by the mid-1970s. An intense recovery project brought them back, and the first nest was recorded in 1985.

A record 219 Kemp's ridleys nested at the Padre Island National Seashore in 2017. Staffers take eggs to protected labs for incubation and release hatchlings under controlled conditions. Many releases are open to the public.

Green sea turtles, common in Texas waters, crop seagrass beds and encourage more growth, and Kemp's ridleys may play a role in the population dynamics of crabs, their favorite food. Sea turtle eggshells and unhatched eggs add important nutrients to beach ecosystems.

Drive slowly on beaches. If you see a sea turtle on the beach or catch one while fishing, call 1-866-TURTLE-5 immediately. Place a prominent marker near the nest; mother sea turtles are masters at disguising them. Do not touch or disturb the turtle.

See more of **Melissa Gaskill's** work at melissagaskill.blogspot.com.

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Rousting the Rustlers

Cattle raisers' organization employs special rangers to fight centuries-old crime

BY LADAWN FLETCHER

THE THIEVES ARE BRAZEN. COWS, HORSES, sheep—any livestock—can be swiped and sold relatively quickly at full market value. Depending on what is stolen, it can be days and sometimes weeks before the rightful owner even notices. But when the theft comes to light, one of the first calls to be made is to the special rangers.

The special rangers, not to be confused with Texas Rangers, are a select group of law-enforcement agents licensed by the states of Texas and Oklahoma and dedicated solely to agriculture crimes.

Hal Dumas, a special ranger since 1993, has seen a lot in the decades since he joined the force. It is a far cry from his days as a Houston police officer or as the sheriff of Wharton County. His uniform on any given day is crisp jeans, a white shirt and the hat he places beside him on the sofa as he talks. The only tells that confirm his special status: his badge and the gleaming black gun holstered to his side.

“Almost all of what we do as a special ranger is cold cases,” says Dumas. Theft and fraud to be exact.

Catching cattle thieves is why the force was created in 1877 by the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. Cattle raisers, tired of losing their profits to rustlers, banded together to create this specialized and dedicated force.

To this day, the 30 agents who roam the rural roads of Texas and Oklahoma are funded by the TSCRA, not by either state's government. The rangers investigate crimes not just for members but for any rancher or farmer who experiences theft.

Dumas has his work cut out for him. He supervises Region 5, which includes Milam and all counties east of it, up to Leon County. His region and Region 6 to the north contain 70 percent of the cattle in the state and 70 percent of the sale barns.



Cattle raisers not familiar with the special rangers often call the local sheriff when their equipment or livestock is stolen. The special rangers work closely with other law enforcement agencies.

“We work with sheriff's departments all the time,” Dumas says. “Usually that is what we are doing, assisting another agency. We have the information on all the cattle sold in the state. They are a great help to us, and we're a great help to them.”

There are more than 120 sale barns in Texas, and on any given day, some of them are open for business. Buyers and sellers from surrounding counties converge in metal buildings on dusty lots and, with little more than a handshake and exchange of checks, make deals to transfer ownership of livestock.

In some cases, Dumas says, if a bad check or similar issue has delayed payment, the rangers give buyers a chance to pay before stepping in. Some of these cases involve millions of dollars.

“We filed a case several years ago that ranged from Crockett to Caldwell, and we recovered close to 30 pieces of equipment

worth close to a half-million dollars,” Dumas says breezily.

Livestock can be worth even more.

There have been multimillion-dollar deals where the buyer will purchase cattle from an organization that sells to individuals or puts cattle in a feedlot, Dumas explains. They buy as many as 10 or 15 truckloads and pay for them on time. If they get slow on paying or they go bankrupt, then the special rangers might have to get involved.

As old-fashioned as cattle rustling sounds, modern technology helps to catch the bad guys. Branding, the most effective way to identify cattle, was at one time identified via microfiche. Now each special ranger is equipped with a tablet and has instant access to databases across the state. Surveillance cameras on property also sometimes help.

Dumas believes cattle thieves will always be among us. Technology helps stop them or catch them, but he has old-fashioned advice for the modern rancher. “Brand your cattle.”

LaDawn Fletcher is a Houston-area writer.

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2017 GRAND PRIZEWINNER
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Rebekah Stewart | San Bernard EC
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Breakfast Pastries

WHAT BETTER WAY TO WAKE UP THAN to the aroma of freshly baked pastries? Whether it's fragrant banana muffins, buttery scones or the sheer delight of a high-rising, oven-baked pancake, breakfast pastries are a delicious way to make any day feel special. This month's winners are ideal for celebratory brunches ('tis the season for bridal showers and graduation parties), but they're also easy enough to prepare on a weekday. A family favorite is this cinnamon-scented quick bread that combines a moist, tender texture with a crackly, almond crust. Consider baking two and freezing one to brighten up a future morning.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Snickerdoodle Loaf

BATTER

- 2½ cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 1¼ cups sugar
- 3 eggs, room temperature
- ½ cup sour cream
- ½ cup whole milk yogurt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon almond extract

CINNAMON SUGAR

- 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ cup sliced almonds

1. **BATTER:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and cinnamon.
3. In a large bowl, cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Add the sour cream, yogurt and extracts and beat until well-combined. Add the dry ingredients and mix until the batter just

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

MELISSA BRISKO

Recipes

Breakfast Pastries



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

HELEN COUNTS | GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Counts' Puff Oven Pancake is also known as a Dutch baby, a large, fluffy pancake that's whisked together in minutes and bakes into a billowy show-stealer. Vary the toppings to suit your mood or occasion.

Sprinkle with Parmesan or Gruyère for a savory bite, or top with fresh fruit and powdered sugar.

Puff Oven Pancake

- 4 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup flour
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- Powdered sugar
- Fresh fruit or berries

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
2. In a large mixing bowl, briefly beat the eggs. Whisk in milk, flour, sugar and salt until fairly smooth (do not over mix). Cover the batter and let stand for 30 minutes.
3. Place the butter in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet, or similarly sized

baking dish, and heat in oven until melted. Swirl skillet to coat the bottom and sides with melted butter.

4. Pour batter into skillet and bake 15–20 minutes, or until it rises very high and is billowy on the edges and golden brown.

5. Remove from heat and cool for 5 minutes. Place fruit in the center crevice of pancake and dust with powdered sugar. ▶ Serves 4–6.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

comes together (do not over mix).

4. Pour half the batter into the pan and smooth the top with a rubber spatula.
5. CINNAMON SUGAR: In a small bowl, whisk together the brown sugar and cinnamon. Sprinkle half the cinnamon-sugar mixture evenly over the batter in the pan.
6. Pour the rest of the batter over the cinnamon sugar and smooth the top. Sprinkle the remaining cinnamon sugar over the batter and top with the almonds.
7. Bake 50–60 minutes or until a tester inserted in the middle of the loaf comes out mostly clean. Remove from oven and cool for 10 minutes before running a knife around the sides of the pan and turning out the loaf onto a wire rack to cool completely. ▶ Serves 6–8.

COOK'S TIP Wrapped in plastic wrap or foil, this bread will keep 3–4 days.

Spiced Banana Muffins

JILEEN PLATT | BOWIE-CASS EC

An unexpected blend of spices and a moist texture set these banana muffins apart. Adding a bit of whole-wheat flour lends a satisfying texture and balances the sweetness. For a crunchy topping, sprinkle cinnamon and coarse sugar over the tops of the muffins before baking.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon cardamom
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1½ cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 5–6 ripe bananas, mashed
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Apply cooking spray to 2 muffin tins or line with paper baking cups.
2. Whisk together flours, baking soda, spices and salt in a medium bowl.
3. In a separate mixing bowl, cream butter and sugars. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each. Add bananas,



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\$100 Recipe Contest

September's recipe contest topic is **All Hail the Cookie Jar**. What fresh-baked goodies do you stock in your cookie jar? The deadline to send recipes is **April 10**.

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.

oil and vanilla; mix well. Add the dry ingredients and mix until moistened, being careful not to over mix.

4. Spoon batter into muffin tins. Bake 15–17 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.

5. Remove from heat and cool muffins in tins for 5 minutes. Invert and finish cooling, right-side up, on a wire rack.

► Makes 24 muffins.

Cranberry Scones

CHRISTINE HENDERSON | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

These tender crumb scones are easy to assemble. For optimal texture, use very cold butter. “These are great fresh from the oven or split open and spread with butter, honey, or my favorite—whipped cream,” Henderson says.

- 3 cups flour**
- ½ cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar, divided use**
- 1 tablespoon baking powder**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**

- ¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter**
- 1 egg, beaten**
- 1 cup buttermilk**
- ½ teaspoon almond extract**
- 1 cup dried cranberries**
- ½ cup chopped walnuts (optional)**
- 1 tablespoon finely grated orange zest**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray or line with parchment.
 - 2.** Whisk together the flour, ½ cup sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt in a large bowl. Using a fork (or your fingers) cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Mix in egg, buttermilk and almond extract until it forms a slightly moist batter. Stir in cranberries, nuts and orange zest.
 - 3.** Using a spoon, scoop 3-inch rounds of batter onto baking sheet (keeping them about 2 inches apart). Sprinkle remaining sugar over each scone. Place baking sheet on center oven rack and bake 15 minutes or until lightly browned.
- Makes 12 scones.



Top of the Morning

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TOAST AND SLATHER Top toasted quick breads, poundcake or muffins with cream cheese, lemon curd, seasonal jam or lightly sweetened ricotta cheese.

INFUSE SYRUP Gently heat pure maple syrup with blackberries, raspberries or blueberries (fresh or frozen), and include a cinnamon stick and/or vanilla bean. —PD



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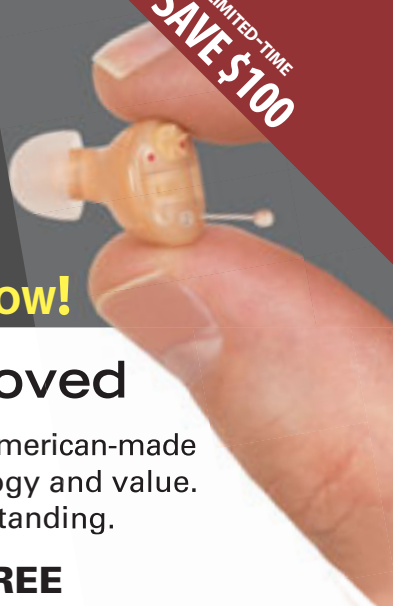
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WEB EXTRAS ► See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ CAROL POPE, Bowie-Cass EC: Tad Hobbs of Hooks shares a gentle touch with his horse, Gingersnap.



▲ KANDICE LAMMERT, Heart of Texas EC: "Lucas Lammert, age 4, mutton bustin' at the HOT Fair in Waco"



▲ JULIE KLAMMER, Pedernales EC: Mylie Pearl, 3, wears chaps and a cowgirl hat for a Texas birthday party.



▲ DAVID PENA, Pedernales EC: "My son loved the sound the spur made as he walked."



UPCOMING CONTESTS

AUGUST SCHOOL'S OUT	DUE APRIL 10
SEPTEMBER WEDDING FUNNIES	DUE MAY 10
OCTOBER CLOCKS	DUE JUNE 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.

◀ BECCA BRIDGE, South Plains EC: These 1952 cowgirls—Jane Powell Bridge, left, and sister Pat Powell Hightower—are ready for the rodeo.

Pick of the Month Cajun Heritage Festival

Port Arthur April 7
(409) 835-2787, cajunheritagefest.com

Food, drink and music mark this annual festival, which takes place as the coastal community of Port Arthur continues to recover from Hurricane Harvey. The Category 4 hurricane, which struck Texas on August 25, 2017, caused \$125 billion in damage and dropped 4 feet of rain on Port Arthur and 5 feet on neighboring communities.



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April 7

Kilgore Gregg County Walk Like MADD, (903) 534-6000, walklikemadd.org

Terrell Big Band Hangar Dance & Dinner, (972) 551-1122, bftsmuseum.org

8

Crockett Ernie Haase & Signature Sound, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

11

San Angelo [11-14] Just Between Friends, (325) 716-7356, sanangelo.jbfsale.com

13

Georgetown [13-14] Quilt and Stitchery Show, (512) 658-6973, handcraftsunlimited.com

Neches [13-22] 1836 Chuckwagon Race, (903) 721-9111, 1836chuckwagonrace.com

14

Cedar Park Austin Walk for PKD, (508) 981-3011, walkforpkd.org/austin



April 14
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Hearne Crossroads Hometown Festival, (979) 279-5372, crossroadshometownfestival.com

San Saba Music Series Presents Jason Boland, (325) 372-5144, visitsansabatexas.com

Schulenburg Sausagefest, (979) 743-4514, schulenburgsausagesfest.com

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Waco Rootstock: A Texas Wine Festival, (254) 848-4343, rootstockwinefest.com

Chappell Hill [14-15] Official Bluebonnet Festival of Texas, (979) 836-3696, visitbrenhamtexas.com

19

San Angelo [19-21] Regional Cavalry Competition, (325) 657-4444, fortconcho.com

Waxahachie [19-22] Crossroads of Texas Film Festival, (469) 309-4045, crossroadsoftx.com

20

Edinburg Got Faith Concert Series, (956) 358-2755, gotfaithmusic.com

Carthage [20-21] Piney Woods Quilt Festival, (903) 646-1791, carthagetexas.us/main-street

Henderson [20-21] Antique Tractor Show, (903) 889-2671, visithendersontx.com

Grandview [20-22] Antique Alley Texas, (817) 666-5024, antiquealleytexas.com

21

Calvert Calvert 150: A Texas Celebration Fit for a Queen, (979) 364-2323, calverttx.us

Hillsboro Hill County Master Gardeners Plant Sale, (254) 582-4022, hill.agrilife.org

Brazoria [21-22] Migration Celebration, 1-844-842-4737, migrationcelebration.com

Dripping Springs [21-22] Redbud Artisan Market, (512) 858-7892

Whitney [21-22, 27-29] *Doublewide, Texas*, (254) 694-5105, lakewhitneyarts.org

April 20-21
Henderson
Antique Tractor Show



22

Wilson VFD Fundraiser Dinner and Auction, (806) 778-7326

26

Freeport [26-28] RiverFest, (979) 233-6061, freeportriverfest.com

Fredericksburg [26-29] Hill Country Film Festival, 1-866-224-7714, hillcountryff.com

27

Clute [27-29, May 4-6] Little Theater's Production of *Hamlet*, (979) 265-7661, brazosportcenter.org

May 6

Wylie Wylie 500 Pedal Car Race, (972) 516-6016, wylietetexas.gov

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Where Birders Perch

World Birding Center spans nine sites along Rio Grande Valley

BY EILEEN MATTEI

FROM SOUTH PADRE ISLAND ALONG THE Rio Grande to Roma, 134 miles to the west, nine World Birding Center sites entice serious birders and amateur naturalists with extraordinary, year-round watchable wildlife. Easily accessible, the WBC includes three state parks and six urban nature preserves where it is possible to enjoy one-on-one encounters with birds, butterflies, Texas tortoises and semi-tropical, thorny, flowering Mother Nature.

Beginning birders count red-crowned parrots, great kiskadees and green jays among the Rio Grande Valley's large, loud and colorful species that make it easy to enjoy wildlife watching. Veteran birders come from around the world to spot birds not seen anywhere else. World Birding Center habitats range from tidal wetlands to thorn-scrub forests. Brimming with native plants, the sites attract an abundance of semitropical and migratory birds. This inspires locals to grow native plants to nourish and shelter wildlife.

The WBC's easternmost location is on South Padre Island, and the other eight sites lie within a few miles of Interstate 2 and Highway 83, which traverse the lower RGV.

At **South Padre Island Birding and Nature Center**, you can observe birds up close because the birds here don't spook easily, says Javier Gonzalez, park naturalist. In contrast, he adds, the alligators living in the freshwater wetland tend to shy away from noisy groups. "The adjacent salt marsh lets you compare the differences in habitats and wildlife," Gonzalez says. "With only one trail and one boardwalk, you share experiences with people you meet and learn from each other."

Thirty-six miles inland, **Resaca de la Palma State Park's** diverse habitats include



The Edinburg Scenic Wetlands and World Birding Center

a wetland that weaves through the park's 1,200 acres. As guests roam the park's grassland, thorn scrub and old-growth ebony forests, they are likely to spot Altamira orioles, groove-billed anis, green jays and kingbirds.

The **Harlingen Arroyo Colorado** site of the WBC encompasses the 54-acre Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and the 40-acre Harlingen Thicket. Volunteer Texas master naturalists have collaborated to transform parts of the park into an indigenous habitat densely packed with native plants.

Scattered through **Estero Llano Grande State Park's** 230 acres of grassland and woods are ponds that host alligators, black-bellied whistling ducks, roseate spoonbills and wood storks. A wildlife-watching pavilion overlooks Ibis Pond and serves as the ideal starting point for the popular owl prowls and night hikes.

In addition to the birds and butterflies crowding the gardens, the **Old Hidalgo Pumphouse Museum** boasts an up-close perspective on the massive steam-driven pumps that drew water from the Rio Grande to irrigate farm fields starting in 1909.


Quinta Mazatlan, a historic 1930s adobe mansion, takes center stage at McAllen's

urban wildlife habitat. Resident semitropical birds perched along the trails blend in with 38 bronze sculptures of leafcutter ants, bats, owls, horned lizards and javelinas.

At **Edinburg Scenic Wetlands**, two large ponds and several small ones act like magnets for kids, wading birds, songbirds, foxes and dragonflies. "We're an educational nature center, an urban oasis for watchable wildlife rather than a native forest," says Marisa Oliva-Rodriguez, who manages the 40-acre site. "The idea is to get kids outside and enjoying it." Park admission includes use of binoculars and playsets with dip nets.

Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park is renowned for hawk watches during seasonal migrations, while **Roma Bluffs'** observation deck high above the Rio Grande looks out over the river and islands and into Mexico. Every step on the World Birding Center trail delivers wildlife encounters in this lively, semitropical environment.

Eileen Mattei, a member of Nueces and Magic Valley ECs, lives in Harlingen.

 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see more photos from the World Birding Center.



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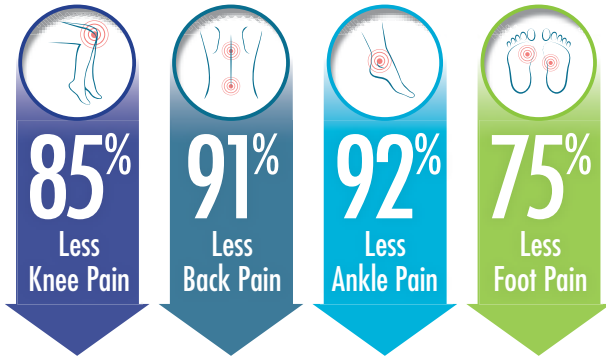
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