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are perfect for
Shakespeare





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Stormy sky over the Big Bend

FEATURES

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A Slice of Heaven

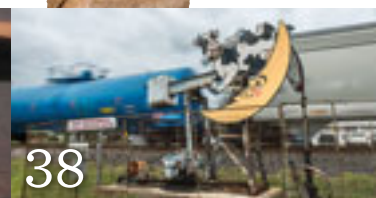
By Lonn Taylor

NEXT MONTH

Hill Country Gems Scenic swath of Central Texas spotlights culture, history and natural wonders.



CANYON: E. DAN KLEPPER. CAIRN: JULIA ROBINSON



ON THE COVER *Camp Shakespeare youngsters perform The Winter's Tale at Winedale Theatre Barn. Photo by Caroline Poe Photography*

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— J. Fitzgerald, VA



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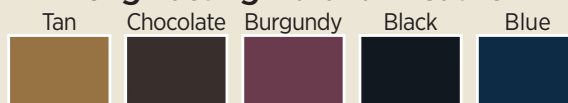
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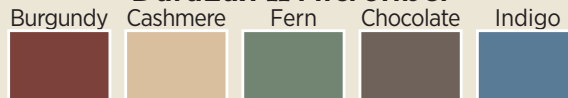
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Planting the Seeds

I had just received a packet of milkweed seeds from Lands' End when the May issue of *Texas Co-op Power* [*Naturally Protective*] arrived. I immediately cleared a spot in my yard and planted the seeds.

JOEL MUCKLERoy | JOURDANTON KARNES EC

About MacArthur

Gen. Douglas MacArthur was commander in chief of the South Pacific, which was primarily New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand and eventually the Philippines [*Chain of Command?*, Letters, June 2018]. Adm. Chester W. Nimitz was commander in chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas. This included all of the island groups from the Solomon Islands through Okinawa and Iwo Jima.

HOWARD MAX | FAIRVIEW GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

What was Gen. MacArthur doing? He was cooperating with Adm. Nimitz, who was in charge of all Pacific operations.

D.J. BRUCE | WEATHERFORD TRI-COUNTY EC

Other Connections

Having had a "connected" home for the past 17 years, I was surprised there was no mention of X-10 or Z-Wave technology [*Connecting Your Home*, June 2018]. X-10 being a power line (the wires in your house) technology and Z-Wave being a radio frequency system of controls for lights, appliances, thermostats, TV and stereo, sprinkler systems, security systems integration,

Keep Texas, Texas

Every day we lose a little bit more of our lush countryside due to progress. Laura Bush has a big job on her hands, and I hope it's not too late [*Naturally Protective*, May 2018]. I hope we can keep Texas, Texas.

JAN ALSGARD | LEANDER | PEDERNALES EC



water valves, door locks, etc.

JIM NEUMANN | VICTORIA VICTORIA EC

East Texas Authors

I'd hoped the article on East Texas writer Joe R. Lansdale [*East Texas Mojo*, May 2018] would mention Caleb Pirtle III, a Kilgore native now writing out of Lindale. He has written over 75 books—among his more



recent is a prize-winning account of the Giddings oil strike of the 1970s, *Gamble in the Devil's Chalk*. He's now writing two fiction books on life in a small East Texas town in the 1930s.

JOHN NICKOLS | FORNEY TRINITY VALLEY EC

One of my favorite writers! For decades!

WILLIAM TROCINO | VIA FACEBOOK

I will be looking for him [Lansdale, left] on my next trip to the bookstore.

MARY JANE ZORN | VIA FACEBOOK

Spilled Jewels

Beautiful picture of the dedicated spider mom [*Doting Mother*, Letters, November 2017].

Try this: Shine a bright flashlight onto the grass at night, holding the light on your head so you can look down the beam.

When you find a wolf spider, follow the beam to get closer. Wolf spider eyes glow a most brilliant aqua, and so do the babies'.

If disturbed, the babies scatter and look like spilled jewels.

SANDY GADSDEN | BANDERA BANDERA EC

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Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

See What Real Cowboys Do

Working cowboys test their skills at the **BIG BEND RANCH RODEO, AUGUST 10-11** at Sul Ross State University in **ALPINE**.

The rodeo, sanctioned by the Working Ranch Cowboys Association, provides participating cattle workers an opportunity to educate the public about the everyday work of a ranch. The rodeo includes ranch bronc riding, cattle sorting, cattle doctoring, wild cow milking and calf branding.

The Big Bend winner advances to the WRCA World Championship Ranch Rodeo in November in Amarillo. Proceeds from the Big Bend Ranch Rodeo go toward scholarships at Sul Ross State.

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ALMANAC

Heck of a Comment

The words of Davy Crockett, the American folk hero who died defending the Alamo, live on as a pointed message on coffee mugs, T-shirts and other knickknacks: "You may all go to hell, and I will go to Texas."

Consider the backstory of that comment on the anniversary of Crockett's birth—August 17, 1786. Here's an excerpt from the April 9, 1836, edition of *Niles' Weekly Register* in Baltimore, which chronicled national history much as *The New York Times* does today:

"A gentleman from Nacogdoches, in Texas, informs us, that, whilst there, he dined in public with col. Crockett, who had just arrived from Tennessee. The old bear-hunter, on being toasted, made a speech to the Texians, replete with his usual dry humor. He began nearly in this style: 'I am told, gentlemen, that, when a stranger, like myself, arrives among you, the first inquiry is—what brought you here? To satisfy your curiosity at once to myself, I will tell you all about it. I was, for some years, a member of congress. In my last canvass, I told the people of my district, that, if they saw fit to re-elect me, I would serve them as faithfully as I had done; but, if not, they might go to h___, and I would go to Texas. I was beaten, gentlemen, and here I am.' The roar of applause was like a thunder-burst."

WORTH REPEATING

“Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow my footsteps and preside over the White House as the president’s spouse. I wish him well!”

—**FORMER FIRST LADY BARBARA BUSH**, who died April 17 in Houston



WEATHER WATCH

Never Again, Harvey

HARVEY HAS BEEN RETIRED from the rotating list of hurricane names by the World Meteorological Organization, as were Irma, Maria and Nate—all monster hurricanes in 2017. Harvey struck the Texas coast August 25 as a Category 4 storm with 132 mph winds, killing 68 people and dumping historic amounts of rain on the Houston area. It caused \$126 billion in damage, second only to Katrina in U.S. history.

THE RETIRED NAMES have been replaced with Harold, Idalia, Margot and Nigel. Nations hit hard by hurricanes can request the WMO retire names. Each hurricane season, which runs June 1–November 30, storms are named, in alphabetical order, based on lists that get recycled every six years.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Don't Be Left Out

August 13 is International Left-Handers Day. Roughly 10 percent of people are left-handed, according to Chris McManus, a University College London researcher who wrote a book chapter on the history and geography of left-handedness.

CO-OPS IN THE COMMUNITY

BRINGING LIGHT TO BOLIVIA

In November, 16 lineworkers from six Texas electric cooperatives—Bartlett, Bluebonnet and Pedernales ECs; CoServ; Mid-South Synergy; and United Cooperative Services—built 6 miles of power lines to bring electricity for the first time to 147 homes in the rural Bolivian villages of Batraja, Jerico and San Antonio de Maty.

To help fund the project, the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation presented a \$35,000 grant to the co-ops in February.

“It was an amazing adventure,” said Bo Williams, Mid-South operations VP, who led the expedition. “It was hot for sure. It rained every day—but the people there made it all worthwhile. They were very appreciative and wanted to help every way they could.”



United Cooperative Services linemen Brody Weems, left, and Chase Noland pose with a Bolivian child.

All the State's a Stage

BY CLAYTON STROMBERGER

If we could, like Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, “put a girdle round about the earth / In forty minutes,” and zip around the Lone Star State over summer and fall evenings, O, the Shakespeare we would hear and see!

*A dozen festivals, all alike in dignity,
In fair Texas, where we lay our scene,
From famous texts, break to new creativity ...*



We begin in the West Texas city of Odessa. As the heat waves rise, is that a shimmering vision of Shakespeare's Globe we see, sitting in the land of oil fields and Friday night lights? It is! The Globe of the Great Southwest, which, thanks to the vision and persistence of a brilliant high school teacher, appeared in the Llano Estacado a full 30 years before London put up its rebuilt Globe. Today, Odessa's Globe Theatre hosts performances by the Odessa Shakespeare Festival.

Next, we fly west to El Paso and spy a group of local actors performing outdoors at Chamizal National Memorial, within shouting distance of the Rio Grande. As the players strut and fret their hour upon the stage with a touch of twang in their iambic pentameter, we soar from thence over parks filled with families sitting on picnic blankets and watching Shakespeare festivals in Dallas, Houston and Austin.

We hear comic prose, stirring verse and laughter along the



Riverwalk in San Antonio, along the Concho in San Angelo and under a canopy of stars in the Hill Country nook of Wimberley, as well as on college campuses in Fort Worth and Kilgore. Last, above the gently rolling countryside of Winedale, we spy an old open-sided hay barn in the twilight, orange light spilling from inside, and we hear a voice cry out, in a timeless moment after the onstage murder of Julius Caesar:

*How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over
In states unborn and accents yet unknown!*

MACE: MARY RATH, HENRY V. ROBERT MONCKIEFF

THE HISTORY, MYTHS AND WILD SPIRIT OF TEXAS PROVIDE FERTILE GROUND FOR SHAKESPEARE PERFORMANCES



When it comes to the immortal Sweet Swan of Avon, all the state's a stage. This is remarkable when you consider that Shakespeare was born almost four decades after Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, shipwrecked near Galveston in 1528 like a character out of *The Tempest*, became the first European to travel into the interior of Texas and wander amid its indigenous people. How did this Londoner from the time of Queen Elizabeth become our favorite playwright for a Texas midsummer night?

Shakespeare likely arrived in Texas first in an adventurer's satchel or a settler's trunk. As improbable as it might seem today,

Opposite: *Macbeth* at EmilyAnn Theatre & Gardens in Wimberley. Above: Shakespeare at Winedale presents *Henry V*.

Shakespeare was a favorite of all social classes as America entered the 19th century, according to eminent Shakespeare scholar James Shapiro.

"There is hardly a pioneer's hut which does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare," wrote French diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville after his travels through the United States in 1831. Children learned Shakespeare's verse from the ubiquitous McGuffey Readers, which began publication in 1836. Shake-

Shakespeare's plays—primarily the tragedies—were constantly in demand at theaters and opera houses and held their own against melodramas and farces. In October 1835, when James Butler Bonham organized a rally in Alabama to support Texas independence, he held it at the Shakespeare Theater in Mobile, a bustling town that held its first Shakespearean performance more than a decade earlier. Even Sam Houston knew his Shakespeare and quoted him often.

"Scholars and historians have now learned that language and dialect was very different during Shakespeare's time than we thought," says Bridget Farias Gates, artistic director of the EmilyAnn Theatre & Gardens in Wimberley. "Many consider it to be closer to the Texas dialect than to British. So, in a romantic way, this means Texans deliver Shakespeare more closely to original practice than most would think.

Richard already had two Mexican wives in San Antonio. "Nothing daunted at this public accusation of polygamy," Jefferson recalled decades later, "'Pud' pressed his suit with ardor."

In Texas' early days, even soldiers performed Shakespeare, partly to stave off boredom. In the winter of 1846, shortly after Texas had joined the union, 4,000 troops of the United States Army under the command of Gen. Zachary Taylor were stationed near the village of Corpus Christi in preparation for the conflict that would later become known as the Mexican-American War.

While waiting for orders, the soldiers assembled at the Union Theater, large enough to hold 800, and began rehearsals for

From left: *Romeo and Juliet* at Wimberley's EmilyAnn Theatre & Gardens. *Richard III* at the Houston Shakespeare Festival. The Texas Shakespeare Festival Roadshow cast performs *Shakespeare's Greatest Hits* at Odessa's Globe Theatre with help from an audience member.



"Shakespeare would have loved Texas, both for its own

"I also like to think that the wide expanse of Texan land and the more laid-back nature of the Texan way of living is a closer representation to Shakespeare's country folk characters," she says.

The first notable professional performance of a Shakespeare play in Texas was held February 12, 1839, in Houston, when one Mr. Lewellen, who had scored a big hit in St. Louis with an equestrian melodrama co-starring his horse, Mazeppa, assayed the title role in *Othello*.

Competing theaters were built in Houston before the city's first church; established actors arrived by boat from New Orleans. Theaters attracted a rough-and-tumble crowd looking for diversion—and not necessarily accustomed to the niceties of high culture. Touring actor Joseph Jefferson recalled in his autobiography that during one mid-1840s portrayal of *Richard III* by an aging local troupier named "Pudding" Stanley in Houston, a patron interrupted Richard's wooing of Lady Anne to warn Anne that

Othello. Out of necessity, as in Shakespeare's London, men often played the female roles. James Longstreet, later a leading general in the Confederate Army, was up for the part of Desdemona, young wife of the noble Moor, but was deemed too tall. Longstreet's good friend, young Ulysses S. Grant, nicknamed "Little Beauty" for his feminine good looks, took over the role, but eventually a professional actress was hired and brought in because the soldier playing Othello, as Longstreet later recalled, just could not work up the "proper sentiment" while gazing upon Grant.

After the Civil War, as Texas' cities and towns began to develop civic traditions, the next wave of interest in Shakespeare came not from touring actors but from local citizens, especially women, with a focus on the communal enlightenment of group reading and discussion rather than performance. During the first half of the 20th century, there were at least 27 Shakespeare clubs meet-

ing in the state, from Abilene and Calvert to Waxahachie and North Zulch; many continue proudly to this day. That same democratic impulse led to the spread of community theaters in the early 20th century as the touring system of the barnstorming-actor days faded. In the 1970s, the ripple effect from Joseph Papp's Free Shakespeare in the Park in New York City led to a wave of park-based festivals around the state.

"Shakespeare would have loved Texas, both for its own energy and spirit and as a setting," says Jon Mark Hogg, president of the board of directors of Be Theatre and producer for Shakespeare on the Concho. "So many of his works are set in historic or myth-

cal Center near Round Top and meet the legendary Miss Ima Hogg, who had restored the Winedale property, including a historic stagecoach inn, and donated it to UT in the late 1960s.

Hogg directed Ayres to peek into the property's old hay barn, with its clay floor and handcarved cedar beams. "I want you to do Shakespeare in that barn," Hogg informed him, and three weeks later, Ayres brought his first class. Now, the Shakespeare at Winedale program is one of the leading Shakespeare-through-performance programs in the country, with UT students studying and performing three plays each summer. Ayres, a professor emeritus, founded and continues to lead Camp Shakespeare,



energy and spirit and as a setting."

ical places. The history, myths and wild spirit of Texas, both past and present, would have been fertile ground for the Bard."

On the educational front, Texas scored a coup in 1946 when legendary British director B. Iden Payne, who previously had led the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Shakespeare's hometown, Stratford-upon-Avon, came to the University of Texas as a guest professor in one of the nation's first collegiate drama departments.

One of the country's more unique venues for Shakespeare, the Winedale Theatre Barn, came about through a Texas miracle. In the fall of 1970, James B. Ayres, then an associate professor of Shakespeare at the University of Texas, happened to visit the Winedale Histori-

residential summer camps for children ages 11–16 who perform an entire play at Winedale at the end of each session.

The Shakespeare at Winedale logo perfectly captures this long love affair between a poet and a place. Known as "Cowboy Willie," it depicts Shakespeare wearing a cowboy hat and a bandana, chewing a piece of straw, a wad of chewing tobacco bulging in his cheek. A few years back, the program printed T-shirts that read: "Rich History. Vast Countryside. Family Feuds. Shakespeare would have loved Texas."

No doubt. In the meantime, we remain grateful for the gift of his words and characters and the chance to bring them to life. To lift a line from the noble Moor Othello, who was likely the first Shakespearean tragic hero to grace a Texas stage: He hath done the state some service, and we know't.

Clayton Stromberger is the outreach program coordinator for Shakespeare at Winedale.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see a list of Shakespeare festivals and learn more about the Bard from the experts.

A dramatic desert landscape featuring large, dark boulders in the foreground. In the background, there are dark, layered mountains under a heavy, stormy sky with dark clouds. The ground is sandy and sparsely covered with small desert shrubs.

WHY THE RAVEN CALLS THE CANYON



///

BOOK EXCERPT CAPTURES

LIFE OFF THE GRID IN BIG BEND

From 2006 to 2013, I divided my time between Marathon, 50 miles north of Big Bend National Park, and Fresno Ranch, an abandoned, off-grid, horse-and-mule operation located along the Rio Grande. Relatively uninhabited for almost a decade, the ranch encompassed more than 7,000 acres of springs, canyons and volcanic peaks. In 2006, absentee owners recruited Rodrigo Trevizo, a friend of mine and local state park superintendent, to keep an eye on the place. Two years later he moved into the ranch's adobe studio, determined to bring the rudimentary infrastructure of the ranch back to life. I joined him for weeks at a time, lending a hand to unearth the ranch's water system, repair livestock corrals and restore the solar power, all while adjusting to the day-to-day challenges of living off the grid. With Trevizo's help, Fresno became part of Big Bend Ranch State Park, at over 300,000 acres the largest state park in Texas.

Fresno Ranch was established in the 1900s as a 640-acre section bordered by the river at its confluence with Fresno Creek and present-day FM 170. During the 1980s, another 10 sections were added, including nine sections up Fresno Canyon and an additional mile of riverfront. At one point, Fresno also covered the Picachos, a 5,000-acre ranch directly across the river in Mexico.

Ancient campsites and historic ruins litter the desert terrain around Fresno, sharing a robust cultural history with defunct mercury mines and remnant candelilla wax camps. A collapsed magma dome, so large it can be detected from space, dominates much of

These boulders were placed in alignment at Fresno Ranch decades ago using a tractor.

the ranch's northeastern horizon. Among Fresno's hand-built attributes, a 2,000-square-foot adobe painting studio lies at its heart, constructed for the late Jeanne Norsworthy, Texas artist and granddaughter of George B. Dealey, publisher of the *Dallas Morning News*.

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY E. DAN KLEPPER

///



Left: Chupadera Spring in the Cienega Mountains. Below: The author gets a haircut at Fresno Ranch.

///

Fresno's natural world shares the allure of wild places found across the entire Big Bend region. The inscrutability of this West Texas country inspires life-long appreciation for its rare natural beauty as well as an unorthodox creativity, resulting in artistic endeavors like this one, and often rousing those who hail from gentler places to abandon creature comforts and move to the Big Bend for good. Here, adventurers, artists, and writers live in stone ruins, campers, and makeshift shelters, contending with extreme summer temperatures, winter freezes and venomous wildlife like scorpions and rattlesnakes, all in an attempt to understand the enigma possessed

by mountains and canyons scattered throughout hundreds of uninhabited miles. Much of the territory's draw may reside in the region's volcanic upheaval, conjured from the planet's bedrock, and a geography lit by an ever-changing light, as cryptic as the human psyche. With time and consideration, an artist can thrive here on conclusions that reveal as much about the land as our own internal landscapes.

Writer and photographer **E. Dan Klepper** works from Marathon. *Why the Raven Calls the Canyon* was published by Texas A&M University Press in 2017.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see a slideshow of Fresno Ranch.

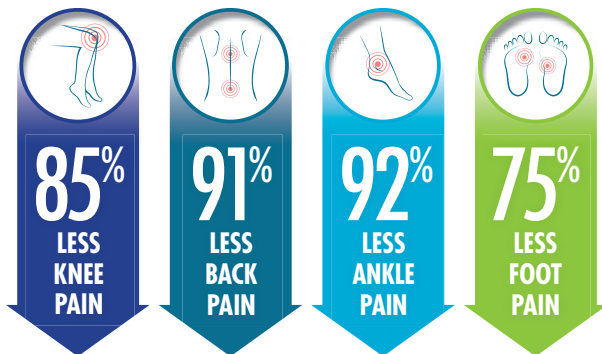


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FLIP FLIP HOORAY!

A perfect symbol of fun in the sun for only \$79

Here's a memorable beach moment: You're basking in the warm sun, toes in the sand, letting the gentle turn of the foam-capped waves lull you into a state of complete relaxation. As your eyes scan the endless horizon of blue on blue, you're rewarded with a school of dolphins making their way across the sea. There's no denying their signature shape as they leap from the water. If you don't see anything else extraordinary the rest of day, you can take solace knowing you've witnessed one of nature's most playful and intelligent creatures in their natural habitat.

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— Dolphins-World



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— Vivian, Cabool, MO

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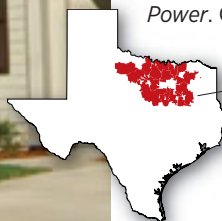
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Include Home Energy Savings in Vacation Plans

SLIPPING IN A LAST-MINUTE VACATION BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS? BE SURE TO GIVE YOUR home's energy use a vacation as well. Simple tips can save you money while you're away.

Air conditioning: Set the thermostat to 85 degrees. If it's a programmable thermostat, use the "hold" or the "vacation" setting. For every degree a thermostat is raised during the summer, you can save 2 percent on your electricity bill.

Electronics: Computers, CD/DVD players, TVs and chargers—these and other electronic appliances use electricity even when they are not turned on. Unplug them before leaving.

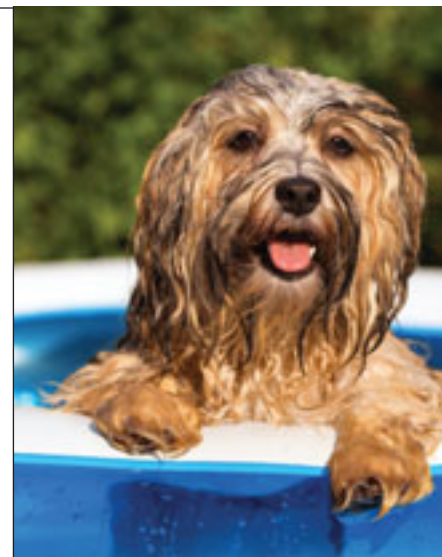
Lighting: Improve energy savings, and your home's security, by using timers to operate lights at night. And by installing LEDs in those lamps, you'll save more energy—up to 66 percent for each lamp—and the bulbs last about 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs.

Water heating: Turn the water heater's temperature to the lowest setting. Many water heaters have a "vacation" setting for this purpose. Leave a reminder to turn it back up when you return home.

Pool: Shorten the operating time for the pool filter and automatic cleaning sweep. A pool cover can save energy, too. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, up to 70 percent of pool water loss is by evaporation.

Refrigerator: Set the fridge to 42 degrees and the freezer to 5 degrees. This increase is enough to keep everything cold and frozen but still save energy over the vacation period. As a precaution, it's a good idea to clean out any leftovers and raw vegetables and keep only new foods that won't spoil while the house is empty. If you're going on an extended trip, consider emptying the fridge and turning it off. If you do so, remember to leave the doors open to prevent mildew.

For more information on how to use energy efficiently year-round, contact your electric cooperative.



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The Best Place for Fido

YOUR DOG LOVES RIDING IN THE CAR

with you and playing in the grass on warm, sunny days. But when it gets really hot, keep Fido indoors where the air conditioning can keep your best friend cool.

Like people, pets can suffer from all kinds of heat-related problems, such as heatstroke, dehydration and respiratory distress. Some days, the safest thing for them is a lazy day inside your home.

Here are five ways to keep Fluffy and Fido safe and cool this summer:

- ▶ Put out extra bowls of water indoors and outdoors so your pets can drink as much as they need. And drop a couple of ice cubes into Fido's water dish to keep the water nice and cool.
- ▶ Water isn't just for drinking in the summer. Let your pets stand or play in it to help keep them cool.
- ▶ If you're outdoors with your pet, stay in the shade. Too much sun can cause heatstroke. Short-haired pets can get sunburned.
- ▶ If you're leaving the house without your pets, keep them indoors and leave the air conditioning on. If you're taking them with you, don't leave them unattended in a hot car, even with the windows cracked.
- ▶ Exercise your pets early in the morning or late in the evening, when the weather is not so hot.



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Top Five Energy Users in Your Home

A starting point for savings

WHILE MOST HOMEOWNERS WOULD LIKE TO BE MORE ENERGY efficient and save money, often it feels overwhelming because we don't know where to start. How can the average family use less energy, lower its utility bills and still meet daily energy needs? To help jump-start your effort, it's useful to know the top energy users in your home. With this knowledge, you can choose a path to savings that works best for your family.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the top five energy users in U.S. homes are:

1. Space cooling
2. Lighting
3. Water heating
4. Space heating
5. Refrigeration

Adjust the Temperature

Together, home heating and cooling use the most energy and take the biggest bite out of your energy budget. On the bright side, there are ways you can achieve at least 10 percent savings on heating and cooling by taking a few simple low-cost or no-cost steps.

► During warm weather, the recommended indoor temperature is 78 degrees.

► During cold weather, set your thermostat to 68 degrees.

► Clean the filters of your HVAC system to cut costs 5–15 percent.

► Caulk and weatherstrip around windows and doors to prevent conditioned air from escaping to the outdoors.

► No matter what the climate or time of year, proper use of a programmable thermostat can save you 10 percent on your monthly utility bill.

Shine the Light on Savings

Take a fresh look at the lighting in your home. If you still use incandescent lighting, your lightbulbs are operating at only 25 percent energy efficiency. Replacing your home's five most frequently used bulbs with Energy Star-rated LEDs can save \$75 per year. Another easy way to save is to always turn lights off in rooms that are not being used.

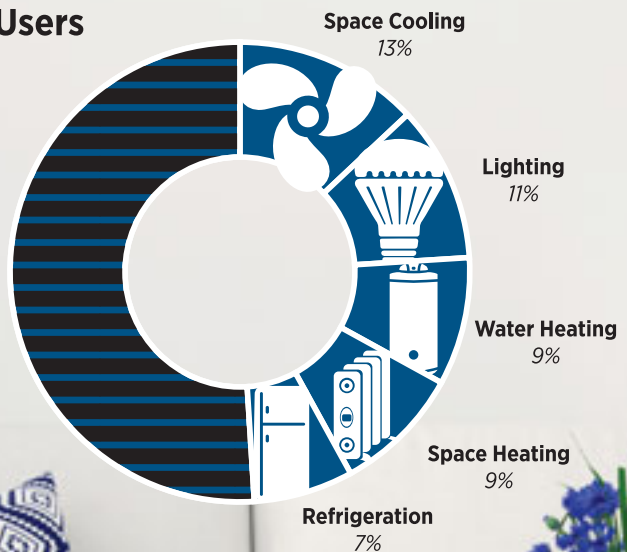
Water Heating Efficiency

Just as it's energy-wise to insulate your roof, walls and floors, it also pays to wrap your water heater with an insulating blanket. This is all the more critical if you have an older unit. Make sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions. For additional efficiency and savings, insulate exposed hot water lines and drain 1–2 gallons of water from the bottom of your tank annually to prevent sediment buildup.

Top Five Energy Users in U.S. Homes

Estimated residential electricity consumption by end use, 2014

Other uses include TVs, set-top boxes, home entertainment and gaming systems, monitors and networking equipment, clothes dryer, small electric devices, heating elements and motors.



Put Cash Back in Your Wallet

If your refrigerator was purchased before 2001, chances are it uses 40 percent more energy than a new Energy Star model. If you are considering an appliance update, a new Energy Star-rated fridge uses at least 15 percent less energy than nonqualified models and 20 percent less energy than allowed by current federal standards.

By understanding how your home uses energy, you can determine the best ways to modify energy use and keep more money in your wallet. For additional ways to save, contact your electric cooperative.

The Original Texas Songster

Mockingbirds' tireless trilling includes mimicry and original tunes

BY CLAY COPPEDGE

THE NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD, THE STATE bird of Texas, is an avian chatterbox that serenades Texans all over the state at all hours of the day and sometimes night, most exuberantly from early spring through summer. The mockingbird's scientific name is *Mimus polyglottos*, or "many-tongued mimic."

Though they have long preferred southern climes, mockingbirds (also the state bird of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee) have extended their range in recent years and sing as far north and east as New England and as far west as Northern California. Males and females perform their concerts in typical avian settings, singing for hours on end with scarcely a pause, raising and lowering their wings, and fluttering up a few feet in the air and settling back down.

As suggested by their name, the prevailing notion is that mockingbirds' exhaustive repertoire is a product of mimicry, not originality. Their alleged replications include not only other birdsongs but also car alarms, whistles, sirens, bells, flutes, trumpets, crickets, squirrels and just about anything else that makes a noise. They're nature's ultimate cover band—prolific but derivative.

Or are they? Texas naturalist Roy Bedichek expressed an unabashed and lifelong fondness for mockingbirds, but he balked at the notion of the mockingbird as a mocker.

"If one wants to call a single note, or a phrase uttered here and there entirely out of context, the imitation of a song—that is, if he doesn't care how loosely he uses

the word 'imitation'—he may say the mocker imitates," Bedichek wrote in his 1947 book, *Adventures With a Texas Naturalist*. "But when I hear it said that he can fool anybody, I dissent. I have never been fooled more than momentarily by the so-called mimicry of the mockingbird."

Well, maybe he was. At least a little bit. Bedichek's belief is only partly true because the mockingbird definitely mocks—it just does not mock all the time. Research led by Dave Gammon at Elon University in North Carolina found that up to half of the mockingbird's song is mimicry. The rest is original material, qualifying our state bird as a prolific songwriter as well as an inexhaustible performer.

As to why they sing so many songs, ornithologist Kim Derrickson, who has analyzed sonograms of mockingbird songs, told a writer for *National Wildlife* magazine in 1992 that mockingbirds' concerts coincide with hormonal changes they need for mating and nesting in the spring and summer.

"If you followed a bird for an entire mating season, you would end up with more than 400 song types," he said. "There is no point at which their repertoire flattens out. They just keep adding. Some they will forget or not use. Others they will remember into the next breeding season."

Derrickson once recorded a mockingbird that mastered not only the call of a male red-winged blackbird but also the paired response of a female red-wing, inspiring the mockingbird to perform a duet with itself.

Another longtime mockingbird ob-

A Slice of Heaven

A Texas historian shares a quest for a personal favorite—Key lime pie

BY LONN TAYLOR

KEY LIME PIE IS A SCARCE ITEM ON MENUS in the Key lime-less Big Bend, but I am fond of it. So I was delighted to discover during my wife, Dedie's, and my recent winter ramble to Key West, Florida, that all 162 restaurants in Key West (a town of 27,000 people) serve Key lime pie.

It must be impossible to get a restaurant license in Key West without guaranteeing that Key lime pie will be on the menu. Even the Chinese restaurants serve Key lime pie. In addition, there are about a dozen hole-in-the-wall Key lime pie carryout places, most of them near the cruise ship dock on Mallory Square. That way, the several thousand cruise ship passengers who are disgorged every couple of days or so in the winter can munch on a slice as they trudge around buying T-shirts and glass octopi.

Key lime pie is a very simple combination of egg yolks, sweetened condensed milk, Key lime juice and pie crust, but there are hundreds of versions of it—most of them claiming to be the original. None of them are.

According to Tom Hambright, librarian of the Florida Keys Collection at the Monroe County Public Library and the go-to man on Key West history, the original Key lime pie was concocted in the late 19th century by Key West's sponge fishermen. They created it from supplies they carried on their boats, which often hovered over the sponge grounds for several days at a time. The spongers (called "hookers" in Key West vernacular) would pour canned sweetened condensed milk over stale Cuban bread that had been tamped into

the bottom of a coffee cup, add beaten egg yolks and squeeze in Key lime juice, which "cooked" the eggs in the same way that lime juice cooks ceviche. After sitting for five or six hours, the mixture was firmed up and considered delicious.

Key limes (*Citrus aurantifolia swingle*) are about the size of golf balls, and their skins are yellow with brown spots when they are ripe, in contrast to the larger, green Persian limes (*Citrus latifolia*) usually found in grocery stores. In the 1890s, boys sold them on the streets of Key West, chanting, "Key limes for sale fresh from the tree / A dozen for you and a nickel for me / Take 'em to the kitchen, put 'em in a pie / A little slice of heaven, my oh my."

At some point in the 1890s, the Key lime pie spread from the sponge fishermen's boats and into the mansion of a Key West ship chandler, William "Rich Bill" Curry, who would become Florida's first millionaire. Tradition, in the form of a printed recipe distributed by the Curry Mansion Inn, credits this transition to a woman known only as Aunt Sally, who cooked for the Curry family. David L. Sloan, a Key West chef and culinary historian who has written the definitive book on Key lime pies, *The Key West Key Lime Pie Cookbook*, has identified Aunt Sally as Sarah Jane Lowe, who was married to William Curry's son, Charles.

Here is Lowe's recipe, dated 1894: "Ingredients: 4 eggs separated, 1/4 cup key lime juice, 14-ounce can sweetened condensed milk, 1/3 cup sugar, pinch of cream of tartar, one eight-inch Graham cracker crust. Beat egg yolks until light and thick.



Blend in lime juice, then milk, stirring until mixture thickens. Pour mixture into pie shell. Beat egg whites with cream of tartar until stiff. Gradually beat in sugar until glossy peaks form. Spread egg whites over surface of pie to edge of crust. Bake in 350-degree oven until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Chill before serving.”

Lowe’s recipe contained several improvements over the sponge fishermen’s. First, it called for baking the pie in an oven. There are still traditionalists who argue that true Key lime pie is unbaked, but fears of salmonella (and of losing a restaurant license) have meant that most Key lime pies served in restaurants have been in an oven.

Another of Lowe’s innovations was the substitution of graham crackers for stale Cuban bread for the crust, although Key West now is divided into two factions on this matter: graham cracker crusters and pastry crusters. Sloan’s book gives recipes for both, as well as for crusts incorporating s’mores, peanut butter, Kool-Aid, Oreo cookies, pretzels, pecans, chile pequins, thin mint cookies, vanilla wafers, coffee, rum and bacon.

Lowe’s third innovation was to top the pie with meringue made from the egg whites. As with the crusts, there are two topping factions: the meringuers and the whipped creamers. The meringuers accuse the whipped creamers of taking

the easy way out because it requires patience and skill to create a towering 6-inch meringue above a 2-inch pie. The whipped creamers retort that their toppings are more accommodating to so-called secret ingredients, such as Tabasco, raspberries, rum, eggnog, agave nectar and Kahlúa.

I cannot say that I have sampled the Key lime pie in all of Key West’s 162 restaurants, but I will say that my favorite is the one served at the Conch Flyer, the restaurant at Key West’s airport. Try that on the last day of your visit and you will not be disappointed.

Historian **Lonn Taylor** lives in Fort Davis. Reach him at taylorlw@fortdavis.net.

Eliminate Belly Fat with Vinegar!

Find Out How...

by James Victor

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by James Victor

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by James Victor

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I'LL TAKE MINE BLACK...NO SUGAR

In the early 1930s watch manufacturers took a clue from Henry Ford's favorite quote concerning his automobiles, "You can have any color as long as it is black." Black dialed watches became the rage especially with pilots and race drivers. Of course, since the black dial went well with a black tuxedo, the adventurer's black dial watch easily moved from the airplane hangar to dancing at the nightclub. Now, Stauer brings back the "Noire", a design based on an elegant timepiece built in 1936. Black dialed, complex automatics from the 1930s have recently hit new heights at auction. One was sold for in excess of \$600,000. We thought that you might like to have an affordable version that will be much more accurate than the original.

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Texas' OPEC

The story of the strangely named and powerful Texas Railroad Commission

BY ROBERT SPRINGER

FOR A THREE-PERSON AGENCY ORIGINALLY tasked with overseeing intrastate railways, the Railroad Commission of Texas has exerted an outsized impact on an unexpected market: oil. The commission's story is one of power and influence that spans more than a century.

In the late 1800s, railroads were a dominant economic force, analogous to what the tech industry is today, according to David Prindle, professor of government at the University of Texas at Austin and author of the book *Petroleum Politics and the Texas Railroad Commission*. The industry was abusing its power, and a nationwide movement caused Congress to create the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1887 to regulate railroads. Texas followed suit by creating the Railroad Commission of Texas in 1891 to regulate railroads that did not cross the state line.

The story behind the curiously named commission getting into the oil regulating business begins in 1901 with the Spindletop oil strike, which made Texas one of the world's top oil-producing areas. (The well was so prolific that it soon produced "more oil in one day than all the rest of the world's oil fields combined," says the American Oil & Gas Historical Society.)

This sudden oil wealth made Texans wary of Standard Oil, which had dominated the oil business in Ohio and Pennsylvania "by basically monopolizing transportation in the pipelines and then running the little guys out of business," Prindle says.

After trying and failing to pre-emptively outlaw Standard Oil, the Texas Legislature hatched an innovative plan to protect Texas' small oil producers. "Well, what are pipelines? Pipelines are transportation," Prindle explains. "Well, we already have a commission regulating



An oil gusher in Port Arthur, circa 1901

transportation, the railroad commission, so let's let the railroad commission regulate oil and gas pipelines."

When the East Texas oil field was discovered in 1930, chaos ensued because of the oversupply of crude that field produced, Prindle says. This oversupply caused prices to plunge, scaring producers. Prindle says there was a "huge fight" over whether the government would be able to regulate production from the wells.

The government won out over the oil producers. By 1935, the commission "had been given the authority to regulate production—that is, not just regulate pipelines but regulate the amount that each well could produce," Prindle says. Railroad regulation was out, and oil and natural gas regulation was in.

From the early 1930s to the early 1970s, the commission's goal was to stabilize the price of oil, as price volatility made it challenging for oilmen to plan. And by controlling how much a well could produce and where producers could drill, the commission achieved the price stability goal for about 40 years.

Texas wasn't the only place in the world

with oil, of course, so the commission's influence began to wane as large reserves were discovered in the Middle East, Venezuela and Nigeria, causing Texas' share of global production to decline.

Yet even as the railroad commission's influence diminished, its price control model was being studied by another group interested in regulating its production to control prices—the group that became the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The proto-OPEC hired the railroad commission's chief engineer to show them how. That action helped set in motion the oil embargoes and gas wars of the 1970s.

Today, the commission has the same mandate and structure as in its heyday, albeit with less global influence. Periodically, lawmakers try to rename the commission to reflect its current mission, but the effort invariably fails. "I've twice been called to testify before a hearing of the Legislature," Prindle says. "I put on my suit and I go down there—I'm the guy who wrote the book, and I say, 'Well, yeah, if you want truth in advertising, change the name.' And of course, then nothing ever happens."

Robert Springer is a freelance writer who loves Tex-Mex and armadillos.

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The Secret to Salsa

WHETHER SPOONED ONTO BREAKFAST tacos, devoured with chips or served with grilled red snapper, salsa's addictive heat elevates everything on the plate. This month's reader recipes serve up a delicious mix of charred, smoky and fiery flavors. To get a salsa fix without cooking, try the following from Gonzalo Guzmán, chef at Nopalito in San Francisco (and author of the eponymous cookbook, with Stacy Adimando). "Unlike a cooked tomatillo salsa, this version retains all the bracing freshness and acidity of its raw ingredients," he says. He suggests serving Salsa Cruda with meaty appetizers or entrées, like carnitas, or robust vegetables, like grilled portobello mushrooms.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Salsa Cruda

- 1-2 jalapeño peppers, coarsely chopped
- 7 medium tomatillos, husked and rinsed
- 1 large clove garlic
- Leaves from ¼ bunch cilantro
- Salt

1. In a food processor, combine the jalapeños, tomatillos, garlic, cilantro and a generous pinch of salt. Pulse until ingredients are well-blended but the salsa is slightly chunky.
 2. Taste and adjust the amount of chiles and salt as desired.
- Makes 2 cups.

Reprinted from *Nopalito: A Mexican Kitchen* (Ten Speed Press, 2017)

SALSA CRUDA

Recipes

The Secret to Salsa



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

PHYLLIS BUSTILLOS | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

"This is a first-place winner at the State Fair of Texas, and you will not find a better, more unique salsa anywhere," Bustillos writes. Made with both fresh and dried chiles, it's no wonder this complex, deeply flavored salsa is a staple at her family barbecues. This recipe makes enough to feed a crowd or provide leftovers to freeze for a future meal.

Pick 'Em Up and Dust 'Em Off Smoked Salsa

- 3½ pounds red tomatoes on the vine
- 1½ pounds large tomatillos, husked and rinsed
- 1 medium Texas 1015 onion, quartered
- 2 serrano peppers
- 2 poblano peppers
- 1 clove garlic
- Olive oil
- 2 dried ancho chiles
- 1 dried pasilla chile
- 2 dried chiles de árbol
- 2 dried guajillo chiles
- ½ cup fresh cilantro
- ½ cup roasted (or canned) New Mexico green chiles
- Juice from 1 large lime, approximately 1 tablespoon
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- 1½ tablespoons salt

1. Prepare a smoker or grill for indirect heat cooking.
2. Combine the tomatoes, tomatillos, onion, serranos, poblanos and garlic in a mixing bowl. Add enough olive oil to lightly coat and toss to combine. Place the vegetables in the smoker or grill (using an aluminum drip pan or grate if necessary) and smoke at 225 degrees 30–40 minutes, until softened and lightly charred.
3. While the fresh vegetables are smoking, place the dried chiles in a small bowl with hot water and allow them to soak until softened, then drain, stem and seed the chiles.
4. Remove vegetables from smoker and cool slightly. Stem and seed the fresh chiles and peel the garlic. Combine the smoked vegetables with the dried chiles and remaining ingredients in a food processor or blender and process until combined. Taste and adjust seasonings, adding more salt, lime juice or heat (see sidebar) as desired. ► Makes about 3 quarts.

COOK'S TIP For a spicier salsa, do not seed the serrano peppers.

Enter online to win an El Gallo salsa grill kit.



Grilled Jalapeño and Tomato Salsa

ELIZABETH GARCIA | BLUEBONNET EC

Ripe, flavorful tomatoes are key to creating the best flavor, Garcia tells us. Grilling the vegetables creates a smoky salsa that's best enjoyed warm with tortilla chips, smoked chicken or grilled fish.

- 6 jalapeño peppers
- 3 tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- ½ teaspoon olive oil, plus more as desired
- Salt

1. Prepare a grill for direct heat cooking and build a medium-high fire.
2. Grill the jalapeños and tomatoes until blistered, turning as needed for even cooking, then place in a paper sack to steam.
3. Combine the rosemary, garlic and olive oil in a food processor and pulse into a coarse purée, then allow the mixture to macerate for a few minutes. Add seeded, stemmed jalapeños and pulse until the peppers are chopped. Remove to serving dish.
4. Place the grilled tomatoes in the food processor, add a pinch of salt and pulse 4–5 times, then fold into the pepper mixture. Taste for seasonings and adjust salt as desired. ► Makes about 1½ cups.

COOK'S TIP For a spicier salsa, use a combination of serrano and jalapeño peppers and/or leave the seeds in a couple of them. To ensure the vegetables don't stick to the grill, toss them with enough olive oil to coat before cooking.

Knock Your Socks Off Salsa

RENE BEAUMONT | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

You'll want to add the cilantro (about a half bunch, leaves and tender stems) and perhaps a squeeze of fresh lime or red wine vinegar to balance the sweet and fiery flavors.

- 4–5 jalapeño peppers
- 1 onion, roughly chopped, divided use
- 4 Roma tomatoes, halved
- 2 cloves garlic, smashed
- 1 tablespoon canola or olive oil, plus more as needed
- 1 can (28 ounces) whole peeled tomatoes
- ½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
- Fresh cilantro (optional)



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED, YOU'LL WIN A TCP APRON!

\$100 Recipe Contest

January's recipe contest theme is **Sunny Citrus**. Brighten winter with recipes featuring fresh grapefruit, orange, lemon or lime. Send us your favorite. The deadline is **August 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.



1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Combine the jalapeños, half of the onion, the tomato halves and garlic in a mixing bowl, drizzle with enough oil to lightly coat and toss to combine. Place on a baking sheet and roast 20 minutes, or until softened, then allow to cool.
3. Combine the canned tomatoes, roasted onion, Roma tomatoes and garlic in a blender and process to combine. Add the remaining raw onion, 1–2 of the jalapeños, salt and fresh cilantro, if using. Purée the mixture, taste and adjust the heat (adding jalapeños as desired) and salt. ▶ Makes about 2 quarts.

COOK'S TIP Don't skimp on oil for roasting vegetables—you'll want to use enough to lightly coat the ingredients—and be sure to scrape the flavorful juices into the blender. The delicious roasting oil will add flavor and help pull all the ingredients together.

WEB EXTRAS ▶ Read this story on our website to see a recipe for Hatch Green Chile Salsa from a Bartlett EC member.

Playing With Fire

Making salsa at home is often an intuitive process that incorporates garden ingredients, heat proclivities and whatever else you have on hand. Whether you're following a recipe or creating your own, remember that the heat level of fresh peppers can vary widely. One week they might be scorching and the next, mild, leaving fire-lovers wanting more excitement. To create more flavor and/or fire in your salsa, consider the following ideas.

Allow chopped onion to macerate with a squeeze of fresh lime juice and a pinch of salt before combining with other ingredients (this will soften the onion's sharp, raw taste and help balance overall flavors).

Toast dried chiles (in a dry skillet or on the grill) until puffed and lightly toasted before soaking.

For a spicier salsa, leave the seeds in a few of the peppers. When jalapeños and serranos don't add enough fire, add a blistering habanero, chile pequin, Thai bird chiles or ground cayenne pepper to the mix.

Vinegar-based pepper sauces like Cholula (my favorite), Crystal or Tabasco add heat and help make the other ingredients pop. Use them—in addition to salt—to finish and “brighten” your salsa if it needs more flavor. —PD



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School's Out

NOT TO TELL TALES OUT OF SCHOOL, but we reckon these reader photos are sweeter than Texas tea. Can you hear it? Summer is calling Texans, old school and new, to ditch the work and hightail it to the creek for some fun in the sun. **GRACE ARSIAGA**

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

▼ **RUDY SEPOLIO**, Navasota Valley EC: Granddaughter Olivia keeps cool during summer break in Prairie.



▲ **PATRICIA GARCIA**, Medina EC: "Ariella is taking advantage of her preschool spring break and taking her little lamb for afternoon walks."

▼ **VIOLA MURRAY**, Pedernales EC: Evening at Canyon Lake in August



UPCOMING CONTESTS

DECEMBER **HIGH CONTRAST** DUE **AUGUST 10**

JANUARY **HARVEST** DUE **SEPTEMBER 10**

FEBRUARY **TWO OF A KIND** DUE **OCTOBER 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. We do not accept entries via email. **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 regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.

▲ **BOBBY NORRIS**, Pedernales EC: A little girl plays on the low-water crossing at Blue Hole Park in Georgetown.

▶ **LORI SONNIER**, Pedernales EC: "My son Kyle loves floating in the lazy river. We usually go to several different water parks each summer, and he makes a beeline for the lazy river."



Pick of the Month Quilt Show: Rhapsody in Blue

Fredericksburg August 31–September 1
(830) 997-7802, vereinsquiltguild.org

When Fredericksburg turned 150 in 1996, part of the celebration included a quilt show so successful it spurred the formation of the Vereins Quilt Guild, which this month holds its 10th biennial quilt show. The event includes bed turning, a boutique, donation quilt, silent auction, tearoom and vendors.



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August 7

Bandera Cowboy Capital Opry,
(830) 796-3045, banderacowboycapital.com

8

Levelland [8–12] SPOTC Dog Agility Trials,
(806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com/events

9

Stephenville Texstar Ford Lincoln Summer
Nights Concert Series: Moe Bandy With Terri
Hendrix and Lloyd Maines, 1-800-481-9345,
stephenvilletexas.org

10

Junction [10–11] Hill Country Fair Associa-
tion Summer Classic Rodeo, (254) 212-9160,
facebook.com/hcfajunctiontx

11

Palestine Dogwood Jamboree: Forever
Country, (903) 729-7080,
dogwoodjamboree.com

August 23–26
Wichita Falls
Hotter 'N Hell Hundred



Henderson [11–12] East Texas Sacred Harp
Convention, (903) 863-5379, texasfasola.org

14

Beaumont [14–15] Paw Patrol Live: Race to
the Rescue, (409) 951-5400,
pawpatrollive.com

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18

El Paso Magoffin Home Victorian Sci-Fi Book and Tea Club, (915) 533-5147, thc.texas.gov/historic-sites/magoffin-home-state-historic-site

23

Fort Davis [23-26] Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration, (432) 426-3015, fortdavis.com

Wichita Falls [23-26] Hotter 'N Hell Hundred, (940) 322-3223, hh100.org

24

Tyler [24-26] Texas Rose Breed Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

25

Big Spring Comanche Warrior Triathlon, (432) 263-8235, visitbigspring.com

Galveston An Evening With Robert Earl Keen, 1-800-821-1894, thegrand.com

Victoria Dueling Pianos, (361) 576-6277, theatrevictoria.org

Crockett [25-26] Marine Corps League 1433 Gun Show, (936) 229-2023, facebook.com/marinecorpleague1433

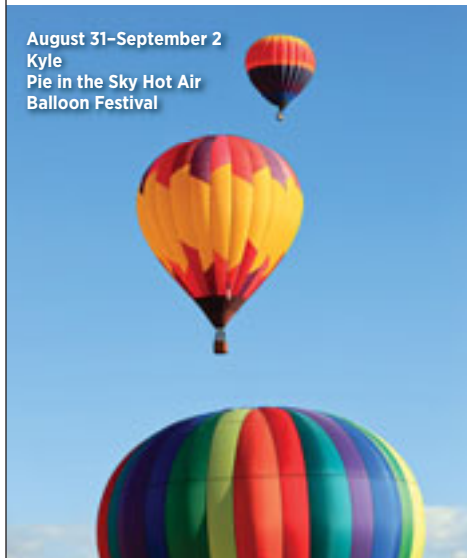
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Stonewall Commemoration of Lyndon Johnson's Birthday, (830) 868-7128, nps.gov/lyjo

30

La Grange [30-Sept. 2] Fayette County Fair, (979) 968-3911, fayettecountyfair.org

August 31-September 2
Kyle
Pie in the Sky Hot Air
Balloon Festival



31

Bedford [31-Sept. 2] Blues & BBQ Festival, (817) 952-2128, bedfordbluesfest.com

Kyle [31-Sept. 2] Pie in the Sky Hot Air Balloon Festival, (512) 262-1010, kyletxpieinthesky.com

September 1

Amarillo Yellow City Sounds Music Festival, (806) 371-5224, panhandlepbs.org

Fort Stockton Wizarding World of Fort Stockton, (432) 701-0588, thegaragetx.com

7

Corsicana Show and Dance With the Others, (903) 872-6779, corsicanaopry.com

Lubbock [7-9] National Cowboy Symposium & Celebration, (806) 798-7825, cowboy.org

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Lolling Around Luling

Town with tough reputation still basks in benevolence of its oil history

BY GENE FOWLER

WHEN YOU DRIVE INTO LULING, NESTLED along the San Marcos River about 24 miles southeast of the river's headwaters at San Marcos Springs, you notice right away that oil plays a major role there. A monumental faux derrick soars beside a visitors center at a major intersection on U.S. Highway 183. And around town, nearly 200 pump jacks—some adorned with bright cartoon figures—summon black gold.

Luling also is known for its annual **Watermelon Thump** festival held the last full weekend in June. And two of its eateries—**City Market** and **Luling Bar-B-Q**—are renowned destinations for barbecue pilgrims.

From 1874 to 1876, when Luling served as the end of the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway, Austin newspapers said Luling was “given over to the devil” and that everyone in town “goes armed at night.” Hence, “toughest town in Texas” became a common descriptor.

I learned about the town's drilling history at the **Luling Oil Museum**, housed in the 19th-century Walker Brothers building, one of the oldest mercantiles in Texas.

A colorful wildcatter with mystical inclinations named Edgar B. Davis brought in the original discovery well. Folklore recounts that the Massachusetts native drilled where he found the prettiest wildflowers, and the facts of his share-the-wealth binges are better than fiction. Davis, feeling that his gushers were gifts from God and that he needed to give back, funded enormous Luling picnics, a country club, hospitals, wildflower painting contests, a Broadway play about reincarnation and an agricultural demonstration farm called the **Luling Foundation**.

“Mr. Davis saw local farmers and ranchers struggling and wanted to help them develop diversified ag practices,”



A whimsical pumpjack in front of a passing freight train in Luling

explained Bonnie Dredla, Luling Foundation office manager, as she gave me a tour of the 1,123-acre site.

“One of our primary programs today is the Foundation Angus Alliance,” she continued. “We have over 200 head of bulls, and we practice freeze branding—that’s a process that uses liquid nitrogen or dry ice and denatured alcohol. It doesn’t burn the animal but turns the branded hair white.”

At the branding pen, I watched as Dredla’s brother-in-law, Jason Dredla, applied the more humane process to cattle in a chute designed by animal behavior expert Temple Grandin to be less stressful on the animals.

Foundation acreage is bordered on the west by the San Marcos River, and a few miles downriver stands the restored **Zedler Mill**. Its grist mill was built in 1874 as Luling sprang up with the railroad; a cotton gin soon was added, followed by a saw mill and feed mill. Tools and equipment on display at the mill museum include a quadruplex pump made in Brenham that pressed cotton into bales. The Zedler family began

producing electricity from the river as early as 1894.

Due to the setting’s natural beauty and a newly constructed pavilion, a couple gets married there just about every weekend.

Not even the rattling trains passing in the night could wake me at Luling’s **Ainsworth House Inn**, named for the commander who led the 36th Infantry Division ashore at Salerno, Italy, in advance of the Normandy landings of World War II. The inn’s Audie Murphy room is named for the war-hero-turned-film-star, who visited frequently.

Before leaving town, I stepped across Bowie Street from the inn to examine an ancient oak tree. There, according to Luling historian Riley Froh, Old West outlaws had carved directions to a buried treasure of stolen gold.

I couldn’t discern the map, but I still felt a living link to the days when Luling was known as the toughest town in Texas.

Gene Fowler is an Austin writer who specializes in history.



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