

METER READERS STILL  
MAKE THE ROUNDS

CHET GETS CHARMED  
BY POLKA MUSIC

CUERO SHARES ITS TIES  
TO TURKEYS

# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

OCTOBER 2022

## Monarch Matriarch

One woman's quest to protect  
the butterfly's future





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# October 2022



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How one woman is earnestly spreading the word about monarch migrations through Texas.

By Laura Tolley  
Photos by Julia Robinson

## Reading Between the Lines

Decades after new tech started taking over, meter readers are still a valued part of co-op connections.

By Chris Burrows  
Illustration by Michael Koelsch

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Monika Maeckle in her pollinator-friendly backyard in San Antonio.  
Photo by Julia Robinson

ABOVE  
Meter readers have ready friends in Co-op Country. Ready enemies, too.  
Illustration by Michael Koelsch

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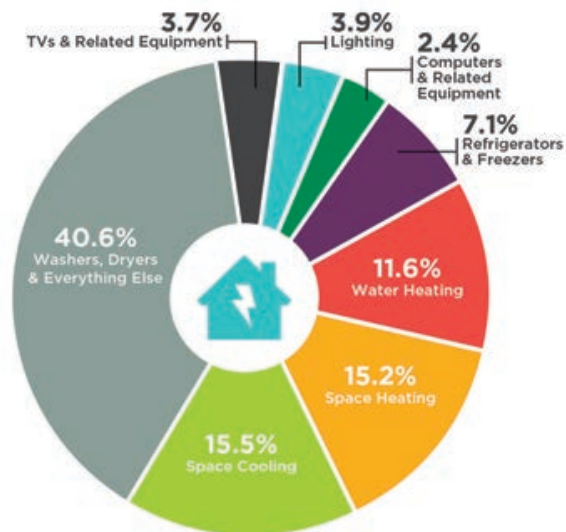
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By Caytlyn Phillips



# Extra Credit

**WILEY COLLEGE** graduates learned at commencement in May that their student debt was paid for. An anonymous donor bestowed the gift upon the 100-plus members of the class of 2022 at the historically Black college in Marshall, erasing some \$300,000 from the books.



## How We Use Electricity

This National Co-op Month, your electric cooperative and trusted energy adviser wants to show you where your money goes—and where you might focus on cutting back.

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

### THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT I EVER GAVE WAS ...

**TCP** Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to [letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com) or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our August prompt: **The song that takes me back to high school is ...**

1999 by Prince. I graduated high school in 1999, and we played the song all year.

JENNIFER MAYFIELD OKERE  
VIA FACEBOOK

*Before the Next Teardrop Falls* by Freddy Fender.

PEGGY DARSEY  
VIA FACEBOOK

*Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. Every time I hear the song, I have to sing along and let my mind wander back to those glorious high school days.

JACINDA MOORE  
TRI-COUNTY EC  
GRANBURY

*Don't Bring Me Down* by Electric Light Orchestra. It was playing every day at lunch on our cafeteria jukebox.

LESLIE CHATHAM JAMES  
WISE EC  
PARADISE

To see more responses, read Currents online.



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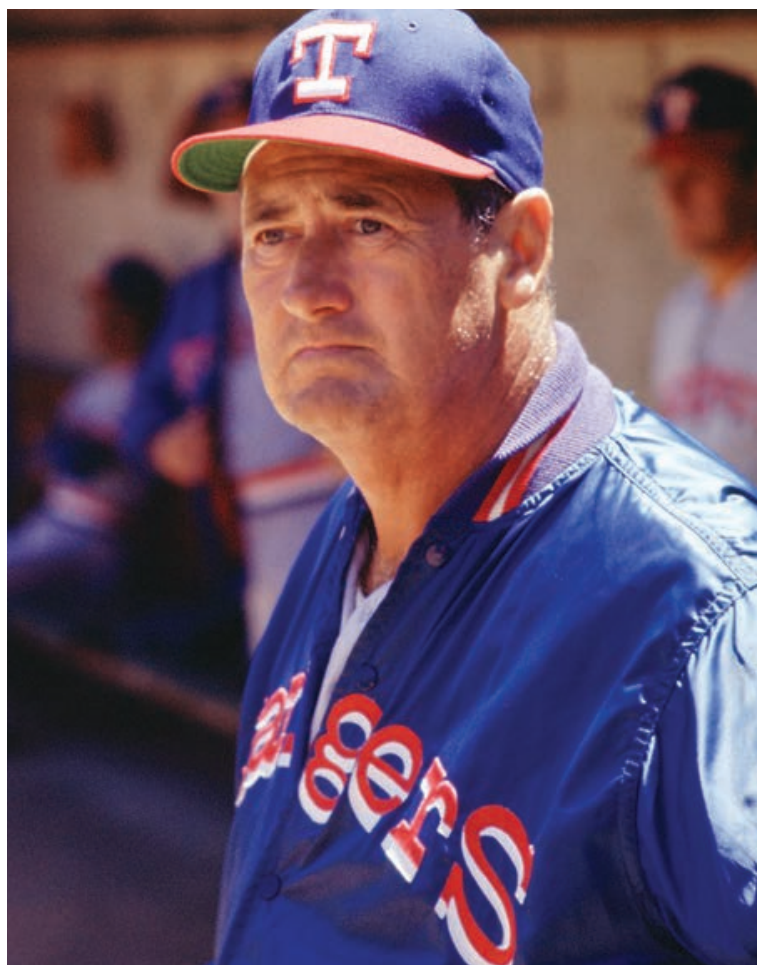


## **Gourd as Gold**

When Sherry Nelson attended a Texas Gourd Society show in 2017, she was stunned by the gourds she saw. "It's just amazing what people can do with them," she said. "But I thought I could never do that."

She was hooked. The Kerrville native and Central Texas Electric Cooperative member joined TGS and took classes. After a *Texas Co-op Power* illustration by David Danz in March 2021 caught her eye, she reached out to *TCP* for permission before spending three weeks burning it into a gourd for a Kerr Arts and Cultural Center contest in May.

It won—beating out 151 other gourds. "I'm going to enjoy this win for a while," she said.



# **Rangers Flashback**

**HALL OF FAME** outfielder Ted Williams was a phenomenal baseball player, but he met little success as a manager.

His four-year managerial career started with the Washington Senators in 1969 and ended 50 years ago this month, in 1972, when the Senators relocated to Arlington and became the Texas Rangers.

Williams went out with a whimper, losing the season finale 4-0 on October 4 and finishing with a 273-364 record as manager.

## **Did You Know?**

That Rangers team played in Arlington Stadium, a converted minor-league ballpark originally called Turnpike Stadium. Whatever the name, the summer heat plagued players and fans alike. One writer called the outfield stands "the world's largest open-air roaster."





### Why'd the Chicken Cross the Pit?

"I have tried barbecued chicken at Kreuz Market and around the state. Most (including Kreuz) do a great job, but the best is at Mumphord's Place BBQ in Victoria."

JOHN GEORGE  
VICTORIA EC  
VICTORIA

### Raving and Squawking

If you haven't tried the Kreuz Market barbecued chicken, you need to [*Why'd the Chicken Cross the Pit?*, July 2022]. It's great.

Tom Faulkner  
Pedernales EC  
Leander

We were motivated to visit Kreuz after reading your glowing endorsement. What a disappointment. The chicken did not taste any better than a \$5 deli chicken from Sam's Club.

Gary and Gaye Kriegel  
Pedernales EC  
Williamson County

Walked a few yards  
onto it once and  
crawled back  
[*Colorado's Texas  
Bridge*, July 2022].

MARTHA BEIMER  
VIA FACEBOOK

### The Coach's Coach

The story about Tom Landry and his senior football season at Mission High School does not identify who his coach was [*The Most Glorious Autumn*, August 2022]. I believe it was my uncle, Robert Martin, as he was a lifelong friend of Landry and took Landry's father to many Cowboys games.

Ralph E. Martin Jr.  
Medina EC  
New Braunfels

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Landry's coach at Mission was indeed Robert L. "Bob" Martin.

### The Cotton Patch

My family farmed west of Krum [*Prized Fibers*, July 2022]. Many days I was in the cotton patch hoeing weeds. I "missed" out on the picking as Dad hired a crew of pickers.

Ken Fairman  
Wise EC  
Krum



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letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor  
Austin, TX 78701

**Please include** your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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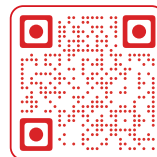
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A woman wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, glasses, a white long-sleeved shirt, and blue patterned shorts stands in a natural setting. A German Shepherd dog sits on the ground next to her. They are positioned under the shade of a large, leafy tree. In the background, there are rocky hills and more trees. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

# Funnel Vision

How one woman is earnestly spreading the word about monarch migrations through Texas





# M

onika Maeckle found her passion in a dry streambed of the San Saba River.

It was October 2004 when she and her husband drove from their ranch, a Hill Country getaway on the Llano River, over to a friend's place near tiny Hext for a "tagging event." She didn't know what that was really, but Maeckle likes an adventure and loves the outdoors.

At sunset, monarch butterflies started cascading from the sky. The group caught them in long nets, carefully plucking the bright orange marvels out to tag their wings with coded stickers. They tagged a couple hundred monarchs that evening, then set them free. Maeckle was completely smitten.

"It was a passion play from the beginning," says Maeckle, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative. "It was this magical thing. I was entranced."

The San Antonio-based communications and marketing pro spent the following months reading and researching everything she could find about the monarchs' annual migration to Mexico. A year later, on a Saturday in October, Maeckle climbed into her kayak and ventured out on the clear-running Llano near Mason. She was equipped with tags, each about as big around as a pencil eraser.

"I figured they had to be at our place, too, because everything they needed was here: water, tall trees, nectar up against a limestone escarpment that shielded them from wind and held the heat during the cool nights," she says.

She guided the kayak to a spot near three pecan trees, and as she stepped out, there they were.

"I started tagging and ripped through a sheet of 25 tags in about 15 minutes, went back and got another sheet and tagged 25 more," she says. "They weren't dropping from the sky that day; they were already fluttering around, finding a spot to spend the night."

What captured Maeckle's heart, and a lot of her time, is the splendid monarch butterfly and its remarkable migration—up to 3,000 miles—from the northeastern United

States and southeastern Canada to the mountain forests of central Mexico, where they hibernate during the winter. The Central and South Texas region, called the Texas funnel, is part of the path south for all monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains.

Adult monarchs are easily identifiable, with two pairs of deep orange wings that have black veins and white spots along the edges. On average they weigh about as much as half of a dollar bill, with a wingspan of about 4 inches. Tagging doesn't harm the delicate creatures.

Maeckle is part of a groundswell of advocates who are tagging and tracking the monarchs' migration as well as planting and sustaining habitat that will help attract and protect them and other important pollinators, including bees.

But she's an overachiever when it comes to monarchs. The citizen scientist launched an educational website called the Texas Butterfly Ranch, writes and gives talks about monarchs, and is the founding director of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival, the seventh of which will be held October 8 at San Antonio's Brackenridge Park.

The free one-day festival offers children and adults opportunities to learn about the monarch migration and the importance of other wildlife pollinators to our own food sources. The festival also features arts and crafts activities and other entertainment, as well as monarch butterfly tagging demonstrations. An estimated 2,500 people attended last year's festival, and more than 550 butterflies were tagged.

## Monarchs Matter

The monarch population has been in decline in recent years, but there is hope for this fall's migration despite the continuing drought and its detrimental effect on native habitat.

The World Wildlife Fund announced in May that a survey found that the number of monarch butterflies in Mexico's forests last winter actually increased 35% from the previous year. The rise "marks a sign of recovery—albeit a fragile one—and gives some reason for hope against a backdrop of several decades of decline for the iconic species," the organization said in a release.

"The increase in monarch butterflies is good news and indicates that we should continue working to maintain and reinforce conservation measures by Mexico, the United States and Canada," says Jorge Rickards, general manager of WWF's Mexico office. "Monarchs are important pollinators, and their migratory journey helps promote greater diversity of flowering plants, which benefits other species

OPPOSITE Monika Maeckle launched the website Texas Butterfly Ranch and is the founding director of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival in San Antonio. ABOVE A monarch feeds on a blue mistflower.





in natural ecosystems and contributes to the production of food for human consumption.”

Butterflies are pretty, fanciful things that don’t bite or sting, and that makes them interesting to humans, prompting a willingness to help them, which can help all pollinators, says Judit Green, urban wildlife biologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. She calls the monarch an “ambassador for all pollinators.”

“Our beautiful rural Texas landscapes are in existence because pollinators helped pollinate it, producing the various native plants from wildflowers, bunchgrasses, vines, shrubs, small trees to canopy trees,” Green says. “These plants make up habitat for a host of wildlife. Therefore all wildlife benefit from actions we take to support our pollinators.”

These insects also support crop production, which the scientific world is quick to remind not to take for granted. “They say, ‘Thank a pollinator with every third bite you take,’ since about 33% of the food we eat is pollinated by pollinators,” Green says.

## How To Help

There are simple steps Texans can take to attract monarchs and other pollinators: Grow and cultivate native plants, and don’t use pesticides, Green says. In addition, you can plant native milkweed, the host plant for monarch caterpillars, which feed on the leaves. Migrating monarchs lay their eggs on these plants.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Monika Maeckle paddles the Llano River. Yellow cestrum planted beside the San Antonio River Walk. Queen butterflies fuel up on frostweed at the Llano River. Bees collect pollen from a coneflower plant. ABOVE A child holds a monarch at the San Antonio festival.

FESTIVAL: COURTESY DRAKE WHITE. BUTTERFLIES: COURTESY MONIKA MAECKLE





**M**aeckle is part of a groundswell of advocates who are tagging and tracking the monarchs' migration as well as planting and sustaining habitat that will help attract and protect them and other important pollinators, including bees.

There are larger endeavors underway as well. The city of San Antonio's advocacy for monarchs dates back to 2015, when then-Mayor Ivy Taylor signed the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge, a commitment to creating better habitats for pollinators and educating the public about them. Today 42 Texas mayors have active pledges through NWF, including those from small towns like Cuero, Liberty and Nolanville.

NWF named San Antonio the first Monarch Champion City, and current Mayor Ron Nirenberg has continued those efforts. The city's pledge consisted of 24 specific actions, including holding or supporting a butterfly festival to raise awareness about pollinators. Not surprisingly, Maeckle took on that challenge.

"When I say I'm going to do something, I do it," says Maeckle, who, with her husband, Robert Rivard, founded a nonprofit digital news website now called the San Antonio Report.

Green says the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival has been important to raising awareness about the problems pollinators face and how the public can help.

"Getting the public to support our pollinators, like the monarch, is crucial," Green says.

Cheri Tondre, an instructional specialist for San Antonio Independent School District, participated in a 2017 festival workshop that led to the creation of a pollinator

garden at Collins Garden Elementary. She says the festival offers children the chance to explore the natural world.

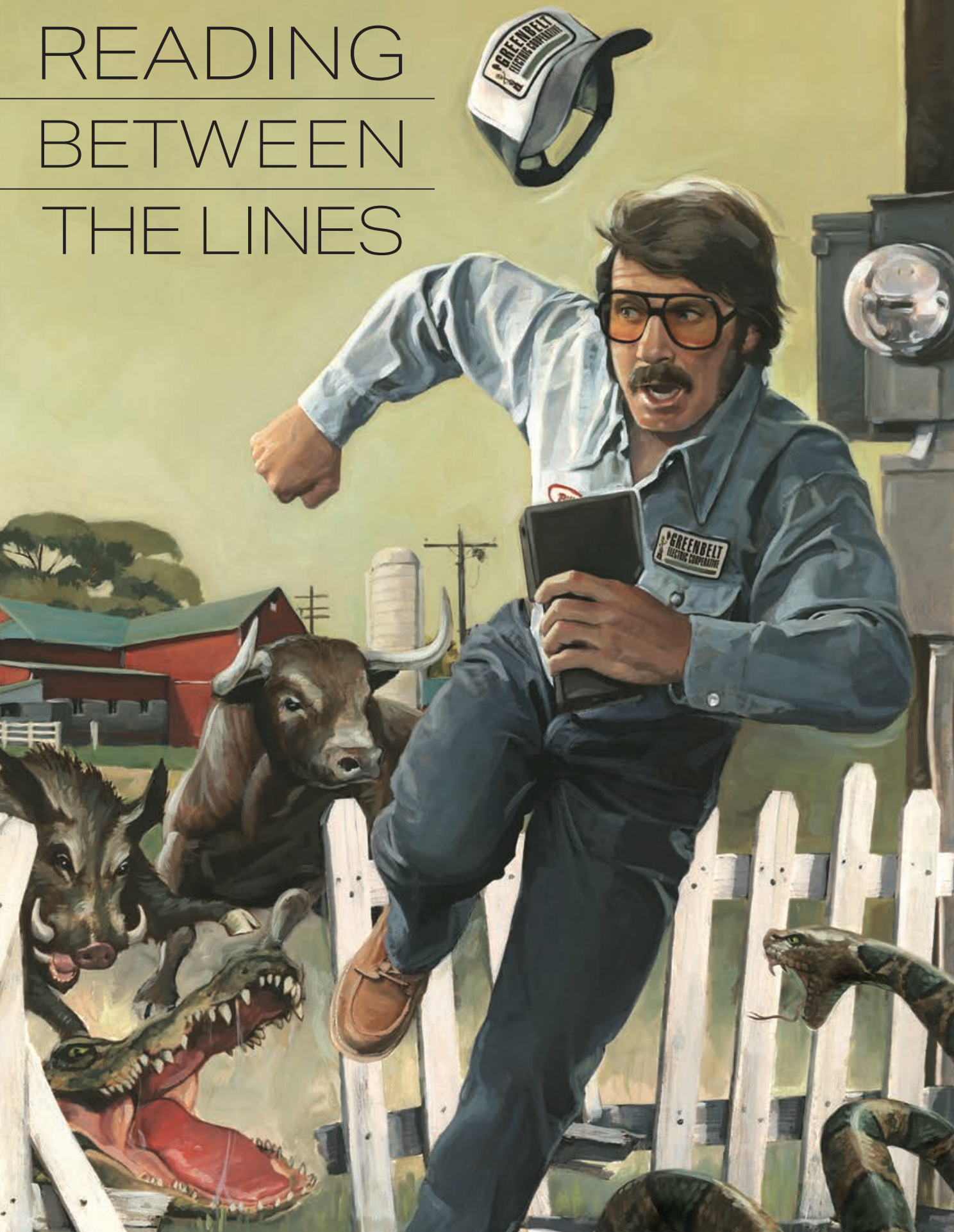
"Opportunities to engage with science, nature and community are important to engage students in the type of learning we need," Tondre says. "They need to know they are part of the problem and solution."

Maeckle sees the monarch as an access point for viewing a number of complex issues—migration, climate change, sustainability. And she still takes joy in recalling how that evening in Hext ignited a lasting passion.

"They had always been there; I just hadn't realized," Maeckle says. "And it underscores the connectedness of us all." ■



# READING BETWEEN THE LINES



Decades after new tech started taking over,

## METER READERS are still a valued part of co-op connections

BY CHRIS BURROWS • ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL KOELSCH

C onnie Turner can tell you all about the time she cracked three ribs battling a gate over a cattle guard, slipping on ice in the process. Or about the time an electric meter exploded in her hands, knocking her unconscious. Or the time she injured her foot jumping from a fence.

“And since then, I’ve had shoulder surgery,” she says. “I really think that that injury came from the repetition of pushing on gates.”

But in the last week of her 40-year career at Coleman County Electric Cooperative, Turner can also tell you that she misses working as a country meter reader, despite the toll it took on her body. Seventeen years into that career, she was able to move into an office role, but her injuries weren’t the only factor in that move.

Another was the folks on her route. They were like family to her—and aging.

“I could hardly stand to go out there, and they wouldn’t be there anymore,” she says. “A lot of them kind of adopted me. I used to load furniture; I’d get the lawn mower started for them and help them pick their garden. I just did everything that you wouldn’t really think that a meter reader would be out there doing.”

Turner was part of a group like no other—one accustomed to outsmarting dogs, boars, snakes, and the odd alligator or goose; to knowing the roads, power grid and land better than anyone; and to dealing with the occasional unhappy member, flat tires and whatever else came their way as they scoured the countryside, read dials and displays, and relayed kilowatt-hour usage to co-op accounting departments for accurate billing.

But ever since co-ops started installing automated meter reading systems in the 1990s, these neighborly, workaday men and women seemed doomed to be replaced by the very devices they regularly visited.

However, many still haven’t been. Sure, there aren’t as many meter readers working today, but Texas co-ops still employ dozens. And now many of them are armed with more technical skills than ever.

### A GOOD READ

John Gross is one of them. For 19 years he’s been reading meters on his rural routes in Parker County, west of Fort Worth, for Tri-County Electric Cooperative.

“People didn’t know that we still walked around,” he says.

As others in his line of work do, he has plenty of stories. Like the time he tore his ACL climbing a fence to get to a meter—“I actually read about three more meters until I said I can’t keep doing this because I was hopping on the one good leg,” he says—or the time a bull chased him around a meter pole (he still got the reading).

“You don’t know what you’re going to walk into: coyotes, cows, deer, bulls,” he says. “A lot of times you have to run. Otherwise you’re going to have to tangle with some of the dogs.”

Gross says he drives hundreds of miles daily and gets plenty of walking in, but since TCEC started to deploy smart meters across its system in 2019, he’s part of a shrinking team.

Gross, co-worker Bobby Collins and a handful of others at TCEC no longer read all the co-op’s 125,000 meters. Collins has read meters for 23 years in an upscale area closer to Fort Worth, where he’s met celebrities Terry Bradshaw, Sandra Bullock and Josh Hamilton in the course of his work, but it’s the everyday folks who he especially appreciates.

“They’ll start a story, and you’ll end up leaving; and then next month, they’ll pick up right where they left off,” Collins says.

### THE FUTURE IS HERE

E conomist David Autor famously pointed out that the invention of the ATM in the 1970s seemed sure to spell the end for bank tellers. But a funny thing happened: As ATMs quadrupled between 1995 and 2010, the number of tellers actually increased over that period.

“The last 200 years, we’ve had an incredible amount of automation,” Autor said in a 2017 interview with CBS News. “We have tractors that do the work that horses and people used to do on farms. We don’t do bookkeeping with books. But this has not, in net, reduced the amount of employment.”



Since the 1990s, when electric utilities began to implement AMR systems, jobs for electric meter readers in the U.S. fell by more than half, from a peak of 55,000 in 1996 to 24,000 in 2021, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Today, nearly all co-ops in Texas have deployed some form of advanced metering infrastructure—a further revolution in metering technology that unleashed myriad benefits for co-ops and their members. But like any complex system, even AMI needs humans to watch over it and fix it when it falters.

When that happens, a worker still has to drive out, find the meter, get a reading and make a fix.

“We generally troubleshoot,” says Kevin Gray, one of two meter readers at Fort Belknap Electric Cooperative. “If we have a meter not sending a reading in, you go out to see: Is the transformer fuse blown? Is the AMR itself dead and not sending a reading? We check transformer connections, look for trees burning on the line.”

As meters have become more complex, so too have the jobs of meter readers like Gray, who has developed new skills to troubleshoot issues in the field.

“I can remember back when the technology began to get a good foothold in the market, obviously the meter readers got very nervous,” says Mike Cleveland, manager of meter products at Texas Electric Cooperatives, the statewide association for co-ops. He says a lot of co-op leaders initially used that as an excuse to delay upgrading to the new meters.

“It took a while for people to understand the benefits and understand that you can take meter readers and turn them into more advanced technicians for running the AMR system,” Cleveland says. “You’re implementing something that has to be babysat all the time. It’s a complex piece of technology that doesn’t just run on autopilot in the background. Somebody has to monitor and manage it.”

## MORE THAN METERS

In the 1970s and ’80s, many electric cooperatives started meter reading departments, some citing frustrations with the self-reporting postcards that most utilities of the era relied on.

At Southwest Texas Electric Cooperative, that meant closing the office for about a week every month. Each of the co-op’s employees would grab a pickup, take a meter route and gather readings from rural West Texas. General Manager Buff Whitten did his part when he started at the co-op in 1977.

“You don’t get to see the system like we once did,” he says. “You’re looking at poles, you’re looking at crossarms, you’re able to see the system and recognize problems that you take back, keep track of and correct. And there’s always an opportunity, when you’re out there, to meet the members.”

AMI won’t spot a broken crossarm or start a lawn mower for a member, but these systems of smart meters, communications networks and data management systems can do so much more. The granular data they capture increases

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE

**Binoculars for reading meters from the road.**

**Extra meters and meter seals for making repairs in the field.**

**Nontoxic dog repellent.**

**Sunglasses, hat and sunscreen.**

**Fiberglass hot stick for adjusting lines and transformers.**

**Four-wheel-drive pickup.**

**Keys for Co-op Country gates.**

**Car jack, for fixing flats.**

**Fence stretcher for slinking through barbed wire.**

reliability by enabling advanced outage management systems and troubleshooting and provides cost savings for co-ops and their members.

“The old mechanical meter, as good as it was, it was pretty dumb,” Cleveland says. “All it could sit there and do was just count revolutions, but these new meters, they just have so much horsepower under the hood. They’re very powerful instruments.”

Meter readers Mario Manriquez and Donald Priesmeyer keep Wharton County Electric Cooperative’s powerful instruments humming.

“My main thing right now is helping with the AMI system,” says Manriquez from the side of a South Texas road where he and Priesmeyer are installing a communications relay for WCEC’s AMI system.

Over 23 years at WCEC, Manriquez’s work has changed a lot, but the dangers of the job haven’t. “I almost stepped on a snake once,” he says. “They say good snake, bad snake. I say all bad snakes.”

But Scott Thomas, who was the last full-time meter reader at PenTex Energy in North Texas, will tell you that it’s still the folks at the end of the line who make his job so gratifying.

“The best part is going out into the community and visiting with the customers because every one of them liked to talk and visit,” he says, in between greeting folks by name at the co-op’s annual meeting in April. “You had a schedule, and you tried to stay on schedule, but you had to visit.” ■



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## Best Tips for Battery Safety

**BATTERIES ARE BECOMING MORE EFFICIENT** and power an increasing number of electronics, energizing everything from remote controls and toys to radios and flashlights. The Safe Electricity program reminds consumers to be safe when storing, using and disposing of batteries.

Always read the manufacturer's instructions. Use the correct size and type of battery needed for each device, and be sure to insert batteries with the positive and negative terminals properly aligned.

Store batteries in a dry, secure location that is kept at normal room temperature. Batteries could leak if exposed to extreme heat.

Batteries that are easy to access can be hazardous when they are within the reach of small children. Be sure to store them in a safe location. Check the covers of devices' battery compartments to ensure that they're closed and functioning properly to prevent children from accessing them.

Some batteries, such as button batteries, are quite small and could be mistaken for pills or candy. Hearing-aid batteries are

particularly small. Do not place them anywhere near where medicine or food is stored.

The consumption of batteries by children is a serious safety concern. A swallowed battery could get stuck or cause tissue burns or other damage to the esophagus. If someone is suspected to have swallowed a battery of any kind, immediately call 911.

Remember to promptly remove and safely dispose of dead batteries. Some dead batteries have been known to leak, so it is best to safely dispose of them right away.

Do not mix old and new batteries in any device because doing so could cause battery leakage or rupture. It's best to replace all the batteries at the same time.

Rechargeable, lithium, lithium ion and zinc air batteries should be recycled. Get into a habit of putting old batteries in a plastic bag that can be sealed and delivered to a battery recycling center. To find a facility near you, visit [call2recycle.org](http://call2recycle.org). ■

# Is It OK To Switch Between AC and Heat During the Fall?

**WARM FALL DAYS CAN TURN** chilly once the sun goes down—enough that you might be tempted to run your air conditioning during the day and then turn on the heat at night.

If it's hot enough during daylight hours for the AC and cool enough overnight for the heat, there's really no harm in using both on the same day. However, it's a good idea to ease one system off before switching on the other. Here are a few tips for a good transition:

**Air conditioning systems run in cycles.** Once the house reaches the temperature you have set on your thermostat, it will cycle off. You'll hear when that happens. Before you turn your AC off, listen for it to complete its cycle. Short-cycling can cause the AC compressor to lock up.

**Wait five minutes after you turn the AC off** before you switch on the heat. This grace period will give the refrigerant in the AC a chance to normalize, which can prevent circuits from tripping if the transition to the heater is too abrupt.

**Avoid drastic thermostat changes.** Once the AC is off, raise the temperature just a few degrees and then wait for the heat to rise to that temperature before raising it any more. This prevents your heating system from overworking, which is inefficient.

You might be able to avoid using both systems in the same day with some simple steps.

**In the morning when it is cool, open the blinds** to let the daylight naturally warm rooms but block the sun before it gets too warm so your air conditioner doesn't have to work so hard.

**Anticipate the evening temperature drop** and stop running your air conditioner before the weather cools down.

**Put extra blankets on your bed to feel warmer** and try to avoid having to run the heater overnight. If the morning is chilly, wear extra layers and slippers until the temperature warms up. ■



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## Halloween Safety by the Letter

**EVERYONE LOVES A** good scare on Halloween but not when it comes to child safety. These tips will help make the festivities fun and safe.

**Swords and costume accessories** should be short, soft and flexible.

**Avoid trick-or-treating alone.** Walk in groups or with a trusted adult.

**Fasten reflective tape to costumes** or carry glow sticks to be easily seen.

**Examine treats before eating them.** Limit the amount of treats you eat.

**Hold a flashlight while trick-or-treating** to help you see and others see you.

**Always test makeup first and remove it promptly** after coming home.

**Look both ways before crossing the street.** Use crosswalks wherever possible.

**Lenses in the eyes or decorative masks** can hinder vision or cause injury.

**Only walk on sidewalks or on the far edge of the road** facing traffic.

**Wear well-fitted costumes and shoes** to avoid tripping and falling.

**Eat only factory-wrapped treats.** Don't eat homemade treats made by strangers.

**Enter homes or accept rides only from those you know,** never strangers.

**Never walk near lit candles.** Wear flame-resistant costumes. ■





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**Lightning strikes kill more Americans than tornadoes or hurricanes. Don't take chances with this deadly force of nature.**

**Go inside** a building and stay away from windows and doors.

**Avoid** electric appliances and metal plumbing and stay off the phone.

**Do not seek** shelter under a tree—they are easy targets.

**Move** to low ground and avoid open fields.

**Whether** at the beach or in a swimming pool, get out of the water immediately.

**Do not touch** metal objects, such as golf clubs or bicycles.

**Inside a car** is relatively safe, but do not touch interior metal.

**If your hair** stands on end, you may be a target. Crouch low on the balls of your feet and keep your knees and hands off the ground.

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# Uncharted Territory

World-renowned cave explorer Bill Steele is adding new passages to Texas maps, foot by foot

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTO BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

**IN A DARK TUNNEL** near the entrance of Honey Creek Cave, Bill Steele buckles his helmet and tugs on a pair of swim fins.

The world-renowned speleologist scoots to the edge of a ledge, then eases into a chilly underground creek. He'll spend the next two hours swimming through this dark, watery passage beneath the Texas Hill Country.

Steele, 73, has crept through more than 2,500 caves around the globe, from Sistema Huautla in Oaxaca, Mexico—the deepest known cave in the Western Hemisphere—to two of the longest known caves in China. He belongs to the prestigious Explorers Club, whose members include divers, astronauts and mountain climbers, and in 2018 researchers named a hairy-legged species of cave tarantula *Hemirrhagus billsteelei* in his honor.

Today he's wearing a wetsuit over Batman-themed swim trunks. His headlamp cuts a cone of light through the bleak darkness, illuminating thousands of stalactites that drip from the arched ceiling like long, mud-colored teeth. At one point, the ceiling drops to within a few inches of the water's surface, and Steele removes his helmet, tips back his head and floats through the passage, breathing from a narrow pocket of air.

Steele has been exploring Honey Creek Cave, the longest known cave in Texas, for nearly four decades. Several times a year, cavers from around the state get special permission to access the private property near Bulverde where it's located. They've mapped more than 21 miles so far, and on this March weekend, they're adding to that total.

What they've found might surprise Johnny Goss, who ranched this land in the 1960s. Goss knew about the cave but didn't realize how far it extended beneath the scrub- and cactus-covered fields.

Steele knows the cave's twists and turns well. Years ago, he became the first person to enter an area called the Boneyard, where remains from ancient camels, horses and saber-toothed cats were found.

At camp he spreads out a map.

"This is the longest cave in Texas, and it just got longer," Steele says, noting that other cavers exploring this weekend added 300 or 400 feet to the total.

That's the kind of stuff that has kept Steele crawling into underground passages since he was a boy

in Dayton, Ohio. His Boy Scout troop visited several caves, including one where Steele squeezed through a passage that had never been explored.

He was hooked. He became an Eagle Scout, saying it gave him a chance to explore, then joined the National Speleological Society. During a 34-year career working in administration at the Boy Scouts of America, he spent much of his spare time squirming through caves.

"It's original exploration, done on a weekend," he says.

He still crawls—and swims—through caves frequently, but most of his work now involves spearheading expeditions from aboveground.

"Everybody who's a caver in this state knows Bill Steele or knows of him," says Kurt Medking, former head of mapping for the Bexar Appraisal District. "He's legendary—he's published books and writes articles; he loves to tell stories and goes to caving events all over the country."

Medking remembers following Steele into the labyrinths of Honey Creek Cave shortly after surveying began in the early 1980s. "We'd swim with flippers on for hours, get to a side passage and slog through a couple more hours, then survey for a few hours," he says. "Then we'd do it all again coming out—a six-hour trip.

"Bill would fly through that cave. He knew exactly where to step and what to avoid."

Steele, who lives in Irving, is best known for his work in Mexico, where he has helped lead explorations of Sistema Huautla, which reaches depths of nearly a mile. He helped create the Huautla Deep Caving Expedition in 2014 to map the entire cave system. He has personally crawled through about 40 of the cave's 55 mapped miles, sometimes camping inside its damp crevices for weeks at a time.

"Some people get overwhelmed at the thought of how long it takes to get out," he says. "But I like that kind of thing."

He feels the same way about the watery tunnels of Honey Creek Cave.

"They say there's an explorer's gene, and I think I've got it." ■





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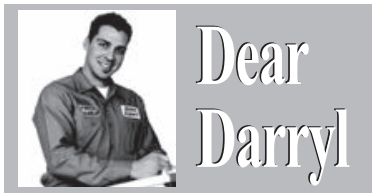
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My wife is on my back to make the bathroom stop smelling and as you can imagine, my neighbors are having a field day, kidding me about the mud pit and sewage stench in my yard. It's humiliating. I called a plumber buddy of mine, who recommended pumping (and maybe even replacing) my septic system. But at the potential cost of thousands of dollars, I hate to explore that option.

I tried the store bought, so called, Septic treatments out there, and they did Nothing to clear up my problem. Is there anything on the market I can pour or flush into my system that will restore it to normal, and keep it maintained?

*Clogged and Smelly – Austin, TX*

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Our Aussie friend would approve of our rendition of his "knife." Forged of high grade 420 surgical stainless steel, this knife is an impressive 16" from pommel to point. And, the blade is full tang, meaning it runs the entirety of the knife, even though part of it is under wraps in the natural bone and wood handle.

Secured in a tooled leather sheath, this is one impressive knife, with an equally impressive price.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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# Bison at the Brink

When just 23 were left in Yellowstone National Park, a Texan revived the herd

BY W.F. STRONG • PHOTO BY JULIA ROBINSON

**IF IT WEREN'T FOR TEXAS**, there would likely be no bison in Yellowstone National Park. This is a large claim, but it's not without merit.

To be honest, Texas had considerable liability in driving the poor bison to near extinction in the first place. However, once people finally realized the range just wouldn't be as happy a home if the buffalo didn't roam, Texas took a leading role in saving these magnificent creatures. Here's how it came about.

In the early 1900s, the U.S. Army, which patrolled the park in those days, estimated that there were just 23 bison left in Yellowstone. They believed that

those might be all the bison that remained in the whole of the wild, wild West. Imagine—just 23 bison left when, 100 years before, there had been some 30 million of them on the American plains. At one time, there were 10 bison for every American, but by 1900, they were nearly gone.

Despite efforts to protect the Yellowstone herd, the poachers poached away. After all, one impressive bison head could fetch \$2,000 to forever gaze across a bar in someplace like Chicago. That's \$60,000 in today's money. Profit was high, and the risk was low. This was the reality that nearly doomed the creatures.

After the Army managed to intimidate and scare off most of the poachers, Yellowstone needed some good, purebred bulls to rebuild the meager herd. And it needed them fast.

The problem was that most of the bison then in captivity were cattalo—a mixture of bison, or buffalo, and cattle. But in Texas the famous Charles Goodnight—perhaps the most omnipresent figure in Texas history—had his own herd of bison. His herd had been gathered and nurtured by his wife, Mary Ann Goodnight, who personally saw to it that the orphans found wandering the ranch were saved and protected. And so Goodnight, at his own expense, sent three fine, purebred bulls up to Yellowstone to help rebuild that herd.

It worked. Today there are some 5,500 bison in Yellowstone, thanks in part to Goodnight. True, Congress created Yellowstone, and the U.S. Army did its part to help protect the herd from poachers in that enormous park. But it was Goodnight's gift that truly saved the majestic creatures.

In fact, Yellowstone now says it has too many bison, and the herd needs culling. If you add those to the herd that Goodnight donated to Caprock Canyons State Park in Texas, you can say that Texas is largely responsible for bringing bison back from the brink of absolute extinction. And that's no bull. ■



# Nuts About Nuts

These tasty treats draw unique flavors out of their shell

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

While walnuts are traditional in Greece, and Turkey uses pistachios, in Texas our thoughts naturally turn to pecans for baklava. This sticky, nutty dessert is easier than it seems—it's simply a matter of layering. Use a basting or pastry brush to lightly apply the butter to each layer, taking care to not rip the delicate phyllo dough.



## Pecan Baklava

**1 cup water**  
**1½ cups sugar, divided use**  
**½ cup honey**  
**1 tablespoon lemon juice**  
**4 cups pecan halves, finely chopped**  
**in a food processor**  
**1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**  
**¼ teaspoon ground cloves**  
**1 pound (1 box) phyllo dough, thawed**  
**according to package instructions**  
**¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, melted**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a small saucepan, combine water, 1 cup sugar and honey, and bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking to dissolve sugar. Once boiling, reduce heat to low and simmer 5–7 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in lemon juice and let syrup cool.
2. In a bowl, combine pecans, remaining ½ cup sugar, cinnamon and cloves.
3. Unroll phyllo dough and trim as necessary to fit a 9-by-13-inch pan. Brush a thin layer of melted butter on the bottom and sides of the pan, then begin building the baklava.
4. Lay down a sheet of phyllo and brush butter over it. Repeat until you have 15 layers. Spread 1 cup of pecan mixture on top. Add 5 layers of phyllo, brushing on butter between each layer, then add 1 cup of pecans. Repeat twice until all pecans are used, then place on remaining phyllo layers, buttering between each.
5. Using a very sharp knife, cut baklava into squares or diamonds, making sure to cut through each layer. Hold the phyllo in place as you cut. Pour over any remaining butter.
6. Bake 40–50 minutes, turning the pan halfway through. Remove from oven and immediately pour the cooled syrup over the top; you should hear it sizzle. Let cool completely before serving.

**SERVES 24**

**TCP** Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com), where she features a recipe for Honey Pistachio Shortbread.





## Bostock (Almond Toast)

MELISSA TIDWELL  
PEDERNALES EC

If you're a fan of bakery almond croissants, you'll love this easy bostock (BOH-stock) recipe. It's perfect for serving at brunch, and you can also freeze the unbaked slices and simply bake one or two as desired.

**1 loaf challah or brioche**  
**1 cup sliced almonds, divided use**  
**6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter**  
**⅔ cup sugar**  
**2 teaspoons flour**  
**1 teaspoon cornstarch**  
**1 egg**  
**½ teaspoon almond extract**  
**Powdered sugar, for serving**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment. Slice the bread into ½-inch slices and arrange on the baking sheet.
2. In a food processor, pulse ¾ cup almonds until finely chopped. Add butter, sugar, flour, cornstarch, egg and almond extract. Purée until a smooth almond cream is formed.
3. Spread 2–3 tablespoons of the almond cream onto each slice of bread, leaving a small border around the edge to allow for spreading. Sprinkle each piece with a few of the reserved sliced almonds.
4. Bake 15–20 minutes, until almond cream is puffed and browned. Let cool 5–10 minutes, then serve with powdered sugar sprinkled on top.

**SERVES 6**

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

**\$500 WINNER**

## Spaghetti Squash With Cashew Pesto

RHAE BROWN  
SAM HOUSTON EC



Fresh and flavorful, this dish uses cashews to create a dairy-free pesto you'll love. Depending on the size of the squash you use, you might have leftover sauce. Use it as a zesty vegetable dip or spread on crusty bread.

**SERVES 2–4**



**1 spaghetti squash**  
**¼ cup plus 1–2 teaspoons olive oil, divided use**  
**¾ cup raw cashews, divided use**  
**2 lemons**  
**2 cups fresh basil**  
**1 avocado, pitted**  
**3 tablespoons water**  
**1 clove garlic**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**½ teaspoon pepper**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Halve the spaghetti squash and scoop out the seeds. Rub the insides of the squash with 1–2 teaspoons olive oil, then place cut-side down on the baking sheet. Bake 40 minutes or until tender.
2. Meanwhile, chop ¼ cup cashews, then toast in a dry pan over medium heat until golden brown. Set aside for topping.
3. Zest 1 lemon for topping if desired, then juice both. Measure out ¼ cup juice and set aside the rest.
4. In a food processor, combine basil, remaining cashews, avocado, ¼ cup lemon juice, remaining olive oil, water, garlic, salt and pepper. Blend until a smooth pesto forms. Taste and add more lemon juice, salt or pepper if desired.
5. Once the squash is done, use a fork to shred the inside to make "noodles" and scoop into a bowl. Add pesto and mix well. Serve topped with toasted cashews and lemon zest.

## \$500 Recipe Contest

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## Walnut Surprise

GALE HEEP  
TRI-COUNTY EC

This simple dessert is a cross between a cookie, a bar and a candy. Heep recommends it warm with ice cream, but it's just as good enjoyed simply with a cup of tea.

**½ cup flour**  
**⅓ teaspoon baking soda**  
**½ teaspoon salt**  
**1 egg**

**1 cup brown sugar**  
**½ teaspoon vanilla extract**  
**1 cup chopped walnuts**

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees and coat an 8-inch square pan with nonstick spray.
2. In a small bowl, combine flour, baking soda and salt. In another bowl, beat egg until foamy, then stir in brown sugar and vanilla. Add flour mixture and stir until completely incorporated. Stir in walnuts; the batter will be thick.
3. Spread the batter into the prepared pan, using a greased spatula or spoon to spread to the edges, if needed.
4. Bake 18–25 minutes, until golden brown.

**SERVES 9**

**TCP** Find more recipes on our website that make the most of nuts—as the featured or accompanying ingredient. They're perfect heading into the holidays, and most come from the kitchens of *Texas Co-op Power* readers.

## Tips for Toasting Nuts

BY MEGAN MYERS

**Many recipes call for toasting nuts, which enhances their flavor and makes them deliciously crunchy.**

**Stovetop method:** Set a dry skillet over medium heat and add nuts in a single layer. Cook 3–5 minutes, stirring, until fragrant and starting to darken.

**Oven method:** Place nuts in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees until fragrant and starting to darken, 5–8 minutes depending on the nut.

To prevent burning, remove nuts from heat as soon as they are toasted.



## Cast-Iron Skillet

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# HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Oodles of Oompahs

A Schulenburg museum preserves polka's enduring power

BY CHET GARNER

**IF YOU PASS THROUGH** the rolling prairies northeast of San Antonio and listen carefully to the wind, chances are you'll hear the faint sound of a tuba and an accordion floating along. Follow the sound to its source and you could end up in any of dozens of old German and Czech dance halls as polka bands play the music of their ancestors.

Since the late 1800s, polka has been the soundtrack of life for many residents of Fayette County. To learn more about how this unique musical style keeps the beat, I headed to the Texas Polka Music Museum in downtown Schulenburg.

I stepped into the small repository on Lyons Avenue and immediately felt my feet bouncing to the signature "oompah-oompah" playing on the speakers. I was helpless to repel the power of the polka. The walls are covered in pictures, records and stories of the numerous polka artists who have hailed from the Lone Star State—bands like Vrazel's Polka Band, which toured Texas for more than 50 years.

There are also dozens of cases and displays filled with instruments and mementos going back well over 100 years, including booths from local radio DJs that kept the polka power going around the clock. Of course, any proper polka band needs an accordion, tuba and saxophone. But just as important are the matching outfits. This museum has some that would give Elton John a run for his money.

Like most folks, I don't listen to a lot of polka music, but after visiting this museum, I discovered a newfound appreciation for the art and culture of polka. I even bought a CD so I could oom-pah-pah all the way home. ■

ABOVE Chet takes in the polka grooves that resonate in Fayette County.

**TCP** Toe-tap with Chet in 2/4 time to this nearly two-century-old music. Our website features his latest video, and watch all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details.

## OCTOBER

07

**Fredericksburg [7–9] Texas Mesquite Arts Festival**, (830) 997-8515, [texasmesquiteartfestivals.com](http://texasmesquiteartfestivals.com)

08

**Lexington Blue Volunteer Fire Department Fund-raiser**, (512) 229-8533, [facebook.com/bluevfd](https://facebook.com/bluevfd)

**Stonewall Fish Fry**, (830) 990-8793, [stonewallvfd.com](http://stonewallvfd.com)

**Tyler Rose City Music Festival**, (903) 593-6905, [therosecitymusicfestival.com](http://therosecitymusicfestival.com)

**Chappell Hill [8–9] Scarecrow Festival**, (979) 836-6033, [chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com](http://chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com)

**Edom [8–9] Art Festival**, (903) 258-5192, [edomarts.com](http://edomarts.com)

**Pearland [8–9] Art on the Pavilion**, (281) 997-5971, [visitpearland.com](http://visitpearland.com)

13

**Collinsville 42 Bed Bash**, (903) 465-6041, [texomafamilyshester.com](http://texomafamilyshester.com)

**Tyler [13–16] Texas Rose Festival**, (903) 593-6905, [texasrosefestival.com](http://texasrosefestival.com)

14

**Kyle Halloween Movie in the Park**, (512) 262-3939, [cityofkyle.com](http://cityofkyle.com)

**Canton [14–15] Texas Star Quilters Guild Quilt Show**, (903) 312-5252

**Henderson [14–15] Rusk County PRCA Rodeo**, (903) 657-3699, [visithenderson.tx.com](http://visithenderson.tx.com)



15

**Driftwood [14-16] Austin String Band Festival,**  
(512) 644-0212, [aftm.us](http://aftm.us)

**Canyon Lake BBQ Cook Off,** (830) 964-2223,  
[canyonlakechamber.com](http://canyonlakechamber.com)

**Clifton FallFest,**  
(254) 675-8337,  
[cityofclifton.org](http://cityofclifton.org)

**Conroe Fall Herb/Vegetable and Succulent Sale,**  
(936) 539-7824, [mcmga.com](http://mcmga.com)

**Frisco The Boho Market at Frisco Square,**  
(214) 202-2668,  
[thebohohomemarket.co](http://thebohohomemarket.co)

**Plano International Festival,**  
[planointernationalfestival.org](http://planointernationalfestival.org)

**Waco Oakwood Cemetery's Walking Tales,** (254) 717-1763

**Brenham [15-16] Texas Arts & Music Festival,**  
(979) 337-7580,  
[texasartsandmusicfestival.com](http://texasartsandmusicfestival.com)

21

**Cisco [21-22] Pie Fest,**  
(254) 334-9621,  
[ciscotxpiefest.com](http://ciscotxpiefest.com)

**Austin [21-23] Gem Capers,**  
(512) 458-9546,  
[agms-tx.org](http://agms-tx.org)

**Plano [21-23] Hollydays Market,** (972) 941-5840,  
[visitplano.com](http://visitplano.com)

22

**Burnet Zombie Color Run,**  
(512) 756-6182,  
[burnet.revtrak.net](http://burnet.revtrak.net)

**Fredericksburg Food & Wine Fest,** (830) 997-8515,  
[fbgfoodandwinefest.com](http://fbgfoodandwinefest.com)

MORE EVENTS >

## TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your January event by November 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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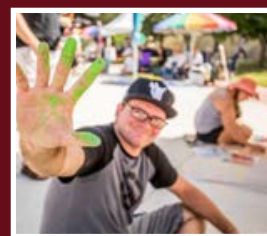


## Retreat... Relax in Kerrville

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[www.kerrvillefolkfestival.org](http://www.kerrvillefolkfestival.org)



Kerrville Chalk Festival  
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## Hit the Road

### Event Calendar

Fairs, festivals, food and family fun! Pick your region. Pick your month. Pick your event.

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DREAMSTIME AGENCY / DREAMSTIME.COM

### Pick of the Month

#### Festival of the Wolves

Navasota, October 15  
 (936) 894-9653  
[saintfranciswolvesanctuary.org](http://saintfranciswolvesanctuary.org)

Learn about wolves and wolf-dogs, browse booths, dine at food trucks, bid on items at a silent auction, and have a howling good time at the Saint Francis Wolf Sanctuary.

### OCTOBER EVENTS CONTINUED

22

**Kyle Center Street Trick-or-Treat**, (512) 262-3939,  
[cityofkyle.com](http://cityofkyle.com)

**Palestine Hot Pepper Festival**, (903) 723-3014,  
[visitpalestine.com](http://visitpalestine.com)

**Plano Fall Harvest Festival and Outdoor Market**,  
 (469) 467-9995,  
[visitplano.com](http://visitplano.com)

**Round Rock Diwali Festival**,  
[info@rrdiwalifest.com](mailto:info@rrdiwalifest.com),  
[rrdiwalifest.com](http://rrdiwalifest.com)

**Cottonwood Shores [22-23] Legends of the Falls**, (830) 693-3830,  
[cottonwoodshores.org](http://cottonwoodshores.org)

**Kerrville [22-23] Mountain Bike Festival**,  
 (830) 896-6864,  
[kerrvillemountainbikefestival.com](http://kerrvillemountainbikefestival.com)

25

**Kenney [25-29] Hodges Farm Antique Show**,  
 (979) 865-9077,  
[hodgesfarmtexas@gmail.com](mailto:hodgesfarmtexas@gmail.com)

28

**Imperial [28-29] Horse-head Crossing Trails of Time**, (432) 336-6316,  
[pecoscountyhistoricalcommission.org](http://pecoscountyhistoricalcommission.org)

**Kerrville [28-30] Texas Fleece and Fiber Festival**,  
 (361) 537-0503,  
[texasfleeceandfiber.com](http://texasfleeceandfiber.com)

29

**Copperas Cove Fall-O-Ween Festival**,  
 (254) 542-2719,  
[www.copperascovetx.gov](http://www.copperascovetx.gov)

**Llano Llano River Pumpkin Float**, (325) 247-5354,  
[llanochamber.org](http://llanochamber.org)

**Sanger Sellabration**,  
 (940) 458-7702,  
[sangertexas.com](http://sangertexas.com)

**Salado [29-30] Table-rock's Fright Trail**,  
 (254) 308-2200,  
[tablerock.org](http://tablerock.org)

31

**Kerrville Family Fright Night**, (830) 257-7300,  
[kerrvilletx.gov](http://kerrvilletx.gov)

## NOVEMBER

04

**New Braunfels [4-13] Wurstfest**, (830) 625-9167,  
[wurstfest.com](http://wurstfest.com)

05

**Brenham Radney Foster & Darden Smith**,  
 (979) 337-7240,  
[thebarnhillcenter.com](http://thebarnhillcenter.com)

**Jefferson Fall History Haunts and Legends Event**, (903) 601-3375,  
[visitjeffersonstexas.com](http://visitjeffersonstexas.com)

07

**Georgetown Wurstbraten 50th Sausage Festival**,  
 (512) 863-3065,  
[zionwalburg.org](http://zionwalburg.org)



# Hometown Pride

Sports, artwork, history and landmarks all make us proud as peacocks to call our town home, no matter the size. These reader offerings just make us beam with Texas pride. So pull up a lawn chair and gather the kids. Here comes the parade.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



**1 JOAN WILSON  
BLUEBONNET EC**

Wilson's granddaughter, Maddie Wilson, gets an early start experiencing Friday night lights with the Hendrickson Hawks cheerleaders in Pflugerville.

**2 JONNIE ENGLAND  
NUECES EC**

Pecos, in far west Reeves County, shows hometown pride with the Pecos Boot Trail, a public art project.

**3 JULIE TUPY  
HILCO EC**

Willie Nelson, painted on a downtown garage in his hometown of Abbott.

**4 KATE MANRRIQUEZ  
WHARTON COUNTY EC**

Taylor Manriquez plays first base for the El Campo High School Ricebirds.



## Upcoming Contests

- DUE OCT 10** First Responders
- DUE NOV 10** Land, Sea or Sky
- DUE DEC 10** Riding the River



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for more Hometown Pride photos from readers.



Quay Rathbone of Victoria was the first Turkey Trot sultana, in 1913.

**TCP** Go to our website to see Caytlyn Phillips' documentary, *Because Two Birds Raced*.



turkey capital of the world.

Thus began the Great Gobbler Gallop, with a Cuero turkey perpetually named Ruby Begonia facing Worthington's Paycheck ("nothing goes faster than a paycheck").

Ruby Begonia heads to downtown Worthington for the first leg every year at King Turkey Day, a month before Turkeyfest. Then the birds race again along Main Street in Cuero, a frenzy of feathers spurred on by crowds lining the way. The bird with the best cumulative time claims the Traveling Turkey Trophy of Tumultuous Triumph for its town.

It's no surprise that the gallop is one of my fondest childhood memories. Cuero's peculiar history with gobblers has long been my favorite aspect of my hometown and even became the focus of my master's thesis. It's not every day that you get to see flightless fowl excitedly plod down an ordinarily busy street. Our silly little tradition enthralled me and drew me in every October.

But the birds barely scrape the surface. It's the enriching union of the communities that brings the festival to life.

Turkeyfest organizers are still moved to tears recalling the generosity of their Worthington friends over the years. Five years ago, when Hurricane Harvey's winds whipped through Cuero, Worthington's residents sent a tractor trailer loaded with essentials, including bottled water and cleaning supplies, to our community.

So at Turkeyfest this year, October 7–9, we will again relish gathering with friends, family and visitors. We'll enjoy cool beverages, good food and all kinds of fun activities. And we'll treasure our bond with that faraway town up north.

It's true: Birds of a feather do flock together. ■

## Not for the Birds

Trotting turkeys—and so much more—unite towns separated by a thousand miles

BY CAYTLYN PHILLIPS

**AMID THE PASTURES** on the main road between San Antonio and the Gulf Coast sits the turkey-centric town of Cuero.

Its long history with the fowl dates back to 1908, when its first turkey processing plant opened. Crowds flocked to witness farmers parade their poultry down the streets, and the town seized the opportunity, dubbing it the Turkey Trot. The first one occurred in 1912, and they continued intermittently into the 1970s.

Fifty years ago this month, the Turkey Trot shifted to a four-day festival known as Turkeyfest. No longer did thousands of turkeys march down Main Street. Instead, Cuero partnered with rival turkey town Worthington, Minnesota, and they jointly decided an annual turkey race was the best way to determine the



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Netflix and Amazon Prime Video streaming memberships required. YouTube is a trademark of Google LLC. Amazon Prime only available on Hopper 3.

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