

FATHERS' LIVES  
ON THE LINES

PUTTING TOADSUCK  
ON THE MAP

REMINISCING IN  
BLUEBONNETS

# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

JUNE 2024

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to visit all of our  
state parks  
in one year



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# June 2024



06

## Trailblazer

How a college professor became the first Texan to visit every state park in a year.

By Anna Mazurek

## 12 Following in Dad's Bootsteps

Three generations of West Texas lineworkers keep the lights on.

Story by Tom Widlowski  
Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun

04

### Currents

The latest buzz

05

### TCP Talk

Readers respond

16

### Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

### Footnotes in Texas History

A Town Called Toadsuck  
By W.F. Strong

26

### TCP Kitchen

Simply Salads  
By Vianney Rodriguez

30

### Hit the Road

We Brake for Steak  
By Chet Garner

33

### Focus on Texas

Photo Contest: Food and Cooking

34

### Observations

Renewal in Blue  
By Claudia Sullivan

ON THE COVER

One of the breathtaking sights in Palo Duro Canyon State Park.  
Photo by Chase A. Fountain | TPWD

ABOVE

Dale Blasingame and his trekking sidekick, Lucy.  
Photo by Anna Mazurek



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

### The Next Book You Should Read Is ...

**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 April prompt: **Wow! The eclipse was ...**

One of those events that reminds us how magnificent our little corner of the universe really is.

SUSAN SINGLETARY  
TRINITY VALLEY EC  
ATHENS

Cool, literally.

LESLIE KRAICH  
TRI-COUNTY EC  
GOODWELL, OKLAHOMA

Way cooler than I expected. I was really looking forward to it, but when it actually happened, I almost cried.

CAROL DUNAGAN  
VIA FACEBOOK

Totally amazing. I love how the sun united people together for this lifetime event.

MOCEDADES ESQUIVEL  
FARMERS EC  
LAVON

Visit our website to see more responses.

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**RECOMMENDED READING**  
On National Olive Day, June 1, we hope you'll remember Texas' place in the harvesting of this ancient fruit. Read *Texas Olive Oil: Pressed for Success* from August 2008.

# Growing Influence

**JUNETEENTH**, commemorating June 19, 1865, when African Americans in Texas learned of their emancipation from slavery, continues to spread across the U.S. as a public holiday.

At least 28 states and the District of Columbia recognize Juneteenth as a holiday. Texas was the first to do so, in 1980. President Joe Biden signed the legislation that made Juneteenth a federal holiday in June 2021.

Read an excerpt from *On Juneteenth* by Annette Gordon Reed on our website.

## June 14 World Blood Donor Day

Blood donation centers continue their call for the lifesaving resource—noting that just 3% of the eligible U.S. population donates blood each year. Learn more at [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org).



APRIL 2024 Thorny Task

“I have many night-blooming cereus plants in pots. I bring them indoors before it freezes every year. I get new plants from cuttings.”

KATHERINE ALLEN  
PEDERNALES EC  
BURNET



DAVE SHAFER

**Don't Forget Obedience**

I appreciated your article on dog agility [Top Dogs, March 2024]. My only issue with the list of dog sports was that no mention of basic obedience or competitive obedience was made.

Obedience is the foundation of all the sports mentioned. If a dog does not have the most basic of obedience commands in its repertoire, all the other things become much harder to teach.

Cindy Hyde  
San Bernard EC  
Columbus

**Around and Around**

I skied at Sea-Arama Marineworld in Galveston in the 1970s [The Green Carpet, January 2024]. Occasionally we put on a show at the Shamrock Hilton—in the swimming pool. It required a pretty constant left turn.

Kelley Farmer  
Pedernales EC  
Dripping Springs



TOM HUSSEY

**Planting Ideas**

Native flora and fauna should be of great interest to all of us, so it is heartening to hear of people rescuing and protecting them [Thorny Task, April 2024]. And Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' *Seedy Behavior* [April 2024] was both entertaining and inspiring. I once rescued a pint of rain lily seeds just days before the city mowed them down.

Paula Stone  
Central Texas EC  
Fredericksburg

**A Budding Friendship**

The April issue was a “blooming success.” I loved reading about the employees who went to Guatemala [Currents, *Wiring the American Dream*], the urgent need to care for our declining native plants [Thorny Task], caring for the less fortunate in Banderita [Holding Promise] and seeing the pictures of pollinators [Focus on Texas].

Your magazine puts the focus squarely on what there is to love about Texas: the place; people; and the vital, tenuous and beautiful connections between them.

Michael Davis  
CoServ  
Wylie

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power  
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor  
Austin, TX 78701

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

Texas Co-op Power

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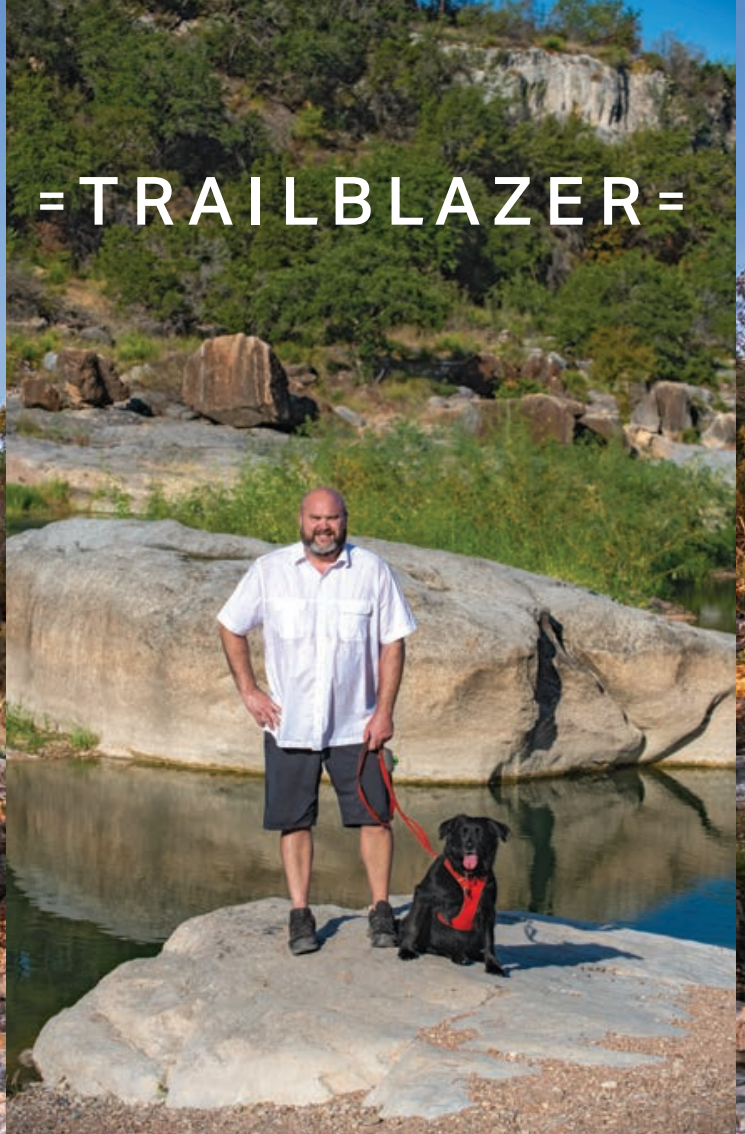
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# =TRAILBLAZER=



BY ANNA MAZUREK

**He was the first to visit every state park in a year, and he can tell you where to start your own adventure**

**WHILE** Dale Blasingame was waiting in the car line to enter Hamilton Pool Preserve in July 2014, a ranger walked over with bad news—the popular Hill Country swimming hole was full. Sensing his disappointment, the ranger suggested an alternative, nearby Pedernales Falls State Park.

“Would you like a day pass or an annual pass?” A simple question at the entrance to Pedernales Falls prompted Blasingame to inquire about the number of state parks. The ranger’s reply—95 at the time—inspired Blasingame to respond immediately with “I’m going to buy the annual pass, and I’m going to do them all in one year.”

LEFT Pedernales Falls State Park, where the idea to visit every state park in one year first struck Dale Blasingame. ABOVE Blasingame and Lucy, his hiking companion.



This spontaneous decision would transform his life and spill over into his career.

With his annual pass in hand, Blasingame, an associate professor of digital media and journalism at Texas State University in San Marcos, started ticking state park properties off his list, beginning with those in Central Texas and followed by ones near Dallas and Houston.

While he had never considered himself outdoorsy, a bad breakup in 2013 led him to spend more time in nature, starting with a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his brother. That inspired a solo road trip to Montana through Yellowstone National Park and the Rocky Mountains.

Halfway through his state park quest, he met a man hiking with his dog at Buescher State Park in Bastrop County.

“I asked him if he liked hiking with the dog, and he was like, ‘Oh man, you’ll never regret it.’” Blasingame says. “The whole way home, I was just thinking about [how] it would

be really great to have a dog to hike with.”

Coincidentally, the PetSmart near Blasingame’s home was having an adoption event that same day. He brought home a medium-sized black rescue pup he renamed Lucy, who resembles a mix between a black golden retriever and a border collie. Since then, the pair have been inseparable.

Blasingame decided Lucy needed to be the first dog to visit every Texas state park. Since hiking and photography were the main draws for him at the parks, the pair focused on long day hikes, mostly ranging from 11 to 14 miles.

In July 2015, as his annual pass expired, Blasingame visited his 95th state park—becoming the first known

FROM LEFT A family enjoys horseback riding at Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Swampy Caddo Lake State Park captivated Blasingame.





person to hit all of them in one year.

“I do have to be totally honest,” he says. “It actually took me 367 days. I was two days late.” The final park, Cedar Hill State Park, near Dallas, had been closed due to flooding, so he had to wait for it to reopen.

Lucy completed her goal in December 2018 after finishing a West Texas route that included a private visit to Balmorhea State Park, where dogs are normally not allowed. When they reached the last park, Blasingame let Lucy off her leash, and she went nuts. “It was like she knew that was a celebration of something,” he says.

His newfound love of the outdoors led Blasingame to create a park-focused storytelling class at Texas State University in 2017 that has evolved to include visits to state and national parks across the U.S. “It’s one thing to get to know students over the course of the semester and a regular class,” Blasingame says, “but when you’re traveling on the

road with students, you really do make lifelong friends.”

Now Blasingame has a new goal: “I decided to do every national park property, which is different from saying ‘I’m going to do every national park,’” he explains, pointing out that this includes park designations like national historic sites and battlefields.

So far, he’s set foot on 251 of the 429 national park properties.

While Blasingame’s Texas adventures have been filled with awe-inspiring moments, like observing the Milky Way from West Texas, and downright scary ones, like being chased by wild boars at Lake Somerville State Park and Trailway, it’s impossible for him to have only one favorite state park.

Here are some of his top picks by region.

## =THE PANHANDLE=

**PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK** is special to Blasingame because of its landscape and a family connection. Located



near Amarillo, it's home to steep, multicolored mesas and the second-largest canyon in the country, known as the Grand Canyon of Texas. Since his parents lived nearby, he often took them to the park.

"My dad loved to go there and just sit in the car and wait for me and Lucy to finish hiking and being able to share those moments," he says. When Blasingame's parents died in late 2020 and early 2021, friends had a memorial bench built for them overlooking the Lighthouse, the park's iconic rock formation.

Despite roughly 30 visits to nearby Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway, Blasingame hasn't witnessed large crowds and never tires of the scenic views and hikes through the red rocks.

"It's got the state bison herd, which are always just incredible to watch," he says. The animals have free range over 10,000 of the park's 15,313-acre prairie.

## =EAST TEXAS=

"CADDO LAKE is one of my favorite parks out in East Texas," Blasingame says, reminiscing about the swampy environment where he captured some of his favorite nature photographs of Spanish moss-covered trees on a sunrise boat ride. "The great thing about the environment in Texas is we have every element. We've got beaches. We've got mountains. We've got canyons. We've got lakes."

Dense fog on his first trip to Martin Dies, Jr. State Park, located at the confluence of the Neches and Angelina rivers, was also memorable. "It literally [felt] like I was just sitting on a cloud and looking out over all these trees coming up out of the fog."

ABOVE Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park has made Blasingame a repeat visitor. OPPOSITE He loves the sparkling water of the world's largest spring-fed pool at Balmorhea State Park.



## =CENTRAL TEXAS=

**CLOSER TO HOME**, Blasingame's favorite park is Colorado Bend State Park, along the Colorado River. A 70-foot spring-fed waterfall is a highlight of every visit.

"Gorman Falls is one of the most unique spots in all of Texas—a slice of the rainforest about an hour outside of Austin," he says.

## =WEST TEXAS=

**BLASINGAME'S** first glimpse of the Milky Way from West Texas in 2013 was one of the moments that molded him into an outdoorsman.

The region's parks have remained a favorite, including Balmorhea, home to the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool, and the lesser-known Big Bend Ranch State Park, the largest state park in Texas. Big Bend Ranch is adjacent to Big Bend National Park and has only one paved road, River

Road (FM 170), along the southern boundary. Even if people can't get into the "very rugged" park interior, Blasingame encourages them to just drive River Road.

"You're driving along the Rio Grande the entire time with huge cliffs behind it," he says. "It feels like a roller coaster, too, based on all the dips and turns the road takes. My single favorite part is the big overlook, which seemingly goes on forever."

**THE NUMBER OF STATE PARKS** has fluctuated since Blasingame hit his record of 95 and currently stands at 88 (including state parks, historic sites and natural areas). Several more are scheduled to open in the next 12–15 years.

He hopes to get a sneak peek of the newest park, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, between Abilene and Fort Worth, when it opens this year or next. "I'm sure we'll be some of the first visitors there," Blasingame says. "New parks don't happen every day in Texas, so this is big." ■



# Following in Dad's Bootsteps

**Three generations of West Texas lineworkers keep the lights on**

**SOMETIMES CHILDHOOD** dreams come true. Other times they veer down an unexpected path.

Three generations of Nixon men in the South Plains ended up on the same path, leaving earlier ambitions in the dust.

Danny Nixon, 66, grew up wanting to be an anesthesiologist. But he fell in love and ran out of money, and he left Texas Tech University after one semester. Soon thereafter he began a career at Lighthouse Electric Cooperative that has lasted nearly 47 years, the first 20-plus spent as a lineworker.

Son Scott, 40, who grew up in Floydada with a dad often away on call, wanted to be a firefighter, but by the time he went off to college, he planned to pursue a career in agriculture. He left Tarleton State University after two years and has been a lineworker at neighboring South Plains Electric Cooperative for 20 years.

Camden, 21, a tall, strapping grandson and son in this family, was sure he'd be a pro baseball player. Did he come close? "Not very," he admits.

Camden remembers how his dad, Scott, missed too many of his childhood games as co-op duties called. "He's not ever at any of my baseball games. What the heck?" Camden says he wondered. "But then my mom talked to me about it, and she was like, he's at work. I was like, well, he's always at work."

Fast-forward to 2024, and Camden is often—if not always—at work, 2½ years into his career as an apprentice lineworker at another neighboring co-op, Lyntegar Electric Cooperative.

Their shared mission of serving co-op members from atop a pole, especially when storms knock out power, is a great source of satisfaction for the patriarch.

"Am I proud? Yes. I'm extremely proud," says Danny, who in 1999 became superintendent at Lighthouse EC and has since been promoted to operations manager.

Camden, the youngster, is proud, too, but he's quick to point out it's not always easy bearing the Nixon name in the West Texas co-op world. He looks first at his dad and then at the man he calls Pops. "A lot of people know him, but *everybody* knows *him*," Camden says. "I say my last name and they're like, oh, OK.

"You don't want to mess up," Camden says. "You don't want to do something wrong. I mean, everybody's going to do something wrong, but you don't want it to be bad enough to where they tell my granddad or tell my dad and we're going to have to talk about this at Christmas."

Of course, they might not be together at Christmas. The crews who keep the power on don't get to schedule when storm recovery and other mishaps call them out on jobs. Thus, the Nixons sometimes find it all but impossible to get together for birthdays and holidays—like Father's Day. It's been that way since Danny started his career, and Scott grew up knowing that.

But he also saw the rewards of the job.

"Dad made a good living and provided us with nice things," Scott says. "I got to do a lot of stuff and go on nice vacations and such that most kids didn't get. It makes it worth the hardships to get to provide my wife and kids with the same things.

"It's also kind of a pride thing. I'm proud to be a lineman. There are not very many people in the world who can do my job."

Danny Nixon—with grandson Camden, left, and son Scott—remembers once telling a member who was stunned to see a crew out in a nasty storm, "Ma'am, when it's the worst, that's when we're at our best."

## "I'm proud to be a lineman. There are not very many people in the world who can do my job."

As parents tend to do, Danny remembers hoping Scott would find his own way in the world.

"Did I put my wishes and dreams on him? No, I did not," Danny says. "I wished for both of these young men anything but becoming a lineman. And I don't mean that in a bad way, but I'd rather him been a doctor or a lawyer or an animal husbandry guy or a vet.

"Both of these guys. You always want better for your kids and certainly your grandkids."

Scott certainly wanted better for the final home football game in Camden's high school career. Senior night is always a big deal—even more so because the Shallowater Mustangs were closing out an undefeated regular season. But an early winter storm socked West Texas that week in October 2020, coating most everything in ice and whipping power lines with wind gusts up to 50 mph.

South Plains EC crews, including Scott, were working on short rest to restore power, and it seemed impossible that he could get away to walk onto Todd Field with his wife and Camden for the traditional senior tribute.

"We worked 16-hour shifts in this ice storm, and I begged my supervisor to [let me] walk out on the field with him—and then I'd get in that truck and go to work," Scott says. With permission granted, Scott, dressed in his fire-retardant work clothes, briefly joined his family in the stadium.

"My bucket truck was sitting in the parking lot—running, ready to roll," he says. "I didn't get to see him play."

By that age, Camden understood—as co-op families do—that Dad had a responsibility to the community. "I was just glad he was able to be there for a little bit," Camden says. "It meant a lot."

The Nixons agree: Working for a co-op is a calling.

"It does set us apart from Acme brand," Danny says.

"We don't go home till the lights are on," Scott says.

"For the members," Camden says.

Yes, Camden walks the path of Scott and Pops. And as has been the case since September 1977, a Nixon is quite likely to rush down that path when a storm strikes the South Plains. ■



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## How To Be Energy Efficient in Humid Climates

**WHY DOES A 95-DEGREE** day in some parts of Texas feel hotter than the same temperature elsewhere? Why do dry heat and humid heat feel so different, and how does this affect your strategy for home energy efficiency? While there are many common ways to achieve energy efficiency across all warm climates, there are important differences that vary by geography.

### The Humidity Factor

Generally speaking, when there's more moisture in the air, the temperature feels hotter because moist air is closer to saturation than dry air. On a humid day, when the air is saturated with water, evaporation is much slower.

In warm climates, the majority of energy used to make the home feel comfortable is spent on home air conditioning and cooling. The first priority is heat reduction. However, in humid areas, moisture reduction is nearly as important as lowering the indoor air temperature. If a home has too much moisture, indoor air quality can be compromised and mold and mildew problems can develop.

Both of these processes can be energy intensive, but smart homeowners know how to cut costs by focusing on efficiency.

### Energy Efficiency

The first line of energy defense is to ensure that your home is properly insulated and sealed in order to keep the heat and

humidity that surround the house from getting inside. Leaky ducts, windows and doors can cause energy loss, making the HVAC system work much harder to wring the moisture out of the air and exacerbate potential indoor air quality issues. Homes that are sealed tight are easier to keep cool and dry.

Next make sure your HVAC system is the right size. The Department of Energy estimates that most current residential systems are oversized. If your unit is too big, you will pay higher energy bills, and you won't get the efficiency level or comfort you want and expect. It's also likely that the unit is short cycling, constantly turning off and on, never achieving optimum efficiency. When the unit runs in short bursts, it will not operate long enough to eliminate all of the humidity in your home.

Damp, cool indoor air creates a muggy atmosphere that can lead to the growth of mold and mildew. This can be a particular concern for those who suffer from allergies, as

many allergens thrive in damp conditions.

### DIY Humidity Reduction

There are some basic steps you can take to lower the humidity in your home to help make it feel cooler and more comfortable. Start by reducing the humidity you already produce. Kitchens and bathrooms are the biggest contributors to higher humidity levels. Check to ensure that your range hood is ducted to the outside, as recirculating range hoods are not effective in controlling moisture (or odors).

When cooking, and especially when boiling water, run the vent fan. In the bathroom, run the vent fan when bathing or showering. Keep the fan on up to 30 minutes after you have finished in order to eliminate the residual moisture in the air.

If you can reduce the indoor humidity level, you may be able to maintain a comfortable indoor temperature with a higher thermostat setting and ceiling fans. The air movement from the ceiling fan will create a wind chill effect, increasing comfort.

Finally, check gutters and downspouts for leaks or blockages. If rainwater leaks out and saturates the ground surrounding your home, some of the moisture can eventually migrate into your house. ■



# Summer Sun Brings Out Solar Scammers

**CONSUMERS HAVE GOOD** intentions when they install solar panels, but we're hearing reports that some solar companies and their sales representatives do not. They're not making good on their promises.

In response to disreputable companies giving false guarantees, purposely installing undersized systems and knowingly soliciting unbuildable systems, the Solar Energy Industries Association offers these guidelines to protect solar customers.

## Here Comes the Sun

Ask friends, family and neighbors for references when shopping for a solar installation company and check on a company's history through state and local consumer protection agencies, such as the Better Business Bureau, before signing any agreements. You should also compare bids from several companies, paying special attention to:

- ▶ The expected performance of the equipment and size of the panels.
- ▶ The full cost of installation, including any permit fees.
- ▶ Whether it is guaranteed to produce a certain amount of energy.
- ▶ What warranties apply to the equipment and the installation's workmanship.
- ▶ Also check with your electric cooperative and your homeowners association, if you belong to one, for any restrictions or regulations on solar panel installation and maintenance.

## Good Day, Sunshine

Industry experts predict that more than 5 million homes will have some sort of solar installation by 2025. That creates a lot of opportunity for scammers. Make sure to do your research before installing solar panels, and if you think a solar company has taken advantage of you, contact an experienced attorney for help.

Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. ■



JEREMY POLAND | ISTOCK.COM



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## Let Your LEDs Shine

**LED BULBS HAVE** been touted as the safest, longest-lasting, most energy-efficient home lighting option on the market. They're also one of the few residential lighting options available as production of incandescent bulbs is being phased out.

Maybe you've dutifully changed all your bulbs to LEDs only to find that the latest technology is not living up to its promises of light quality and longevity, which can be disappointing.

**To make sure that your LEDs shine, follow these four tips:**

For dimmable LEDs, make sure the bulbs are in fact designed to be dimmed or are connected to an LED-compatible dimmer switch. Incompatibility could result in flickering, noises and burnout.

Have an electrician make sure that the voltage coming into your house is not too high, which could lead to early burnout.

Bad connections also could burn out bulbs. They arise when the bulb is not secure in the socket, is too tight in the socket, the contacts are corroded or there is a loose connection.

Ensure the LED is not overheating in an enclosed or improperly sized fixture that isn't designed for the bulb. ■

# Cool Pool Safety Tips

**Remember these rules for safe pool-time fun this summer.**

**Keep electric radios, TVs, grills, lights and other electrical appliances at least 10 feet from pools and wet surfaces.** Use battery-powered appliances whenever possible.

**Electric appliances** should not be used outdoors unless they have a heavy-duty cord and three-pronged plug.

**All outdoor** electrical outlets should be weatherproof and equipped with a ground-fault circuit interrupter.

**Swimming pools** should be well away from overhead wires to avoid contact when using long-handled equipment.

**If you think** you are being shocked while in the water, move away from the source of the shock. Get out of the water, if possible, without using a metal ladder.

**Stay safe** this summer. Don't swim with shocks!

**Your electric cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.**





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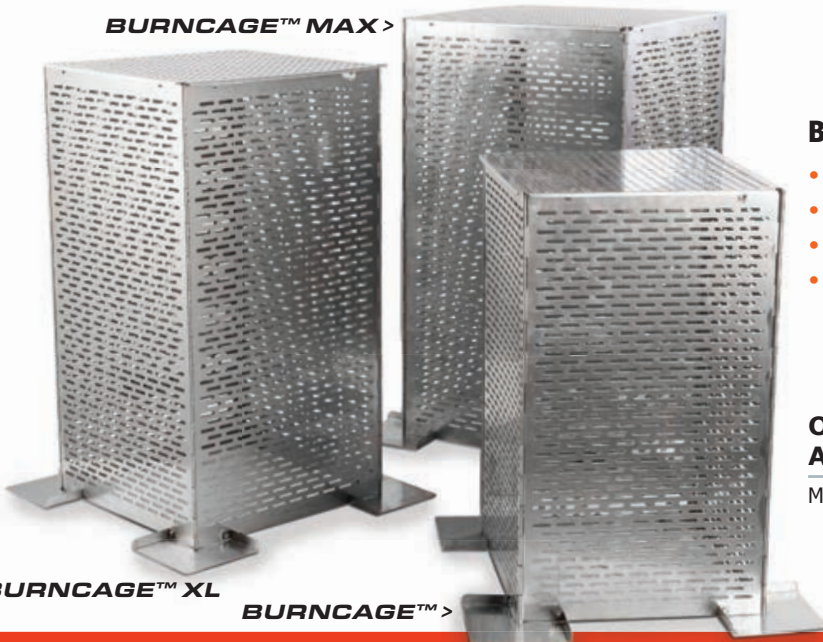
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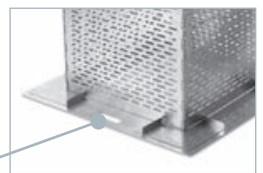


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# Enraptured

Birds of prey travel Texas for thrilling demonstrations that educate audiences

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTO BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

**VICTOR LAWRENCE** asks the kookaburra perched on his fist why the vulture crossed the road.

“Because the chicken didn’t make it!” he says. The corny joke makes the Australian bird erupt in its unmistakable raucous laugh, which triggers roars of laughter from the audience at the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival in Harlingen.

The kookaburra is one of 33 birds of prey that live and work with the nonprofit Wildlife Revealed, traveling across Texas and the U.S. as ambassadors of the bird kingdom. Lawrence, who is a falconer, and his colleagues at Wildlife Revealed act as interpreters, letting audiences observe the birds’ talents, intelligence and quirks. The presentations educate audiences on the importance of wild birds and why they need protection for their important roles in global ecosystems.

Each bird is different. Some birds demonstrate their flight abilities. Cyrene, the Eurasian eagle-owl, is quiet as a shadow. Some, like Pierre, the crested caracara, simply look handsome. While Obee, a white-necked raven, snatches proffered dollar bills and hides them away, Grimley, a black vulture, waddle-hops around the Harlingen audience, looking for food in all the wrong places.

A catlike “mrrrow” comes from Cyrene. Massive and regal, with a wingspan around 5 feet, the captive-bred owl looks like it could swallow a small cat. Onlookers guess that she weighs 25–75 pounds, but she’s just 5 pounds.

Raptors—such as owls, falcons, hawks—capture and kill their food thanks to incredible eyesight, hooked beaks, and strong feet and talons. Lawrence considers birds of prey a broader category that includes all carnivorous birds from kingfishers like the kookaburra to pelicans, vultures, ravens and crows.

The roots of Wildlife Revealed, based near Bastrop, east of Austin, reach back 35 years. On a Cub Scout trip to the Houston Zoo in the 1980s, young Kevin Gaines stood just feet away from a red-tailed hawk on a zookeeper’s arm. “I thought it was the coolest thing in the world,” he recalls.

While earning an engineering degree at Texas A&M University, Gaines volunteered in bird rehabilitation. He learned about injuries and rehab, diet, training, flight, and presentation while working with educational bird programs.

He became a permitted falconer, and when the opportunity arose to give a school presentation, he showed up with three of his own birds. By 2007, Gaines had established Wildlife Revealed, which is funded by donations and performance fees.

“By making it memorable with live birds, they will remember why vultures are important to the environment,” he says. “And when people see a falcon dive across an audience, they are blown away.”

The falcons, along with other birds of prey, perform at Renaissance festivals and at hundreds of schools, birding and wildlife festivals, museums, and special events.

“This is something you do for the love of the job, not the money,” says Gaines, a member of Blue-bonnet Electric Cooperative. “It’s a challenge but super fun.” He directs three teams of falconers, assistants and volunteers.

Working a few hours a day, the avian ambassadors earn their keep. Their keep isn’t cheap. A shipment of frozen mice that lasts 2–3 months costs \$1,600. Birds of prey need to eat the whole mouse or rat to get a nutritionally complete diet.

About half of Gaines’ birds come from animal rescue and rehab centers and can’t be released into the wild. Pierre the caracara, for example, can’t fly after a collision with a car. The rest of the birds, exotics like kookaburras and eagle-owls, come from licensed captive breeding programs.

Training and forming a bond with a bird can take from six weeks to a year and is an ongoing process. “It depends on the bird’s personality, too,” Gaines says. “Owls are hard to train. They are very distractible. Harris’ hawks are quick learners. Caracaras are smart but resistant to complying.”

Lawrence admits the ravens and similar birds such as crows and magpies have his full attention and admiration for their intelligence.

“If Obee gets loose, the next thing on his agenda is world domination,” he says. It’s not hard to imagine kettles of hawks, parliaments of owls and riots of kookaburras flying in to aid the raven.

The planet would be better off if they didn’t. ■

Kevin Gaines, founder and director of Wildlife Revealed, with Vegas, an aplomado falcon.



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# A Town Called Toadsuck

Long removed from maps, it was home for a governor as colorful as its name

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TRACI DABERKO

TEXAS HAS PERHAPS more than its share of cities and towns with unusual names. There's Cut and Shoot, Dime Box, Bug Tussle.

But perhaps the strangest was Toadsuck. You won't find it on a map today because it eventually became Collinsville, near the Oklahoma border in western Grayson County. For a relatively brief and shining period, though, Toadsuck was a real Texas town.

How did it get that strange name? I learned the story mostly from the Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas, which is a priceless resource.

Toadsuck got its start as the name of a saloon near the eventual eponymous town. Settlers arrived in the area in the late 1850s, and in 1869, a townsite was surveyed near the saloon, about a half-mile southeast of Collinsville today.

"The town of Toadsuck took the name of the saloon," the handbook says. "It may have been named by John Jones, an early settler and mill owner, after the city of Toad Suck, Arkansas" (which, by the way, does still exist).

"According to legend, the name was originally a reference to men consuming liquor until they swelled up like toads.

**TCP** Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



However, the word 'suck' was also commonly used in the region as a term for a whirlpool in a river. Hence, the town name may have simply meant 'toad whirlpool.'"

Bill Cannon, who wrote *Tales from Toadsuck Texas*, tells the story of William "Alfalfa Bill" Henry Davis Murray, who was born in Toadsuck in 1869. Murray would go on to become a colorful governor of Oklahoma in 1930. When he was running for president two years later, he returned to the place of his birth for William Murray Day.

The town of Toadsuck had a statue of Murray ready for dedication, but Alfalfa Bill was so drunk he could barely speak, Cannon wrote. You might say he was "swole up like a toad." The townsfolk were so exasperated and embarrassed that they had a team of horses pull the statue down and break it into pieces. Then they buried it.

Toadsuck faded into history when the Texas and Pacific Railway built its line west of the town in 1880, according to the TSHA. By 1887, most of its businesses and residents had moved to the tracks. The new town was named Collinsville when it was incorporated in the 1890s.

Thus, sadly, Toadsuck was no more. But the beautiful memory of that august name remains. ■

# Simply Salads

Keep cool in the kitchen with these tasty garden mixes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

I always find myself craving a Cobb salad when temperatures begin to rise. It's a hearty dinner with abundant toppings that deliver a variety of flavors in every bite. My Texas Cobb Salad is a fun twist on the classic that is so simple to make.



## Texas Cobb Salad

### SALAD

- 1 head romaine lettuce, coarsely chopped**
- 6 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and halved**
- 8 slices bacon, fully cooked and cut into bite-size pieces**
- 2 avocados, sliced**
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed**
- 2 ears corn, roasted and sliced off the cob**
- 16 ounces cooked beef fajitas, sliced**

### DRESSING

- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, minced, sauce reserved**
- 2 teaspoons reserved adobo sauce**
- 1 small shallot, thinly sliced**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**

**1. SALAD** Spread lettuce evenly across a large platter.

**2.** Arrange eggs in one row across the lettuce. Continue arranging each topping in its own row: bacon, avocado, beans and roasted corn. End by adding fajitas to edge of platter.

**3. DRESSING** In a small bowl, combine all dressing ingredients and stir to combine. Serve dressing with the salad.

**SERVES 6**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Tomato Cucumber Panela Salad.



## Strawberry Salad

KATHRYN SULLIVAN  
BANDERA EC

Beautiful, simple and elegant, this salad will leave an impression. Whip up Sullivan's salad for your mother-in-law, a first date or for a gathering. Summer sweet berries stun when paired with creamy goat cheese and a balsamic dressing.

### SALAD

- 1 package 50/50 blend baby spinach and spring salad mix (10 ounces)**
- 1 carton strawberries (16 ounces), hulled and sliced**
- 1 pint blueberries**
- 4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled**
- 6 slices bacon, fully cooked and broken into pieces**
- ½ cup chopped pecans**

### DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar**
- ¼ teaspoon Dijon mustard**

- 1. SALAD** In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients.
- 2. DRESSING** In another bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.
- 3.** Pour dressing over salad. With a serving spoon, gently toss to coat.

**SERVES 4-6**

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

## Thai Peanut Summer Salad

REESE JOHNSON  
TRINITY VALLEY EC



This salad from Reese, 14, has me grinning from ear to ear. The recipe, developed by Reese and her mother, packs in flavor, texture and tang. "I love to cook and bake," Reese says. "It all started when I was about 7. I had started making breakfast for myself as well as my family."

**SERVES 10**



### SALAD

- 4 cups chopped napa cabbage**
- 2 cups thinly chopped red cabbage**
- ½ red bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- ½ yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- 1 medium carrot, julienned**
- ½ medium cucumber, cut in half lengthwise and thinly sliced**
- ¼ red onion, thinly sliced**
- ½ cup honey-roasted peanuts**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- 6 radishes, thinly sliced, reserving a few slices for garnish**

### DRESSING

- ½ cup peanut butter**
- Juice of 1 lime**
- 2½ teaspoons sesame oil**
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce**
- 3 tablespoons honey**
- 2 cloves garlic**
- 1 tablespoon fresh peeled and minced ginger**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 2 teaspoons Sriracha sauce, or more to taste**
- 1 tablespoon seasoned rice vinegar**

- 1. SALAD** In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients.
- 2. DRESSING** Add all dressing ingredients to a blender. Blend until smooth.
- 3.** Pour half the dressing over the salad. With a serving spoon, mix to coat. Add more dressing as desired and garnish with reserved radish slices.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**HOLIDAY BITES** DUE JUNE 10

We want the best from Co-op Country kitchens for our November issue. Send us your holiday favorites by June 10 for a chance to win \$500.





## Texas Tabbouleh

CINDY BROWN  
PEDERNALES EC

Chilled salads are the ultimate summer meal. Prep, tuck away in the fridge and you're set for lunch or dinner. Brown's tabbouleh can be served alone or topped with fish or baked chicken. It's yummy the first day and even better the next.

### SALAD

- ½ cup bulgur wheat
- 1½ cups water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 ears corn, sliced off the cob
- ¾ cup diced carrots
- 1 bunch green onions, diced
- 1 large red bell pepper, stem and seeds removed, diced
- 4 stalks celery, diced
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 bunch parsley, finely chopped
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed

### DRESSING

- Juice of 2 lemons or limes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

1. SALAD Place bulgur wheat in a heatproof bowl. Bring water to a boil over

medium-high heat. Carefully pour boiling water over bulgur wheat. Let stand for 45 minutes, then drain well.

2. Heat olive oil in a medium skillet over high heat. Sauté corn and carrots until tender, about 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat.
3. In a large bowl, combine bulgur wheat, corn, carrots, green onions, bell pepper, celery, cucumber, parsley and beans. Stir to combine.
4. DRESSING In a separate bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.
5. Pour dressing over salad, stir to combine.
6. Refrigerate 24 hours. Serve chilled.

SERVES 6

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## We Brake for Steak

There's no need for menus at the Leona General Store

BY CHET GARNER

**IN MY LINE OF WORK**, it's normal to pass through a small town with ailing buildings and few visible signs of life. It isn't normal for one of those old wooden storefronts to have a line 150 Texans long, stretching clear into the next parking lot. I pulled over to find out what was happening at the Leona General Store, and after someone told me it was steak night, I had no choice but to get in line.

This special event on Friday and Saturday nights draws hordes from hundreds of miles to this vintage storefront on Texas 75 in Leona, less than a mile off Interstate 45, midway between Dallas and Houston. When the doors opened, the small store swallowed the entire line as folks spread across the creaking wooden floor. The walls are covered with knickknacks and farming equipment, just as you'd expect inside a 100-year-old general store.

Part of the magic of "the best little steakhouse in Texas" is its simplicity. There's no written menu since they're known for one entrée: rib-eye steaks. Each one is hand cut and cooked over hot coals. Everyone gets the same sides and salad bar.

The only choice customers make is how big they want their steak. The smallest is 10 ounces, and the largest ever eaten was more than 90 ounces. I decided to let that record stand and ordered a 12-ounce steak, which was at least 16 ounces. They admittedly don't weigh anything in the back, which works to the customer's benefit.

Owners Jerry and Cynthia House made laps through the building, making sure everyone was happy and well-fed. The steak was certainly one of the best I've ever eaten, but it's the small-town hospitality that will keep me and hundreds of my closest friends coming back. ■

ABOVE Chet is about to savor the Leona General Store's trademark steak.

**TCP** Join Chet as he visits "the best little steakhouse in Texas." And see all his Explorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

## JUNE 08

**Corsicana Endless Summer**, (903) 874-7792, [corsicanapalace.com](http://corsicanapalace.com)

**East Bernard Czech Kolache-Klobase Festival**, (979) 533-1902, [kkfest.com](http://kkfest.com)

**Terrell [8-9] North Texas Antique Tractor and Engine Club's Show and Pull**, (214) 497-1611, [north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net](http://north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net)

## 13

**Lockhart [13-15] Chisholm Trail Roundup**, (512) 398-2818, [lockhartchamber.com](http://lockhartchamber.com)

**Brenham [13-16, 20-23, 27-30] The Star-Spangled Girl**, (979) 830-8358, [unitybrenham.org](http://unitybrenham.org)

## 14

**Mount Pleasant Juneteenth Family Celebration**, (903) 575-4000, [mpcity.net](http://mpcity.net)

**Aransas Pass [14-16] Shrimporee**, (361) 758-2750, [aransaspass.org](http://aransaspass.org)

**Kerrville [14-15, 21-23, 28-30] The Charitable Sisterhood of the Second Trinity Victory Church**, (830) 896-9393, [caillouxperformingarts.com](http://caillouxperformingarts.com)

## 19

**Odessa [19-23] Juneteenth Celebration**, (432) 888-9276, [odessabcc.org](http://odessabcc.org)

## 21

**Stonewall [21-22] Peach JAMBoree**, (830) 644-2735, [stonewalltexas.com](http://stonewalltexas.com)

**Albany [21-22, 28-29] Fort Griffin Fandangle**, (325) 762-3838, [fortgriffinfandangle.com](http://fortgriffinfandangle.com)

22

**McKinney Night Out at the Heard**, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

25

**Corsicana [25, 27-30] Of Mice and Men**, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

27

**Luling [27-30] Watermelon Thump**, (830) 875-3878, watermelonthump.com

28

**New Braunfels [28-29] Red, White and Tuna**, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

**Pottsboro [28-29] Fink Fest**, (903) 786-6000, facebook.com/finktexas

29

**Brenham The Grand Ol' Americana Show**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

## JULY

03

**Waxahachie [3-4] Crape Myrtle Festival and Parade**, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

04

**Chappell Hill Independence Day Parade**, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

**New Braunfels July 4 Patriotic Parade and Program**, (830) 629-1572, sophienburg.com

**Amarillo [4-6] Will Rogers Range Riders Rodeo**, (806) 584-0733, wrrangeriders.com

**Rockdale [4-15] Sesquicentennial Event**, (512) 446-2511, rockdale150.com

### TCP Submit Your Event

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

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# Food and Cooking

"We gonna need a big ol' sausage,  
A big ol' plate of ranch-style beans.  
I could eat the heart of Texas.  
We gonna need some brand-new jeans."  
—From *Texas Cookin'* by Guy Clark

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

**1 DAVID MILLER**  
BANDERA EC  
A breakfast that shouts, "I love Texas!"

**2 ALLISON HEBERT**  
SAN BERNARD EC  
"This little guy is doing what he loves—cooking.  
Doesn't get any better than biscuits from scratch."

**3 MICHELE BENNETT**  
GVEC  
Fall cookies.

**4 KRISTEN BROWN**  
PEDERNALES EC  
Homemade wheat bread with blueberry jelly.



2



3



4

## Upcoming Contests

DUE JUN 10 Climbing High

DUE JUL 10 Mascots

DUE AUG 10 Young Photographers



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

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Food and Cooking photos from readers.



## Renewal in Blue

Bucolic summers in the Piney Woods leave an indelible mark

BY CLAUDIA SULLIVAN  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
JAMES O'BRIEN

**EVERY SUMMER** of my youth, I eagerly packed my bags, left the big city behind and traveled to the Piney Woods to live the life of a farm girl with my grandparents.

Those East Texas summer days were idyllic. Mornings began with the smell of bacon or ham cooking on the stove and skillet-fried toast with homemade apple or plum jelly. Lunch was always accompanied with rice, yellow and thick, made rich with butter and milk. The meal wasn't complete without blackberry cobbler made from berries we picked ourselves, battling thorns and yellow jackets while gathering the tart, wild fruit.

Promptly at 12:30 p.m., Mema settled in to shell peas and watch her "stories" on TV while Pa took his afternoon nap. I spent those sultry afternoons outside

whispering secrets to Boy, the old bird dog, and to Lady Bird, the orphaned calf we raised on a bottle, or rocking in the tractor tire swing hung under the huge pecan tree.

Mema, Pa and I spent nights in the screened-in sleeping porch, cool and bathed in moonlight. Lying in my bed, I heard the whine of diesel trucks on the distant highway and the whirring of the summer breeze through the woven, mesh screen. The night air smelled of rose blossoms and honeysuckle.

It was the scent of summer.

The memories of those summer days have not faded. Mema and Pa are gone now and so is the old farmhouse. Some years ago, on a cold night not long after midnight, the house went up in flames. Some said it was itinerants carelessly discarding a cigarette. Others said it was lightning, though no one recalls a storm that night.

I believe the old house caught ablaze all by itself. The warmth of all those memories heated to spontaneous combustion. The house saved up all those memories until one night there was nothing but glowing embers—except for what lived on in the minds and hearts of those who were sheltered and loved there.

Nothing stands now except two large pecan trees and the old tractor tire swing.

But each spring something wondrous and beautiful happens. In the place where my grandparents' house once stood, a dense blanket of bluebonnets blooms.

Like the color of the sky or the gingham dresses little girls used to wear, the wave of flowers defines the layout of the house. No one recalls ever seeing bluebonnets in that part of town.

Maybe the heat of the fire raised dormant seeds to life. Or perhaps that little patch of earth needed something cheery and pretty to grace its sudden emptiness.

Whatever the reason, I know Mema and Pa would be pleased. ■

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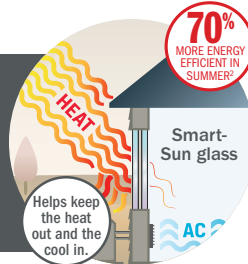
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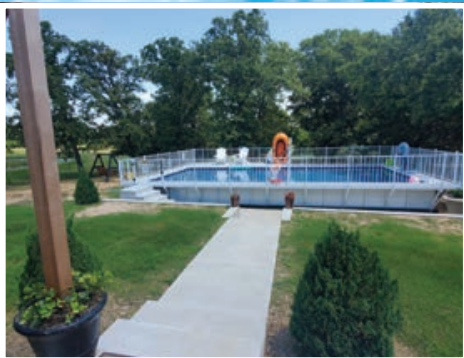


<sup>1</sup>**DETAILS OF OFFER:** Offer expires 7/31/2024. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy one (1) window or entry/patio door, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 40% off, and 12 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase four (4) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 6/1/2024 and 7/31/2024. 40% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Additional \$100 off your purchase, minimum purchase of four (4) required, taken after initial discount(s), when you purchase by 7/31/2024. Subject to credit approval. Interest is billed during the promotional period, but all interest is waived if the purchase amount is paid before the expiration of the promotional period. Financing for GreenSky® consumer loan programs is provided by federally insured, federal and state chartered financial institutions without regard to age, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or familial status. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. CA License CLSB #1050316. Central CA License #1096271. License #RCE-50303. FL License #CGC1527613. OR License #198571. WA License #RENEWAW856K6. WA License #RENEWAP877BM. All other license numbers available upon request. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. \*Values are based on comparison of Renewal by Andersen® double-hung window U-Factor to the U-Factor for clear dual-pane glass non-metal frame default values from the 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018 International Energy Conservation Code "Glazed Fenestration" Default Tables. <sup>2</sup>Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading national full-service window replacement companies. January 2024 Reputation.com. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are trademarks of their respective owners. © 2024 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. RBA13747 <sup>3</sup>Using U.S. and imported parts.

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