

REMEMBERING THAT
FIRST LIGHT BULB

DON'T MIND THOSE
ALLIGATORS

WINDMILLER KEEPS
WITS IN A PINCH

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRI-COUNTY EC MEMBERS

AUGUST 2024

On the Road Again

A photographer
piles on the miles to
capture rural Texas

**TRI-COUNTY
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

I'm thinking more today about how to protect the money I've earned.

I've learned a lot of things over the years, talking to all sorts of experts in all sorts of fields. But one of the most important lessons I learned was from two former Directors of the U.S. Mint, who taught me everything I needed to know about the importance of protecting my savings with physical gold and silver.

In 25 years of working dirty jobs, the thought of a diversified portfolio really didn't cross my mind—but the more I learn, the better I feel about buying gold and silver from U.S. Money Reserve.

Is gold right for you? That's not for me to say. You've got to do your own due diligence. All I know is that today, it's not enough to simply work hard—you also have to save smart. So, call the number below. The folks at U.S. Money Reserve are standing by to help.



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August 2024



12

06 Open Roads, Open Eyes

Over five decades of crisscrossing Texas, a photographer learns to slow down to really see.

Photo essay by Wyatt McSpadden

In the Beginning

Few recall when electric co-ops lit up the countryside; Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work.

*Story by Tom Widlowski
Photo by Caytlyn Calhoun*

ON THE COVER
On the way north to Amarillo, just after crossing the Prairie Dog Town Fork of the Red River.
Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

ABOVE
Katie Phillips enjoys quilting—and air conditioning, ample lighting and watching TV.
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 LBJ's Sense and Humor <i>By W.F. Strong</i>
26	TCP Kitchen Party Drinks <i>By Vianney Rodriguez</i>
30	Hit the Road A Jaw-Dropping Journey <i>By Chet Garner</i>
33	Focus on Texas Photo Contest: Textures
34	Observations Friends in High Places <i>By Sam W. Young</i>



Rural Showcase

OVER THE NEXT YEAR, seven Texas cities will host a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibition that examines the evolution of small towns as the American population moved into urban areas over the past 125 years.

Crossroads: Change in Rural America debuts August 24 in San Augustine. After six weeks in deep East Texas, the exhibition will move on to weekslong stays in Clifton, Brenham, Rockport, Buffalo Gap and San Elizario. The tour through Texas will end in Bandera on August 2, 2025.

To learn more, visit museumonmainstreet.org.



August 20 World Mosquito Day

Don't forget to celebrate
World Mosquito Day. Wait,
maybe not. Scratch that.



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FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Young Photographers

RECOMMENDED READING

True or false: People used to believe you could dynamite rain out of the sky. They sure did, as we explained in *Rain, You Blasted Sky!* from August 2013.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I can't wait to learn ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our June prompt: **The next book you should read is ...**

The Time It Never Rained by Elmer Kelton.
You will laugh. You will also cry.

JANIS HAGAN
NAVARRO COUNTY EC
CORNICANA

The Madstone by Elizabeth Crook.
An amazing historical novel based in Texas just after the Civil War.

SUSAN ERVIN
PEDERNALES EC
GEORGETOWN

The Women by Kristin Hannah. An eye-opening book about the women of Vietnam.

DANI MACNEIL
BANDERA EC
PIPE CREEK

Visit our website to see more responses.

JUNE 2024 We Brake for Steak

“Chet Garner needs to go back to the Leona General Store on Thursday nights, when it’s just some of the best catfish anywhere.”

DARRELL HUTTO
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC
JEWETT



COURTESY CHET GARNER

Traveling South, Traveling East

I loved the idea of emotional healing by traveling to every state park [Trailblazer, June 2024]. I was a little disappointed that no South Texas parks were mentioned.

My favorite story in the issue was *Renewal in Blue*. I traveled to East Texas with the young girl and loved the ending with the bluebonnets.

Penny Brown
Magic Valley EC
Rio Hondo

Multiplying at the Sixes

As an avid fan of the *Yellowstone* TV series, it was captivating to learn about the Burnett family and how the Four Sixes Ranch began and grew into one of the 10 largest ranches in the state [Sixes on the Small Screen, May 2024].

Sarah Brown
Bluebonnet EC
Cedar Creek



B.J. HINKLE

Avenging Uncle

James Franklin Norfleet was my great-uncle [Payback Time, May 2024]. I remember when we would visit the Norfleets at their home in Hale County in the 1950s, and Aunt Eliza would regale us with stories of earlier days.

Uncle Frank awed us kids as he would always strap on his pistol belt before going outside. For kids growing up listening to *The Lone Ranger*, we were quite impressed.

Jim K. Hudgins
San Bernard EC
Bellville

Roadside Attractions

It seems to me that Michael Ford has discovered and perfected a new art form on the Texas landscape [Overpass Easels, May 2024]. His work is extremely expressive of Texas and unique in each example.

Mary E. Specia
GVEC
McQueeney

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.

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American MainStreet Publications

Open Roads, Open Eyes

Over five decades
of crisscrossing Texas,
a photographer learns
to slow down to really see





PHOTO ESSAY BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

When I was younger and living in Amarillo, it always seemed important to get where I was going and back as soon as possible.

For a few years after a divorce, my two boys and their mom lived in San Marcos. And so a couple of times a month, I'd make that 500-plus mile drive as fast as I could.

When I abandoned the Panhandle and moved to Austin, my freelance photography business kicked into a higher gear. The jobs were in every direction, in and around my new city.

I never griped about the mileage, but as I matured, I did start listening to my eyes. I made it a rule that if I saw something that caught my attention at 70 mph and I couldn't get it out of my mind after a couple miles, I'd go back to get a picture—or at least to visit and decide if what I saw was worth a return trip at a particular time of day.

The drives are much more mellow these days after 50 years as a professional photographer, and I navigate using a spiral-bound detail map of Texas counties. Driving seems to be the second-most important skill in my line of work.

Of course, skill No. 1 is making a good picture upon reaching my destination. Most often the job involves capturing a portrait of someone who has accomplished something a magazine editor thinks is worthy of a story. But sometimes it's capturing the feel, the presence of a place.

I'm pretty sure I've driven a million miles in Texas, but now I do it a mile at a time. That's how the pictures in these pages were made, driving slow(ish), with eyes wide open. ■

I know my way around the Amarillo area, having lived there until I was 40. I was joyriding and admiring the late-day clouds when the lonely little tree appeared on the horizon.



Early morning on the road between Earth and Dimmit, in the Panhandle, familiar territory from my early years making a living shooting for seed and cattle operations. I hadn't seen such a tall silage mound, and the man with his pitchfork caught my eye.





I was passing through Hico on my way to the Metroplex when I spotted this little house. It took some coaxing for the woman to pose.





ABOVE I have a collection of barbed wire, plastic and wind pictures. Artsy pictures of trash.

LEFT A blue Dodge seems to have a permanent parking spot between Sandy Fork and Luling.

OPPOSITE A classic farmhouse, newly plowed field and epic sky near Granger, in Williamson County. Irresistible.



In the Beginning

**Few recall when electric cooperatives lit up the countryside;
Katie Phillips remembers every bit of her dad's life-changing work**

Katie Phillips is old enough to remember the dark ages—when nightfall at her family's farm outside Coleman meant navigating by the shadowy illumination offered by carbide and coal-oil lamps and lanterns. When much of the work on her dad's dairy farm—milking, separating and bottling—happened before sunrise and without the benefit of electricity.

"It's a hard life," says Katie, who turns 97 next month. For her and her brother and two sisters growing up in the 1930s, there wasn't much free time for fun, and before electricity, there was no reading or playing games at night.

Milking started every day at 3 a.m., and a few hours later, Katie's dad, Charlie Pitts, was making the first of his twice-

daily deliveries of Oak Grove Dairy Farm milk to homes, stores and cafés around Coleman, south of Abilene, on the western Central Texas plains.

It never escaped Pitts' notice that just 4½ miles east, in town, folks had the luxury of electricity.

Back then in rural America, those 4½ miles might as well have been a million. Electricity stopped where the profits did, and in 1936, fewer than 3% of Texas farms had electricity.

But before long, farmers, ranchers and their neighbors

Katie Phillips' dad helped create Coleman County Electric Cooperative. She saw the co-op's first light bulb flicker on in 1937.

Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home.

pooled their money and worked together to build the electric cooperatives that lit up the countryside and brought a better quality of life.

Katie Phillips is among few living Americans who witnessed that important history. She had a front-row seat.

Katie turned 9 in 1936, the year her dad became a local leader in the cooperative movement that was in its early stages.

In those days, the town of Coleman had not only electricity but phone service too, and Pitts realized he needed that to keep up with milk orders. To get it, he paid to have a line strung from Coleman, across a creek, to the farm. Katie remembers their party line phone number: 4-0-0.

“I always wanted something better,” Pitts told the family. Getting electricity to the farm was another matter.

Pitts traveled to Washington, D.C., to learn about the Rural Electrification Administration, which provided loans for the creation of cooperatives. He then visited neighboring farms, asking folks to contribute \$5 to help start a co-op.

Finally, in April 1937, the first Coleman County Electric Cooperative light bulb flickered on in the Pitts farmhouse—an honor befitting the co-op’s first board president.

“It was a great day for everybody because it was a completion of a long journey for Daddy,” Katie says. The Pitts kids had better lighting for their schoolwork, and Dad had a perfect place to read the Fort Worth newspaper he always had in the house.

Soon lines brought power to the dairy barn, where milking machines freed up farmhands.

Katie remembers the first appliance in the house—a two-door refrigerator picked up at Gray Mercantile in town. It meant no more lugging ice home. “I just know that it was one of the most wonderful feelings there was when we could go to that refrigerator and open both doors and look in there and see what was in it,” Katie says.

Decades later, Katie spends a lot of her days knitting under a lamp in a corner of her living room in a 100-year-old farmhouse 6 miles east of Coleman. Electricity is too commonplace to warrant much thought. It powers her iPhone, tablet, two TVs and brand-new Singer sewing machine.

She’s known around Coleman County EC for being there at the dawn of the co-op. When the co-op held its 85th annual meeting in July 2023, she was there, and it was her 85th annual meeting too. She has attended every last one.

“The first light bulb was the beginning of an amazing future for all of us,” says Synda Smith, the co-op’s CEO and

general manager. “There are few businesses that have a past connection like this. It feels so good to know that Katie still feels like we are doing what our earlier leaders wanted us to do by continuing to uphold the co-op business model.”

Katie has farmed most of her life around Coleman, except for two years in high school at Our Lady of the Lake in San Antonio. She dated Harold Phillips for a little less than a year—sometimes on horseback—and they married in 1948 when she was 21.

Together they farmed for 66 years, until he died in 2014. Harold was one of the first farmers in the area to grow sunflowers and to use parallel terracing. They had five children, four of whom are still living—all within five miles of Katie. Two of the sons are farmers.

By her 50th wedding anniversary, Katie figured she was ready to give up farming, and she broke that news to Harold.

“I told him, ‘I think I’ve done enough now,’ ” Katie says. “And he said, ‘What would encourage you to do a little more?’

“I said, ‘You buy me an air-conditioned, four-wheel-drive tractor.’ ”

And that’s how she ended up the proud owner of a John Deere tractor that’s still in the family.

Katie, who says she needed no prescriptions until she turned 90, has other family heirlooms that she holds dear: A six-leaf table brought by covered wagon from Louisiana by Katie’s great-grandparents in the mid-1800s graces her dining room, and there’s a couple of glider-style chairs that her mother bought in New York and the chair her dad used to rock her to sleep.

But the greatest treasure might be Charlie Pitts’ old desk chair, the very one where he worked out the wrinkles and legal details of creating the electric utility that gave his kids—and his community—a brighter future.

And Katie still has a direct connection to the co-op office in town. One of her six grandchildren, Kathreyn Portis, is a member services representative at Coleman County EC, where she has worked almost four years.

“My family’s legacy in this county is a big one, so to get to be able to continue that means a lot to me,” Portis says. “Family isn’t just blood relatives. It’s these people,” she says of her three dozen colleagues at the co-op.

They all follow in the footsteps of a dairy farmer who wanted to leave the dark ages behind.

As Katie knits or quilts or watches her beloved Dallas Cowboys, she joins nearly 5,000 fellow co-op members in her community living a better life because of co-op power.

But she alone remembers that day in 1937 when her dad helped that first light bulb come on.

“It was magical,” Katie says. “It’s just the greatest thing in the world. When he found out that you could get electricity, he said, ‘We’re going to do it.’ ” ■



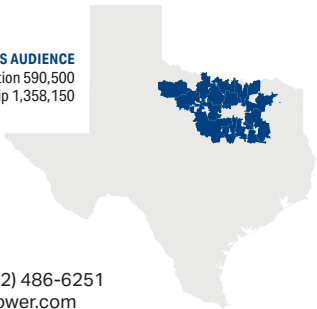
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**SCOTT
SPENCE**

PRESIDENT/
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There have been some exciting developments at Tri-County Electric Cooperative, with the continued focus on enhanced member offerings and financial health to provide better service. The team's commitment to providing safe, reliable, and affordable electric service remains unwavering, and we are pleased to introduce a new billing option that aligns with these goals. There have been additional efforts to tighten our financial belt and realize significant savings, ensuring the cooperative's financial health and sustainability.

INTRODUCING A PREPAID BILLING OPTION

Starting this month, Tri-County Electric Cooperative is offering a new Prepaid Billing option, designed to provide greater flexibility and control over electricity expenses. This new billing option allows members to prepay for electricity and establish a credit balance on their account before consuming power. Each day's electric usage will be billed and deducted from the prepaid balance, offering a transparent and straightforward way to manage energy costs.

Prepaid Billing is particularly beneficial for members who prefer to pay as they go, want to control when they make payments, or wish to avoid paying a deposit. This program empowers you to take charge of your electricity expenses, giving you the freedom to budget more effectively and avoid unexpected bills.

We understand that financial flexibility is important, especially in today's economic climate. By voluntarily enrolling in Prepaid Billing, you can monitor daily usage, receive low balance alerts, and replenish your account at your convenience. Tri-County Electric Cooperative's goal is to make managing your electricity expenses as seamless and stress-free as possible.

PROGRESS IN FINANCIAL HEALTH

Progress has been made in our financial health initiatives. Over the past four months, the Tri-County Electric Cooperative team has been diligently working to identify and implement cost-saving measures that do not compromise safety, reliability, or service quality.

Internally, we have scrutinized our 2024 budget, pinpointing areas where we can tighten our belt without affecting core operations. This thorough review has led to several key decisions that enhance our financial efficiency:

- 1. Budget Management:** Budget items have been identified that can be adjusted or deferred without significantly impacting service. This careful evaluation ensures that every dollar is spent wisely.
- 2. Asset Optimization:** We have made strategic decisions regarding real estate assets. Unutilized or underutilized properties have been identified and placed on the market, allowing us to convert these assets into financial resources that benefit the cooperative and its members.

I want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the entire Tri-County Electric Cooperative team for their dedication and hard work in this multi-year initiative to manage our debt levels and ensure the cooperative's financial health. These efforts are vital to maintaining the foundation that supports the cooperative's mission and values.

Scott Spence
President & CEO

INTRODUCING PREPAID BILLING

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cooperative giving



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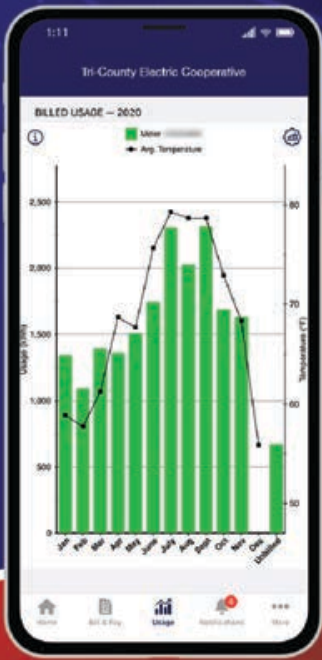
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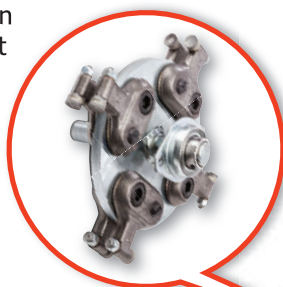
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Catch a Wampus Cat

Irreverent Texans imported a mythical creature created in Appalachia

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR CALLERY

CHEROKEE LEGEND tells of a young woman named Running Deer who once defeated an evil spirit, called Ew'ah, that she believed was responsible for driving her husband insane. Running Deer drew strength from the spirit of a mythical mountain cat but was afterward relegated to the deep woods and remote mountain passes of North Carolina, where she terrorized and drove insane anyone unfortunate enough to glimpse her.

Another legend has Running Deer as a young shape-shifter who slayed a catlike demon and became her tribe's spirit protector.

This is likely how the wampus cat of lore was born in the Appalachian Mountains, probably in East Tennessee or western North Carolina. And that's why all wampus cats—including those on the gridiron in Texas—have a Cherokee lineage.

Appalachian settlers took the story from there and anglicized Ew'ah into a wampus cat, which likely derives from the 1840s slang term "catawampus" or, as some prefer, "cattywampus."

If something was cattywampus, it was peculiar or frightening (likely influenced by the term "cata-mount," another word for a cougar), and the wampus cat of lore can be as peculiar as a storyteller wants it to be. In some accounts, it has six legs (two for walking, four for fighting), walks upright and swims like a mink.

It didn't take long for the wampus cat to become the subject of stories designed to scare children into doing as they were told.

"Parents are telling us that they are experiencing less trouble keeping their children in after dark since the report gained circulation that the Wampus had been seen here," *The Greeneville Daily Sun* in Tennessee reported in 1918.

The wampus cat began showing up in Texas newspapers in the early 1900s, most notably as the subject of a series of stories by frontier journalist and historian Don Hampton Biggers in a satirical Rotan newspaper called *Billy Goat Always Buttin' In*. Biggers had come to the small town northwest of Abilene in 1907 to establish a respectable weekly paper, but he published satire on the side as "a journal of such things as the editor takes a notion to write."

When he needed to fill space in the paper, Biggers spun a series of yarns about the wampus cat, which

he called "a cross between a wildcat, badger and a lobo wolf, with fangs 2 inches long and claws that could peel the bark off of a mesquite tree."

The locals knew it was a hoax, but visitors to the region often left Rotan dreading an encounter with the wampus cat of Biggers' imagination.

Biggers' son, Earl Biggers, in a 1961 interview with historian and scholar Seymour V. Connor, said his father came up with most of the wampus cat tales at the Rotan barber shop, where he and his pals would concoct outlandish stories.

In 1908, the same year Biggers was chronicling the creature's depredations in Fisher County, *The Houston Post* chronicled the game-by-game results of a local baseball team called the Wampus Cats. Since then, a number of schools have chosen the wampus cat as a mascot, including Itasca High School here in Texas.

As with descriptions of the cat itself, there is more than one story about how Itasca, which is between Fort Worth and Waco, chose the beast as its mascot.

A 1996 newspaper story quoted lifelong Itasca Nancy Bowman, who ran the school's special services, as saying that in the 1920s the high school team was having trouble finding a nickname. During a raucous postgame locker room celebration, a player shouted, "Wow, we were really wampus cats tonight!" Itasca had its mascot.

A Dallas radio station has called the wampus cat "the most quintessential Texas high school football mascot," but it's not uniquely Texan. Schools in Conway, Arkansas; Atoka, Oklahoma; Leesville, Louisiana; and as far north as Clark Fork, Idaho, have also adopted the mythical creature as a mascot.

In 2003, a collegiate wood-bat baseball team in Albemarle, North Carolina, brought the creature closer to home. The Uwharrie Wampus Cats square off against the likes of the Carolina Disco Turkeys and the Boone Bigfoots.

Biggers and the other Rotan barbershop regulars would be delighted to know the creature they helped create has come full circle. ■



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



When Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller were campaigning to win their party's nomination for president in 1964, LBJ heard that both men were "cutting way back on their visits to California." Johnson said, "Reminds me of a case in Texas where a man wanted to run for sheriff against an unpopular incumbent named Uncle Johnny.

"Man asked his friend Dave if he thought he had a chance. Dave said, 'Well, I guess it depends on who meets the most people.' 'Yeah, that's what I was thinking,' said the man. Dave explained further, 'If he meets the most people, you'll win, and if you meet the most people, he'll win.'"

LBJ also told of a "boy in Texas who was very poor and tired of seeing his mama struggling so much to feed her family. So he sent a letter to God asking for \$100 for his mama. The letter got forwarded eventually to the postmaster general in Washington, D.C.

"He took pity on the boy and put \$20 in an envelope and mailed it to him. Two weeks later, the postmaster got a letter back from the boy that said, 'Dear God, thank you for sending the money, but next time don't send it through Washington cuz they took 80% of it.'"

Goodwin said she was happy to see that LBJ is getting long-deserved credit for the laws and policies he passed in his time, like the Voting Rights Act, as well as the institutions he helped found, like NASA and the Public Broadcasting Service.

If only he could have known how much progress his work would bring. He certainly would have smiled—and had a story ready. ■

Sense and Humor

LBJ's unique penchant for storytelling helped him navigate politics

BY W.F. STRONG

WHEN MOST PEOPLE think of Lyndon B. Johnson, they don't necessarily envision a man with a great sense of humor. After all, he was president during turbulent times.

"When the burdens of the presidency seem unusually heavy," he once joked, "I always remind myself it could be worse. I could be a mayor."

Though he didn't have the public eloquence of Kennedy or King, he was charismatic. He was a wonderful storyteller.

Writer and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin worked closely with the president for seven years, and because of her professional relationship with him, I would argue that her biography—out of all the biographies about the 36th presi-

dent—is the most humanizing.

No writer knew him better.

Goodwin told me she never tired of listening to him, though eventually she came to realize that his stories were not all completely true. Some were apocryphal, she said, and like Abraham Lincoln, LBJ used stories to animate his points, skewer his adversaries, and amuse and entertain.

He learned his storytelling, Goodwin said, from his father and grandfather, growing up in the Hill Country. Johnson would listen at night as they talked politics on the porch with local power brokers.

My own father, a great admirer of the president, shared a couple of LBJ stories with me long ago.

Party Drinks

Find fruity refreshments—and a guide for mocktail options

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Spending every summer in Mexico growing up, nothing made me happier than sipping on a tall glass of *agua de sandía* (watermelon water) sold by local street vendors. It's a bright and refreshing drink made from watermelon, water, lime juice and sugar. August is peak watermelon season in Texas, so I'm excited to share this beloved drink from my childhood.

Agua de Sandía

8 cups diced watermelon

4 cups cold water

¼ cup sugar

Juice of 1 lime

Tajín, for the rim

Lime wedge, for the rim

1. Blend watermelon and water until smooth. Depending on the size of your blender, you may need to divide this into batches, blending half the watermelon and half the water at a time.
2. Strain into a pitcher. Stir in sugar and lime juice.
3. Spread Tajín on a plate. Run lime wedge around the rim of each glass and dip into Tajín. Serve over ice in Tajín-rimmed glasses.

SERVES 8

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Hibiscus Mint Tequila Punch.





Lemon Pucker Martini

DEBI OROZCO
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

I love a lightly sweet but bold-flavored cocktail, and that’s exactly what this Lemon Pucker Martini recipe offers. It’s a perfect balance between tart and sweet and proves incredibly refreshing.

- 2 tablespoons sugar, for the rim
- 1 lemon wedge, for the rim
- 2 ounces vodka
- 1 ounce fresh lemon juice
- ½ ounce limoncello
- ½ ounce orange-flavored liqueur
- 1 teaspoon agave
- Lemon slice, for garnish

1. Spread sugar on a plate. Run lemon wedge around the rim of a cocktail glass and dip into sugar. Place glass in the freezer until ready to serve.
2. Add vodka, lemon juice, limoncello, orange-flavored liqueur and agave to a cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously.
3. Strain into chilled, sugar-rimmed cocktail glass. Garnish with lemon slice.

SERVES 1



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SERVES 6

- 1 can frozen pink lemonade (12 ounces)
- 12 ounces vodka
- 4 cans light beer (12 ounces each)
- Frozen mixed berries, for garnish

1. Add frozen lemonade and vodka to a pitcher. (You can use the lemonade can to measure 12 ounces of vodka.) Stir until lemonade is dissolved.
2. Add beer and stir to combine.
3. Pour into ice-filled glasses and top with frozen berries.

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Texas Bluebonnet

CAROL BRADY
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It's time to pop open the bubbly and celebrate the waning days of summer. The addition of sparkling wine to this cocktail makes it feel a bit elegant, which is always a plus, but this festive drink can easily be whipped up for four or doubled for a crowd.

½ cup blue Curaçao liqueur
1½ cups lemonade
2 cups sparkling wine
Juice of 1 lemon
Orange slices, for garnish
Lemon slices, for garnish
Maraschino cherries, for garnish

1. Fill a pitcher with ice. Add blue Curaçao liqueur, lemonade, sparkling wine and lemon juice. Stir.
2. Serve over ice, garnished with fruit on skewers.

SERVES 4

TCP Vianney Rodriguez features many more cocktail recipes on sweetlifebake.com and in *Latin Twist: Traditional and Modern Cocktails*, the book she co-authored with Yvette Marquez-Sharpnack.

From Cocktail to Mocktail

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Nonalcoholic cocktails don't have to be bland. Here are a few tips and tricks to keep your party hopping:

Replace sparkling wine with soda water for a guilt-free bubbly effect.

A mix of cranberry and grape juice produces a delicious sangrialike option.

Ginger beer punches up the flavor and adds a warm kick to a mocktail.

Nonalcoholic spirits are becoming more common in stores. From vodka to mezcal and nonalcoholic beer and wine, options are hitting shelves, ready to help you shake up a mocktail.



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Jaw-Dropping Journey

Brazos Bend State Park has acres and acres of alligators

BY CHET GARNER

I LIKE ZOOS. The cages and fences offer comfort when staring into the eyes of an apex predator. But there's something exhilarating about stepping into a natural habitat and encountering a wild creature in its element.

And that's the draw of Brazos Bend State Park, which comprises nearly 5,000 acres of wetland marsh and coastal prairie in Fort Bend County. Visit on a sunny day and you're almost guaranteed to have an encounter with its most famous residents—American alligators.

Driving into the park felt like visiting a movie set, amid oak trees dripping with Spanish moss that create a canopy over the road. It's hard to believe that I was only 40 miles from downtown Houston. I stopped into the visitor center and asked where to find the gators. They simply pointed me toward the park's 37 miles of trails and said, "That way."

It turns out hundreds of alligators inhabit the park, and it's not uncommon to see 40–50 on a good day, in addition to the park's other reptiles, amphibians and 300-plus species of birds.

I set off on the trail surrounding 40-Acre Lake, and it wasn't long before I came face-to-face with a living, breathing dinosaur. It was at least 7 feet long and sunning on the edge of the trail. I cautiously passed by, giving it a Texas nod on my way. Twenty feet down the trail was another and then another.

A ranger assured me that in the park's 40 years, no one has been injured, much less killed, by an alligator. They're fairly docile creatures and prefer flight over fight when it comes to humans. Even so, I didn't want to tempt fate and was more than happy enjoying them all from a very safe distance. ■

ABOVE Chet keeps a safe distance from one of the hundreds of gators that roam freely.

TCP From the safety of your screen, join Chet as he wanders among the gators. Watch the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



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AUGUST

8

McKinney Thomas Craig, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

9

Alpine [9–10] Big Bend Ranch Rodeo, (432) 294-1640, bigbendranchrodeo.com

10

Chappell Hill Wine and Cheese Stroll, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

14

Brady [14–17] Heart of Texas Honky Tonk Festival, (325) 597-1895, heartoftexascountry.com

Corsicana [14–17] Red, (903) 872-5421, thewllac.com

17

Brenham Peter, Paul and Mary Alive; (979) 337-7240; thebarnhillcenter.com

Santo Southwest Open Chili Championship, (940) 733-6086, casichili.net

22

Fredericksburg [22–25] Gillespie County Fair, (830) 997-2359, gillespiefair.com

23

Decatur [23–24] Wise County Guild Quilt Show, (817) 991-3407, wisecountyquiltguild.org

24

Lubbock Book Festival, (806) 775-3634, lubbockbookfest.com

Castroville [24–25]
St. Louis Day Celebration,
(830) 931-2826,
saintlouisday.com

27

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

29

Uvalde [29–Sept. 1]
Palomino Fest & Pro Rodeo,
palominofest.com

30

Fredericksburg [30–31]
Vereins Quilt Show,
vereinsquiltguild.org

Marfa [30–Sept. 1] **Lights**
Festival, (432) 217-6777,
marfachamberofcommerce.org

Granbury [30–Sept. 2]
Labor Day Weekend
Festival, (682) 936-4550,
granburysquare.com

31

Sunrise Beach Village
Sip & Stroll, (713) 299-1728,
sunrisebeachtx.gov

SEPTEMBER

7

Luling **Luling Foundation**
Youth Grill-Off, (830) 875-
2438, lulingfoundation.org

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

New Braunfels **Donny**
Edwards: Tribute to the King,
(830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

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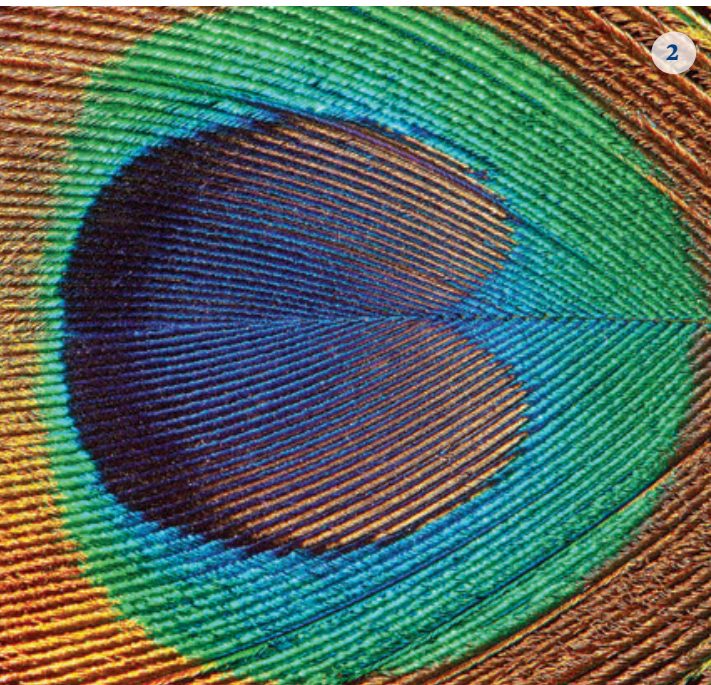
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TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Textures photos from readers.



Friends in High Places

He was known for saving windmills, but one day he saved a whole lot more

BY SAM W. YOUNG
ILLUSTRATION BY
KEVIN HOWDESHELL

DAD CAME HOME from work one day with his left hand in a big bandage. He had driven himself to a hospital, where his fingers were repaired by a surgeon. One finger was almost severed but was put back together and ultimately saved.

When I was young, he worked for West Texas Lumber Co. in San Angelo, the local Aermotor Windmill dealer. Later he worked on his own. Ranch owners for miles around knew he was the man to call if a windmill needed repairs or replacement from the 1930s into the '80s. The cattle and sheep had to have water.

My brother and I are firmly convinced that no one man installed more windmills than our father. He was still climbing the contraptions after his 80th birthday and after he sold his business.

Working on these machines was dan-

gerous, even for a professional. Windmillers free-climbed and stood with a helper on a platform—untethered—as they made their repairs.

Aermotor windmills pivot on a vertical mast, with all the weight sitting on a washer inside a small cavity just under the motor. The motor has to be lifted a few inches to replace that washer.

To lift the windmill, with all the weight of the mill and the sucker rods, a chain is tied to the push rod and the tower and then a helper has to turn the wheel by hand and hold it.

Dad always had to have a helper, of course, and I was usually his helper in the summertime and over Christmas breaks.

There were days when we would load the pickup in San Angelo with the parts of a new windmill, the rods and pipe, sand, gravel, cement—everything needed for installation. I remember once when we drove to a new well on King Mountain, south of Odessa, assembled the tower and mill, raised it up with the pickup, dug the anchors by hand, and had it pumping water before sundown.

But I wasn't Dad's helper that fateful day south of San Angelo.

On that day, the chain must have slipped, allowing the weight of the rotor assembly to smash his fingers. He didn't say so, but what else could it have been?

There was something else he didn't mention until a few days later.

His helper had reacted to the sight of the blood and started to pass out. Dad reached out and grabbed the man with his right hand to keep him from falling off the windmill platform.

I don't know just how the issue was resolved from that point, but I do know this: While Dad's left hand was trapped, he saved a man's life that day with his right hand—the day he came home with the big bandage. ■

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— J. Fitzgerald, VA



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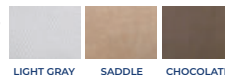
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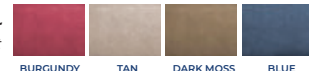
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