

UNEARTHING ARTIFACTS
IN WEST TEXAS

JUNETEENTH'S LONG PATH
ACROSS AMERICA

STAUNCH COMPETITOR
FINALLY WEARS OUT

Texas Coop Power

FOR TRI-COUNTY EC MEMBERS

JUNE 2023

Comfort Food

New food editor
Vianney Rodriguez
opens her kitchen
to TCP readers

**TRI-COUNTY
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16



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June 2023



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Scratching the Surface

West Texas ranchers team up with researchers to unearth pieces of history.

*By Eileen Mattei
Photos by Dave Shafer*

12 'On Juneteenth'

A Pulitzer Prize-winning historian describes the holiday's long path out of her home state.

*Excerpt by Annette Gordon-Reed
Illustration by John Jay Cabuay*

ON THE COVER

New food editor Vianney Rodriguez in her studio kitchen, Cocina Gris.
Photo by Jason David Page

ABOVE

Joey and Laurie Roland show teeth from an extinct three-toed horse at their ranch.
Photo by Dave Shafer

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Making Magic With Vianney

MEET VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, the Corpus Christi foodie who will be inviting readers into her kitchen every month as *TCP*'s new food editor. You first met Vianney in December 2020, when she wrote in delicious detail about *pan dulce*.

She fell in love with cooking as a child in Aransas Pass. "Growing up watching my *abuelita* and mami cook together in perfect sync ... They were creating magic. I wanted to be a part of this world and have been cooking ever since."

Vianney—"simply say the letters V-N-A"—started her blog, Sweet Life, in 2009, joining the online conversations that she saw as "mini love letters to food." Her passion kept growing. "I have authored two cookbooks—*Latin Twist*, a cocktail book featuring cocktails from Latin countries, and *The Tex-Mex Slow Cooker*."

Today she works out of her studio kitchen, Cocina Gris—gray kitchen—where she can't wait to dive into more reader recipes from Co-op Country.



“Don’t be told something is impossible. There’s always a way.”

—ROBERT RODRIGUEZ

FINISH THIS SENTENCE THANKS, DAD, FOR ...

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 April prompt: **I drove all night to ...**

Find myself *still* in the great state of Texas!

ROXANNE NEWMAN
VIA FACEBOOK

Be by my mother’s bedside in her final hours.

ELLEN ROZNECK COULTER
VIA FACEBOOK

Be at the gate when he got a weekend leave.

MARTHA BEIMER
VIA FACEBOOK

Get back to Texas, and I kissed the ground when I did.

RICHELLE NASH
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
SHERMAN

Get to Concan after heavy spring rains so I could float the Frio.

LISA HOLLOWAY FITZSIMMONS
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

QWERTY, USA

When typing while using proper form on a QWERTY keyboard, only two U.S. states' names can be typed using just one hand (overlooking the need for the shift key for capitalization). Texas is one of them. Ohio is the other.



TCP Contests and More

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Holiday Desserts

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Helping Out

RECOMMENDED READING

National Egg Day, June 3, reminds us of all the great reader recipes on our website that use eggs—especially those found in *Eggs: Plain and Fancy* from March 2016.



Welcome Signs

With the arrival of 470,708 people in 2022, Texas became just the second state to surpass 30 million residents—now with 30,029,572. The other one? Well, that would be California, with 39,029,342.

Super Cool or Old School?

THE FIRST LP came out 75 years ago this month, when Columbia released the New York Philharmonic's rendition of Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E minor as a long-playing record June 21, 1948.

Since then, we've hoarded records, then eight-track and cassette tapes, and compact discs. Those made way for digital files and streaming as our favorite music ended up both in a closet and in the cloud.

But take heart, record geeks: Vinyl albums outsold CDs in 2022 for the second year in a row.



Grounded in Mystery

“An East Texas minister built an airship that supposedly flew in 1902. It was destroyed before it could fly publicly at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis.”

VAL L. ERWIN
COSERV
LANTANA

442nd’s Heroism

My father took part in the rescue as a member of an antitank company [*Rescue of the Lost Battalion*, February 2023].

The 442nd suffered 800 casualties rescuing 211 Texans. After the battle, Gen. John E. Dahlquist ordered everyone in formation to congratulate them. He scolded the regimental commander that he wanted *everyone* there. The commander stood at attention and replied, “That’s all that’s left.”

Sidney Miyakawa
CoServ
Lewisville

Bless your heart
[*A Pet Project*, March 2023]. It’s the hardest thing fur parents have to do, but it’s our last, best gift to them. You’ll know when it’s time.

MARY HENDERSON
HARP
VIA FACEBOOK

Sacred Memory

As a boy growing up in north Louisiana, we would go exploring on a small creek near my house [*Caught Cuisine*, February 2023]. Along one stretch of the creek was a very low area that always contained numerous pitcher plants. The local name for the plants was preacher in a pulpit.

John Tubb
Medina EC
Houston

Wreaths Matter

Thanks to TCP’s December 2022 mention [*Wreaths for the Fallen*] of the November 2018 *Circle of Life* article about the impact of Wreaths Across America in Texas. That story helped grow 86 WAA Texas locations to 313 in 2022, with over 250,000 wreaths placed on veterans’ graves. Nationwide, over 2.7 million wreaths were placed at 3,702 locations.

Ellen Fuller
Bryan Texas Utilities
Bryan

My dad, Jack Andrews, was a proud member and captain in the 442nd in World War II. The 442nd ended up being the most highly decorated unit for its size and length of service in U.S. military history. The 442nd was also credited as being one of the first to find Dachau and release prisoners.

Bill Andrews
Big Country EC and Pedernales EC
Shackelford County and Buda



TCP WRITE TO US
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Please include your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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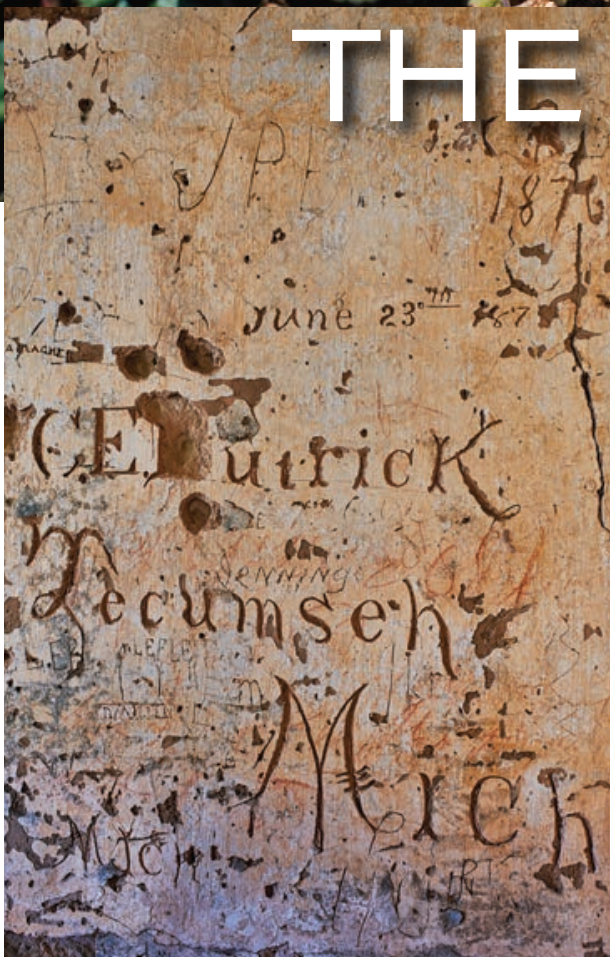


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SCRATCHING THE SURFACE

WEST TEXAS RANCHERS team up with researchers to unearth artifacts



LEFT Graffiti on the plastered walls of Fountain House at Fort Chadbourne dates to 1870.
TOP Artifacts, such as this nail, sometimes emerge after rains. ABOVE Rosettes that went on horses' bridles denoting cavalry Company F.



LEFT Garland and Lana Richards outside the restored east barracks at Fort Chadbourne. ABOVE Looking through the walls of the ruins of the west barracks, across the parade grounds and to Fountain House.

In its heyday, more than 150 years ago, Fort Chadbourne housed 450 soldiers. Today, it sits by its lonesome on a desolate rise in West Texas. Six restored limestone buildings and others, crumbling but stabilized, surround the parade grounds.

The inhabitants are long gone, but traces of them remain.

Garland Richards' family has lived on ranchland here, north of Bronte, in rural Coke County, for eight generations. The site includes a former stagecoach stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail Co. route and the remains of the frontier fort, used by the U.S. Army 1852–67.

Richards, a member of Taylor Electric Cooperative, knew history was being lost to time and the elements.

"When I was a kid, there was a waist-high adobe wall here," he says. "In my lifetime, it has melted to ground level."

The Richardses and another West Texas ranching family, knowing their properties hold remarkable history, are trying to stop the destructive march of time, welcoming excavations by archaeologists and paleontologists and

preserving important stories.

In 1999, soon after he inherited the property, Garland and his wife, Lana, set up the nonprofit Fort Chadbourne Foundation and gave the fort to the foundation to preserve and protect it. They marked a grid over an aerial photo and began keeping meticulous records.

"Everything we have found has been recorded on the grid," Richards says. "You do the best you can with the money you have and common sense."

Their first goal was to stabilize the weathered fort buildings, making them safe to work in and around. Lana took grant writing classes and got the needed funding.

"We joined the Concho Valley Archeological Society and let them come," Lana says. "It was one way of learning about what we had." CVAS members under the direction of Larry Riemenschneider, a Concho Valley Electric Cooperative member and volunteer steward with the Texas Historical Commission, began unearthing the fort's past.

The volunteers cost the Richardses a lot of bologna sandwiches, Lana says, but the workers are proud of their part in excavating a frontier fort. I know that's true, because 15 years ago, my husband and I participated in a Fort Chadbourne dig, working alongside a group of military retirees. The painstaking work of troweling and then sifting through the soil removed from meter-square sections was balanced with the joys of minor discoveries and the unsettling real-

ization that humans leave behind a lot of debris.

“We found almost half a million artifacts below the floor of the double officers’ quarters—the dogtrot house where rancher Tom Odom and his wife raised 13 children,” Garland says. In 1877, the Odoms purchased the land from well-known pioneer Mary Maverick and turned the fort into a ranch headquarters.

“The archaeological picture of Fort Chadbourne is probably more complete than any other Texas military site,” Garland says, based on the number of artifacts recovered.

The 12,500-square-foot Fort Chadbourne Visitor Center opened in 2012 to give people a firsthand look at some of the military, ranching and Native American history of West Texas. Half of the center’s exhibits sit inside a spacious walk-in vault with displays of cavalry items uncovered during digs: buckles, spurs, buttons, helmet badges and metal powder flasks along with flattened bullets used as poker chips. A Native American exhibit contains 48 large knife and spear points found near the fort in a foot-square cache that dates back 6,000 years. There’s also a 450-piece antique gun collection and a replica stagecoach.

A walk around the fort and into the buildings puts the center’s displays into perspective. Even in daylight, the quiet creates a haunting atmosphere. Inside the restored Fountain House, bullet holes in its thick, plastered walls shared space with graffiti from 1870 on. After circling the unrestored hospital and the restored barracks, I spotted a rusty, 4-inch sliver of metal on the ground. Garland explained it was a square-headed nail common until 1880 or so. “You’re in the Butterfield stage corral area,” he says. “It’s littered with artifacts.”

Each excavation answers some questions but raises others. Ground-penetrating radar has revealed a building that isn’t mapped.

If you discover archaeological treasures on your land, contact your local archaeological society, Lana recommends. “We did this correctly, thanks to Larry’s help,” she says.

Millions of Years Away

WHILE exploring family property near Snyder, about 80 miles northwest of Bronte, Tina Roland came across large bones eroding out of a gully. Determined to find somebody who could identify the bones, Roland contacted Eileen Johnson, professor of museum science and a paleobiologist at Texas Tech University.

When Johnson went to Snyder in 2005 to see the discovery, she found herself looking at bones dating from 1.8 to 2.6 million years ago, a time known as the Early Pleistocene. The gully marked an ancient stream bed.

“We knew this was important and exciting. We’re still working 17 years later,” Johnson says. “There are a handful



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Laurie and Joey Roland inside the 15-foot-deep paleontological dig site at Roland Springs Ranch. Graduate student assistant Madison Westfall tends to specimens from the ranch that are filed at the Museum of Texas Tech University. An ancient tortoiseshell recovered from the ranch.





of Early Pleistocene sites in the country of this age, but none has this diversity of species or is so well preserved.”

Numerous wading birds, camels, rabbits, giant tortoises and ancestors of coyotes, mountain lions and prairie dogs lived here once. Fossils have revealed the first appearance of some animals and the last appearance of others. Microbiological material excavated with the bones gives clues about the ancient plant community and climate.

The paleontological site is 15 feet deep and measures approximately 30 feet by 30 feet. For six weeks each summer, a small international crew trowels up dirt and washes the sediment through a fine mesh screen. Joey Roland, Tina’s son, and Joey’s wife, Laurie, host the field camp, providing small cabins next to their house and pool. “They are both very much involved,” Johnson says.

“I’m not a paleontologist, but they’ve taught us so much, mostly during talks around the pool after work,” says Joey,

a member of Big Country Electric Cooperative. “A random bone is exciting, but it doesn’t tell a story. It’s out of context. For us, this is fascinating. I love it, and I’ve fought tooth and nail to protect it.”

With doggedness, he managed to get an oil pipeline diverted around the site. Unlike archaeological sites, no federal or state laws protect paleontological sites.

Laurie loves the picture that the finds suggest: huge Galapagos-like tortoises roaming the West Texas grasslands about 2 million years ago with tiny, three-toed horses grazing nearby. She is thrilled to sometimes find prehistoric bones on the surface after a rain. “Humans have never seen or touched them,” she says. “How could you not know that’s special?”

The Rolands share their findings with their community, allowing the Scurry County Museum in Snyder to offer seasonal public tours at the site. The museum has a temporary exhibit of casts made of the finds. The Museum of Texas Tech’s Roland Springs Ranch materials are part of ongoing lab research and not currently viewable by the public.

“Joey and Laurie are the first and only landowners I know with the willingness to let people on their land,” Johnson says.

“It’s selfish not to let them come to the site,” Laurie says. “Texas is about hospitality.”

Texas has millions of years of buried history—giant mammoths, dinosaurs, oyster reefs, frontier trails. Does that make you wonder what could be in your backyard? ■



‘On Juneteenth’

A Pulitzer Prize-winning historian describes the holiday’s long path out of Texas

TO MY SURPRISE some years back, I began to hear people outside of my home state, Texas, talk about, and *actually celebrate* the holiday “Juneteenth.” June 19, 1865, shortened to “Juneteenth,” was the day that enslaved African Americans in Texas were told that slavery had ended, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed, and just over two months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox. Despite the formal surrender, the Confederate army had continued to fight on in Texas until mid-May. It was only after they finally surrendered that Major General Gordon Granger, while at his headquarters in Galveston, prepared General Order Number 3, announcing the end of legalized slavery in the state.

The truth is, I confess here, that I was initially annoyed, at least mildly so, when I first heard that others outside of Texas claimed the holiday. But why? After all, it was a positive turn in history, evidence that our country was leaving behind, or attempting to, a barbarous institution that had blighted the lives of millions. Such a thing should be celebrated far and wide.

My twinge of possessiveness grew out of the habit of seeing my home state, and the people who reside there, as special. The things that happened there couldn’t have happened in other places. Non-Texans could never really understand what the events that took place in Texas actually meant. I am certain that I’m not alone in this attitude.

From my earliest days, it was drummed into me and, I believe, other young people growing up in Texas at that time, that we inhabited a unique place that we were always supposed to claim, and of which we were always supposed to be proud. I’ve noticed over the years, that it is hard to meet a person from Texas who does not, at some point in the conversation, let you know, either with a drawl or without, that he or she is from the state.

My proprietary attitude about Juneteenth quickly disappeared. Rather than keeping the holiday to ourselves, Texans have been in the forefront of trying to make Juneteenth a national holiday. As I think of it, it’s really a very Texas move to say that something that happened in our

state was of enough consequence to the entire nation that it should be celebrated nationwide.

It has been offered, as part of the justification, that the end of slavery in Texas was the end of the institution period. That’s not quite true. Granger’s order did not end slavery in the country. That did not happen officially until December 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified by the necessary number of states. But it is significant that Texas was the site of the tail end of the Confederate war effort. As the war had been fought to preserve slavery, celebrating Juneteenth throughout the land is a fitting way to mark the end of that effort.

It also is fitting to think of Texas in relation to the nation for another reason. The state has been described as a bellwether for what the United States will become; the term “Texification” has come into use to describe a process that is, supposedly, of recent origin.

The history of Juneteenth, which includes the many years before the events in Galveston and afterward, shows that Texas, more than any state in the Union, has always embodied nearly every major aspect of the story of the United States of America. That fact has been obscured by broad caricatures of the state and its people, caricatures that Texans themselves helped to create and helped make the state seem exotic, almost foreign to the rest of the Union.

My Texas roots go deep—on my mother’s side back to the 1820s, on my father’s side at least to the 1860s. Significantly, my wide-ranging approach to Juneteenth reveals that behind all the broad stereotypes about Texas is a story of Indians, settler colonialists, Hispanic culture in North America, slavery, race, and immigration. It is the American story, told from this most American place. ■

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JUNETEENTH

COMMEMORATED ANNUALLY ON JUNE 19TH, 1865, THE
OLDEST CELEBRATION OF THE END OF SLAVERY IN THE U.S.
THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, SEP. 22, 1862, THAT "ON
THE 1ST JANUARY, A.D. 1863, ALL PERSONS WHO
WITHIN THE REBELLION, SHALL BE
AND FOR THE REASON OF THE 13TH AMENDMENT TO
END THE INSTITUTION OF AFRICAN

APRIL 1865 MOST SLAVES IN TEXAS
FREEDOM. THIS BEGAN TO CHANGE
IN GALVESTON MAJ. GEN.
OFFICER, DISTRICT OF TEXAS,
POSTERMAN BUILDING (STRAND
NO. 3) ON JUNE 19, 1865.
TEXAS ARE INFORMED THAT, IN
FROM THE EXECUTIVE OF
FREE. THIS INVOLVES
RIGHTS AND RIGHTS OF
AND SLAVES." WITH THIS
GAN!

"EMANCIPATION DAY," A
1866 IN GALVESTON,
TEXAS, CELEBRATED
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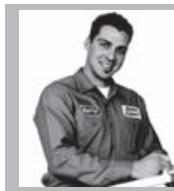


Based on an 1818 painting that depicts John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin presenting a draft of the Declaration of Independence

A D V E R T I S E M E N T

Clogged, Backed—up Septic System...Can anything Restore It?

DEAR DARRYL: My home is about 10 years old, and so is my septic system. I have always taken pride in keeping my home and property in top shape. In fact, my neighbors and I are always kidding each other about who keeps their home and yard nicest. Lately, however, I have had a horrible smell in my yard, and also in one of my bathrooms, coming from the shower drain. My grass is muddy and all the drains in my home are very slow.



Dear
Darryl

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 – Lubbock, TX

DEAR CLOGGED AND SMELLY: As a reader of my column, I am sure you are aware that I have a great deal of experience in this particular field. You will be glad to know that there IS a septic solution that will solve your back-up and effectively restore your entire system from interior piping throughout the septic system and even unclog the drain field as well. **SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs** deliver your system the fast active bacteria and enzymes needed to liquefy solid waste and free the clogs causing your back-up.

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SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs are designed to work on any septic system regardless of design or age. From modern day systems to sand mounds, and systems installed generations ago, I have personally seen SeptiCleanse unclog and restore these systems in a matter of weeks. I highly recommend that you try it before spending any money on repairs. SeptiCleanse products are available online at www.septicleanse.com or you can order or learn more by calling toll free at 1-888-899-8345. If you use the promo code "TXS19", you can get a free shock treatment, added to your order, which normally costs \$169. So, make sure you use that code when you call or buy online.

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A.



B.



I guess I was a little bored. For the past hour, I'd been on the phone with Daniele, the head of my office in Italy, reviewing our latest purchases of Italian gold, Murano glass and Italian-made shoes and handbags.

"Daniele," I said, "What is the hottest jewelry in Italy right now?"

His reply? Woven gold bracelets studded with gems. He texted me some photos and I knew immediately that this was jewelry that Raffinato just had to have.

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**DARRYL
SCHRIVER**

PRESIDENT/
CHIEF
EXECUTIVE
OFFICER

PUTTING MEMBERS FIRST

I CAME TO TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE in June 2017, and it is rewarding to look back on what has been accomplished over the past six years. Never in my lifetime did I expect to encounter the trials and tribulations that came with Winter Storm Uri. However, we all came together and persevered. It was our main objective, and still is, to ensure Uri and the Brazos bankruptcy did not bankrupt our local cooperative as well. The board, leadership and employees fought through the process and continue to fight for you.

Additionally, it is hard to believe that we are nearly halfway through 2023. We are working on numerous projects that will enhance your service and bring added benefits to you as members. One new initiative is being more present in the community by hosting booths at local community events. Last month, we were at Roanoke Roundup and nearly 100 members stopped by the booth to register for the bill credit drawing and received a member-exclusive gift. Our employees enjoyed interacting with members and the community. We hope you make plans to join us at future community events. Check out page 25 for any upcoming events near you. 7000024102

Over the past few years, we have ramped up our maintenance on the electric system, including system upgrades and vegetation management. This work and investment significantly paid off as outage occurrences and duration remain low. In the first quarter of 2023, the average member experienced less than one outage, with the outage lasting an average of 2.6 hours. Weather was the main cause

of outages, accounting for nearly half – 49% – of all outages.

At the time of this writing, the legislative session is in the final stretch. I want to share some insight into what we are doing to work with our local elected officials. As you may recall from the bill update Facebook live on March 21, Senate Bill (SB) 1983 and House Bill (HB) 4590 are concurrent bills that, if passed, would relieve all electric cooperative members of the financial burdens associated with Winter Storm Uri. We contacted all legislators who represent our service territory to sign on as a co-author of the respective bills. Additionally, we sought assistance from you, our member-owners. Thanks to the efforts, over half of our representatives and a senator signed on as coauthors. We are anxiously tracking this legislation and advocating for its passing.

Another bill we are optimistic about is HB 4246/SB 2238, which allows electric cooperatives to receive 50-percent of escheated funds compared to the current 20-percent allocated for scholarship use. These funds are unclaimed capital credits that electric co-ops report to the state. The state then keeps a portion of the unclaimed money (escheated funds) and returns the remainder back to cooperatives to provide scholarships and assist with energy efficiency initiatives. 800792187

This session had a record number of bills filed, with over 230 pertaining to grid reliability and market pricing. Our board and staff are appreciative of the support and time our legislators have provided to ensure the safety of our state.

We will continue to work for you across all fronts. I work for you, and we are in this together.



MEET THE CANDIDATES


JOIN US VIRTUALLY, on Monday, August 21 at 6 p.m. for the Director Candidate Forum. Each director candidate will be asked a series of questions. The forum will be recorded and available on our website following the event. Additional details will be in the July and August issue of *Texas Co-op Power*.

DISTRICT 1



KEVIN INGLE
INCUMBENT

DISTRICT 2



MARGARET KOPREK
INCUMBENT

DISTRICT 4



JERRY WALDEN
INCUMBENT

DISTRICT 4



DAVID MILLER
NOMINATION CANDIDATE

DISTRICT 4



JULIE WALDEN
PETITION CANDIDATE

DISTRICT 4



STAN MICKLE
PETITION CANDIDATE



IT'S IN

Leather fuels life of adventure, mission

STORY BY BOB BUCKEL, COMMUNICATIONS CONTENT SPECIALIST
PHOTOS BY DANIELLE VOSS, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

THE BAG

Saddleback
Leather Co.

Remember that old Johnny Cash song, “I’ve Been Everywhere”?

Dave Munson has been everywhere – almost – and he’s got pictures to prove it, on the walls of his office.

In most, you’ll see a tall, smiling, bearded man (Dave) and a cool-looking leather bag – by a bridge in Prague, over a shoulder in Switzerland, on a beach in Costa Rica, or stuffed with meat, being attacked by crocodiles in Australia or lions in Zambia.

Making bags that can survive all that is what Saddleback Leather does; Dave is the founder and CEO. The bags are handcrafted in León, México and guaranteed to last 100 years. The slogan? “They’ll fight over it when you’re dead.”

They also make desk sets, briefcases, iPhone cases, wallets, belts, backpacks, purses, binders – almost anything that can be crafted out of leather. It is neither cheap nor inexpensive.

“We use the strongest leather you can buy,” Dave said. “A lot of people take off the top layer, to get rid of all the scars, and that’s where the toughness is. We keep that. Our lining is even stronger, and our hardware is unbelievable. No breakable parts, no buttons, no snaps.”

It’s a 21st-century story: products crafted from one of the oldest materials known to man, using techniques thousands of years old, then marketed over the internet and shipped worldwide.

Like those bags, Dave’s journey has taken some unique twists.



Born in Oregon, he was a youth pastor when he moved to México to teach English. Most places he went, he carried books.

“I was looking for something different from my nylon

backpack, and I asked myself, ‘What would Indiana Jones carry?’” He sketched it, and found someone to make it.

León, bigger than Dallas and higher than Denver, has been famous for its leatherwork for centuries. When Dave returned to the U.S., his bag became a conversation-starter.

“Everywhere I went people said, ‘Where can I get one of those?’” he said. He moved to Juárez, had the bags sent to him by bus and sold them on e-Bay. 800713676

He and Suzette met, married and made their home in San

Antonio. As the company grew, they started a factory in León, but soon realized the office staff would work better face-to-face. They chose Fort Worth. When the rent got crazy, Dave found an unfinished retail building just off Main Street in Azle. He finished it out to serve Saddleback’s needs.

By the time the lease is up, he plans to have built a “really cool” headquarters nearby.



Saddleback has about 25 employees in Azle and another 170 in México. Dave considers himself not their boss, but their pastor. In León, there is a school for the workers’ children as well as marriage, parenting and finance classes.

“Ministry is what started it,” he said. “It’s still a ministry.”

Visits to México are frequent, but it was a 2010 visit to Rwanda – site of a 1994 genocide that took around a million lives – that changed their lives. They added a small host of Rwandan kids to their family, and Suzette went a step farther, creating a retail line branded “Love41,” with all profits going to Africa New Life Ministries.

She and Dave have since taken more than 300 people to

I asked myself, 'What would Indiana Jones carry?'



Rwanda, mostly church friends and employees, to see where their money is going. Their Rwandan kids are now young adults, finishing college, starting careers and families of their own. The Munsons' children, daughter Sela and son Cross, are teenagers, home-schooled so the family can travel together. 20948004

The business is worldwide. The ministry is personal.

"One of the things we do is, we try to introduce people into a personal relationship with God – by example," Dave said. "We don't try to shove anything down someone's throat or convert them to anything. We just want them to understand that God loves them, and he loves people through acts of compassion.

"He doesn't give people 'air-hugs.' He sends people for that."



The Munson family lives in tents of heavy safari canvas from Kenya. "Abraham would be jealous," Dave laughs. The tents are up on decks, with hardwood floors, heating, AC and plumbing, all powered by Tri-County Electric Cooperative.

"My service has been uninterrupted," Dave said.

That seems appropriate for someone with Dave's energy level. Not everyone can afford a Saddleback bag, but it's hard to resist his personality.

"We've heard a lot of people say, 'Y'know, I hate Christians, but I like these guys – and I think they're Christians. So maybe there's a little more to this.'"

Dave enjoys growing a company, and he's not opposed to making money. But influence, for good and for God, is what he's really after. That's part of what makes Saddleback different. 800925663

"We're a people business, cleverly disguised as a leather bag company."

We're a people business, cleverly disguised as a leather bag company.

2023 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE is excited to announce the 2023 scholarship recipients. This year, we are proud to award nine \$4,000 scholarships and nine \$2,000 scholarships to seniors headed to college or trade school. Tri-County Electric Co-op is proud to award scholarships to the following students:

\$4,000 RECIPIENTS

Ashton Akins: *Timber Creek High School*
Kierstin Bucher-Jarvis: *Carroll Senior High School*
Aidan Fox: *Timber Creek High School*
Callan Peters: *Seymour High School*
Cameron Powers: *Lipan High School*
Augustus Shockley: *Carroll Senior High School*
Trey Thornton: *Azle High School*
Lainey Vollmer: *Millsap High School*
Courtney Wittrock: *Timber Creek High School*

\$2,000 RECIPIENTS

Riley Farris: *VR Eaton High School*
Alejandro Frias: *Azle High School*
Sofia Furbeck: *Keller High School*
Naomi Kilian: *Homeschool*
Ashlynn Rogers: *Brock High School*
Cashdon Sledge: *Peaster High School*
Sarah Tillotson: *Aledo High School*
Sidney Tillotson: *Aledo High School*
Reagan Wallick: *Central High School*

2023 YOUTH TOUR WINNERS

TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S 2023 Youth Tour winners are headed to Washington D.C. from June 11-20. These students will also receive a \$2,000 scholarship for the college or trade school of their choice. 800893615

- 1.) Jackson Babb: Aledo High School

2.) Cameron Davis: Weatherford High School

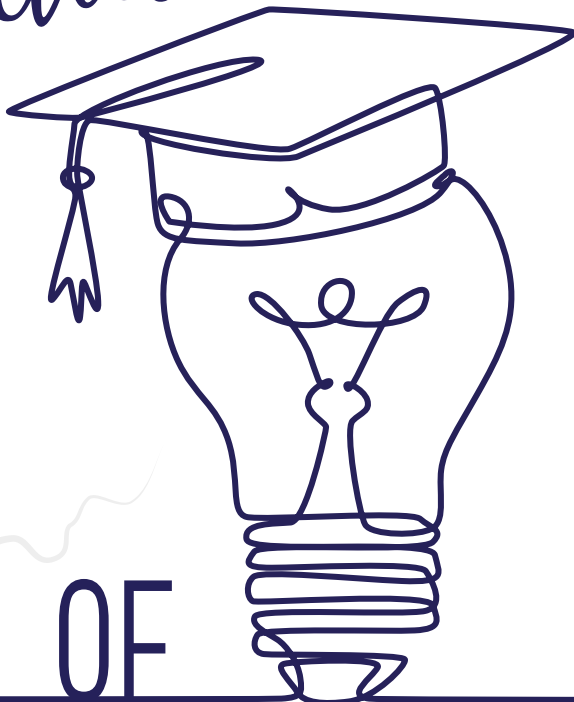
3.) Ria Gupta: Keller High School
- 4.) Layton McAdams: Seymour High School

5.) Steven Reed: Brock High School

6.) Camila Vivanco: Carroll Senior High School

Since 2019, Tri-County Electric Cooperative has sent six sophomore or junior high school students to represent the company and state. This trip is the ultimate opportunity to make connections, form relationships, and gain insight into the governmental process. 800680224

Congratulations



CLASS OF 2023

Josh Tipton

I work for you



For a 23-year-old, Josh Tipton has logged a lot of mileage.

Josh, one of three guys on Tri-County Electric Co-op's service desk (think help desk for any technical problems our employees have), graduated from Tolar High School in 2017 and headed for Dénia, on the Mediterranean coast of Spain.

He spent over a year there, washing dishes, doing maintenance and eventually teaching – all at a church-sponsored private school. When he came home, he was fluent in Spanish and ready for a job. After a gig as a bank teller, he went to work in IT for his dad's business.

That's where he was when the

co-op called.

Here, he works with everyone, from the board and executive level on down, because everyone uses technology. He has several certifications and is working on more – but it's his attitude that people appreciate.

"More than half of being good with the service desk is being good with people," he said. "If people dread calling IT, then I'm not going to get your problem solved. That's a big thing. 800854625

"The little interactions go a long way."

Josh, who lives in Granbury, is one of 10 siblings in his blended family. On weekends, he works as a sound engineer for concerts, usually Texas Country. It keeps him busy – but that's the way it has been his entire life.

"My job is to take care of you so you can take care of the members," he said. "If you're up and running, then I'm doing my job."

Check your eligibility and apply for financial assistance regarding the Brazos Financing Rider by visiting brazoshardshipfund.com or calling 844.770.8549.

Tri-County Electric Cooperative

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Aledo, TX 76008

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Online: oms.tcectexas.com

App: TCEC Connect

Phone: 817-444-3201

Text: OUTAGE to 25069

ABOUT TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC CO-OP

Tri-County Electric Co-op owns and maintains more than 9,900 miles of line to provide electric service to more than 105,000 members in Archer, Baylor, Denton, Foard, Haskell, Hood, Jack, King, Knox, Palo Pinto, Parker, Stonewall, Tarrant, Throckmorton, Wilbarger, and Wise counties.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Aledo

200 Bailey Ranch Road, Aledo 76008

Azle

600 NW Parkway, Azle 76020

Granbury

1623 Weatherford Highway, Granbury 76048

Keller

4900 Keller-Hicks Road, Fort Worth 76244

Seymour

419 N. Main, Seymour 76380

IT PAYS TO STAY INFORMED

Find your account number in pages 16-23 of *Texas Co-op Power*, and you will receive a \$20 credit on your electric bill. Simply contact one of the offices listed above and make them aware of your discovery!

VISIT US ONLINE

tcectexas.com

[Facebook.com/TCECTexas](https://www.facebook.com/TCECTexas)



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

Tri-County Electric Cooperative will be attending community events in our service territory in an effort to reach more of our membership. This will provide you with one-on-one access with employees across departments in your co-op. Win bill credits and take home gifts when you visit our bright red tent and register. Bring the event ticket below to our booth and you will take home a member-exclusive gift.

Check out the upcoming events below and find an event near you!

UPCOMING EVENTS



June 1

Town Hall
Keller, Texas



July 1-4

200 West Pearl Street
Granbury, Texas

PARKER COUNTY PEACH FESTIVAL

July 8

Historic Downtown
Weatherford, Texas



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



Special Delivery

How a crudely scrawled message 300 years ago saved its sender's life

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN WILSON

THE LUCKIEST LETTER in Texas took six months to reach its destination. But the fact that it arrived at all was a miracle within a miracle, and it saved the sender's life. This was more than 300 years ago, when Texas was under Spanish rule. It was a Hail Mary mailing.

François Simars de Bellisle was just 24 when he left France to come to America in 1719. He was headed for Louisiana on a small ship, but his captain overshot their destination, ending up near present-day Galveston, about 300 miles off course.

Bellisle and four other French passengers took meager supplies—biscuits, guns, swords—and went ashore to determine their location and seek help. They slept well that first night, but when they

awoke the next morning, their ship was gone. They had been abandoned.

They walked east to what was likely the mouth of the Sabine River, where they could go no farther because of deep mud. Soon they began to succumb to starvation, and within two months, Bellisle had buried all his friends. He was alone and desperate.

Bellisle believed he was living his last days. He had made his way back to Galveston Bay, out of bullets and reduced to eating boiled grass and worms. Then one clear morning, he saw the first Native Americans he had seen since being stranded. They were Akokisas and his only hope for survival.

He made his way across the bay in a

crude boat he had found. The Akokisas took his goods and stripped him. He wrote that he was forced into labor, ordered about mercilessly and beaten regularly—but fed.

After a forced 150-mile walk to the Brazos River to hunt buffalo, he couldn't help but marvel at the landscape, later writing, "This is the most beautiful country in the world. The earth is black. Grass grows there to a prodigal height, and in abundance, which is a certain sign that the earth is good."

Bellisle soon realized his situation was still dire. So he retrieved one of the few pieces of paper he had, carved a crude pen out of wood, and made ink out of charcoal and water. He wrote a letter begging for rescue from anyone who might receive it and gave it to visitors from the Bidai tribe.

Then the miracle: Members of the Hasinai tribe, which had close ties to the French, took it to the commander of the garrison at Natchitoches, Louisiana. The commander, Louis Juchereau de Saint-Denis, wrote a letter in return and ordered the Hasinai to bring the cast-away back, dead or alive.

When Bellisle's rescuers reached the Akokisa camp, they gave Bellisle the letter that informed him the Hasinai would escort him to Natchitoches. His captors relented.

It still took him months to get to Natchitoches, but at least Bellisle was free. He had sent what was the land version of a message in a bottle. It caught the best currents and washed up on the perfect shore. His literacy—and luck—saved him. ■

Texas Seafood

The catch of the day sparkles in these inventive dishes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Growing up near the Gulf, my mami loved getting shrimp from local shrimpers. One evening she surprised us with shrimp *albóndigas*, succulent meatballs swimming in a rich tomato broth. Served with warm corn tortillas, this dish is comfort at its best. I am excited to share my mami's recipe—a bit of her love from my home to yours. Enjoy!

Albóndigas de Camarón (Shrimp Meatballs)

½ pound Roma tomatoes
½ pound tomatillos
6 cups shrimp or vegetable broth, divided use
1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 egg
2 teaspoons dried oregano
1–2 tablespoons masa harina (corn flour)
2 tablespoons olive oil
½ onion, diced
2 stalks celery, diced
2 medium carrots, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons cumin
3 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons ground black pepper
½ cup rinsed and chopped cilantro
Rice, steamed (optional)
4 corn tortillas, for serving
Sliced radishes, for garnish
Cilantro, rinsed and chopped, for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place tomatoes and tomatillos on a baking sheet. Roast until skins have charred, turning occasionally, 10–13 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool.
2. Blend the cooled tomatoes and tomatillos in a blender or food processor with 1 cup broth until smooth. Set aside.
3. Pulse shrimp in cleaned food processor until finely ground.
4. Move ground shrimp to a bowl. Add egg, oregano and masa harina. Mix by hand until well combined.
5. Lightly oil clean hands and form shrimp mixture into ¾-inch meatballs. Place meatballs on baking sheet and refrigerate to keep firm.
6. In a stock pot or Dutch oven, add olive oil over medium-high heat. Add onion, celery and carrots and sauté until tender, about 4 minutes. Stir in garlic and cumin and cook 30 seconds. Stir in tomato mixture and cook an additional 2 minutes.
7. Add remaining broth and bring soup to a boil. Reduce heat to low and season with salt and pepper. Gently add meatballs to broth. Simmer without stirring 8–10 minutes. Stir in cilantro.
8. Serve over steamed rice or alone as a soup. Garnish with radishes and cilantro and serve with warm tortillas.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow along with Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Skillet Pico de Gallo Shrimp.



Hatch'en Cocktails

ANN CYCHOSZ
TRI-COUNTY EC

Cychosz stashes away a few hatch peppers when they're in season to whip up these shrimp cocktails, a neighborhood favorite. Feel free to use canned roasted hatch peppers. Served in cocktail glasses, this appetizer will be a hit at any gathering.

SHRIMP

- 1 tablespoon salt**
- 2 pounds Gulf shrimp, peeled and deveined**

COCKTAIL SAUCE

- 3 cups ketchup**
- 2 tablespoons horseradish**
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce**
- 1 teaspoon hot chili sauce**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**
- Juice of 2 limes**
- 3 avocados, pitted and cut into ¼-inch cubes**
- ½ cup diced red onion**
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro**
- 1 cup chopped roasted hatch peppers**
- Tortilla chips, for serving**

- 1. SHRIMP** Bring a pot of water to a boil and add salt. Add shrimp and cook 2–3 minutes, or until shrimp are cooked through.
- 2.** Remove shrimp with a slotted spoon, place on a baking sheet and allow to cool.
- 3.** Cut shrimp into ¼-inch pieces.
- 4. COCKTAIL SAUCE** In a large bowl, stir together ketchup, horseradish, Worcestershire sauce, hot chili sauce, pepper and lime juice.

\$500 WINNER

Escabeche

KARA HILL
WOOD COUNTY EC



Hill's husband has fond memories of his Filipino mom cooking fresh fish that he, his brother and dad caught. This escabeche has the perfect level of acidity to pair wonderfully with black drum, a white fish with a mild, sweet flavor.

SERVES 6



FISH

- 6 black drum fillets (about 2 pounds total), skin removed**
- Salt and ground black pepper**
- ¼ cup flour**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**

ESCABECHE

- ½ cup white vinegar**
- 1 cup water**
- ⅓ cup brown sugar**
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce**
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch**
- ¼ cup cold water**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 4 cloves garlic, minced**
- 2 tablespoons minced ginger, fresh or jarred**
- 1 medium onion, sliced**
- 1 small red bell pepper, sliced**
- 1 small green bell pepper, sliced**
- 1 small yellow bell pepper, sliced**
- 2 medium carrots, julienned**
- 3 cups cooked rice**

- 1. FISH** Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Gently pat down fish with paper towels. Season fish with salt and pepper. Place flour in shallow dish.
- 2.** Lightly dredge fish in flour, coating each side, and shake off excess. Place on baking sheet and repeat until all fillets are coated.
- 3.** In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Pan-fry fish until golden-brown on each side, 2–3 minutes. Place on baking sheet, then repeat until all fillets are fried.
- 4.** Place fish in oven.
- 5. ESCABECHE** In a bowl, stir together vinegar, water, brown sugar and soy sauce.
- 6.** Dissolve cornstarch in cold water.
- 7.** In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Sauté garlic and ginger until fragrant, stirring often, about 3 minutes. Do not let the garlic and ginger brown.
- 8.** Add onion, bell peppers and carrots and sauté for 2 minutes. Pour vinegar mixture into skillet. Cover and bring to a boil.
- 9.** Remove cover, add cornstarch mixture, and return to a boil, stirring until sauce has thickened. Serve fish over rice, then top with escabeche.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

HOLIDAY DESSERTS DUE JUNE 10
We'll help cap off your holiday feasts with reader recipes in the November issue. Submit yours online by June 10 for a chance to win \$500.



CONTINUED >

5. Add shrimp, avocado, red onion, cilantro and hatch peppers. Stir gently to combine. Chill until ready to serve. Serve with tortilla chips.

SERVES 12

Jamaica Beach Snapper

GEORGE GRALL
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Dinner ready in under 15 minutes? Yes, please. Baked snapper served warm with a chili butter sauce is the ultimate week-night dinner. Roast or steam vegetables while the fish bakes and have dinner ready in a snap.

4 red snapper fillets (6 ounces each)
½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
2 tablespoons garlic powder
1 tablespoon chili powder
1 large lemon, cut into wedges
Parsley (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.



2. Generously coat a 9-by-11-inch pan with cooking spray and place snapper fillets in the pan.

3. Bake 15 minutes or until the fish flakes easily with a fork.

4. Combine melted butter, garlic powder and chili powder in a bowl and stir until well blended.

5. Drizzle butter mixture over fish and serve with lemon wedges and garnished with parsley, if desired.

SERVES 4

Shipsape Shrimp

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

Texas Gulf shrimp is a great ingredient for meals that can come together in under 30 minutes. Not sure how to buy and store fresh shrimp? Follow these tips, then check out two amazing shrimp recipes in this month's issue:

Look for firm, translucent shrimp.

Avoid shrimp with slimy shells and any that smell like ammonia.

Place fresh shrimp in a bowl on ice to maintain freshness in the fridge.

Uncooked shrimp stay fresh in the fridge for up to three days.

Freeze shrimp for up to two months.

Thaw frozen shrimp overnight in the fridge.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Kilgore's Kickers

The Rangerette museum preserves the legacy of the iconic drill team

BY CHET GARNER

FOOTBALL IS AN EXPERIENCE in Texas. It's about much more than just what happens when the players snap the ball. I mean, what would the Dallas Cowboys be without their cheerleaders? They certainly couldn't be America's team without America's sweethearts, right? And if you've ever danced in a drill team or enjoyed the precise high kicks and jump splits of these athletes, then you have the women of Kilgore College to thank.

I traveled to East Texas to pay my respects and visit the official museum of the Kilgore Rangerettes—America's first precision dance drill team.

After filling my belly with pork ribs at Country Tavern Bar-B-Que, I cruised Kilgore, between Tyler and Longview, and passed the towering oil derricks of the "World's Richest Acre," which once held 24 wells on one city block. In the 1930s, Kilgore was the definition of a boomtown.

While football games at Kilgore College were popular, the college's president became irritated with fans leaving at half time and drinking under the stands. So in 1940 he tasked teacher Gussie Nell Davis with figuring out a way to keep fans in the stands. Her solution was to bring a group of talented dancers onto the field. It launched a multibillion-dollar industry.

I stepped into the Rangerette Showcase and Museum and was immediately impressed with mannequins showcasing the evolution of the uniforms. While the skirts may have been scandalous at the time—they dared to show knees—the uniform is now iconic. I appreciated the short film giving context to the stories and was blown away by the number of photos depicting Rangerettes with celebrities and presidents throughout the decades.

I'll never think of drill team dancing the same way again. Now to work on my high kick! ■

ABOVE Chet's style might not be *precisely* what the Kilgore Rangerettes look for in a dancer.

TCP The Rangerettes' perfected routines are exactly what drew Chet to Kilgore. See the video on our website and see all his Texplorations 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

Coleman [8–10] Rodeo,
colemanrodeo.com

09

Johnson City Dive-In Movies, (830) 868-7111,
johnsoncitytx.org

Blanco [9–11] Lavender Festival, (830) 833-5101,
blancolavenderfest.com

Ingram [9–10, 16–17, 23–24] Newsies, (830) 367-5121,
hcaf.com

Kerrville [9–10, 16–18, 23–25] Beer for Breakfast, (830) 896-9393,
caillouxperformingarts.com

10

Brenham Tapestry: The Carole King Songbook With Suzanne O Davis, (979) 337-7240,
thebarnhillcenter.com

Fredericksburg Craft Beer Festival,
fbgcrafterbeerfestival.com

Nacogdoches Texas Blueberry Festival, (936) 560-5533,
tbf.nacogdoches.org

Terrell [10–11] Antique Tractor and Engine Show and Pull, (214) 497-1611,
north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net

11

Lufkin Madagascar the Musical, (936) 633-5454,
angelinaarts.org

15

Stonewall [15–17] Peach Jamboree and Rodeo, (830) 644-2735,
stonewalltexas.com

Galveston [15-19]
Juneteenth Celebrations,
 (409) 457-3570,
visitgalveston.com

17

Linden Underground
Railroad Quilt Auction
and Performance,
 (903) 826-2495,
lindenpubliclibrary.org

22

Fredericksburg Women's
Ranch Seminar,
 (830) 456-8956,
hillcountrycattlewomen.org

23

McKinney [23-24] Flip
Orley: Comic and Hypno-
tist, (214) 769-0645,
thecomedyarena.com

30

Hemphill [30-July 2] Patri-
otic Weekend on Toledo
Bend, (409) 787-2732,
sabinecountychamber.com

Ingram [30-July 28] Summer
ArtMart, (830) 367-5121,
hcaf.com

JULY

01

Johnson City Fourth Fest
Parade and Fireworks,
 (830) 868-7111,
johnsoncitytx.org

The Colony Liberty by
the Lake, (972) 624-5253,
visitthecolonytx.com

03

Giddings [3-4] Freedom
Fest and Fury on the 4th,
 (979) 542-3455,
giddingsstx.com

04

Kerrville 4th on the
River, (830) 315-5483,
kerrvilletx.gov

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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The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.

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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— H., Arvada, CO



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Dad

Sharing their passions and leading their families, dads play an important role in the everyday life of Texans. These reader entries warm our hearts and make us smile. Gather around the family album as we celebrate dear old dad.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 HEATHER MEIFERT
COSERV

"This is daddy's little girl, Madison."

2 KARI ZIMMERMAN
HAMILTON COUNTY EC

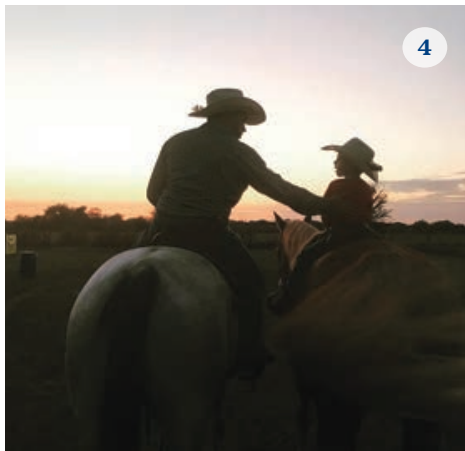
"My grandson shelling peas with his gramps. Such a sweet moment."

3 MONA PARISH
SAM HOUSTON EC

First piano lesson with Pops, the man behind the dad.

4 GALE STEVENS
BOWIE-CASS EC

"My son Jared Stevens of Campbell and his son Tyler ride almost every day and rodeo on weekends."



Upcoming Contests

DUE JUN 10 Helping Out
DUE JUL 10 Golden Hour
DUE AUG 10 Mailboxes



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Texas Water Safari participant Courtney Shaver collapses in her boat after a difficult portage.

Ending on a Sour Note

Here's a first: Accomplished competitor falls short of the finish line

BY PAM LEBLANC
PHOTO BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

I BAILED OUT OF THE BOAT in Cheap-side—which sounds like a line in a country-western song.

But this was no two-step. I staggered out of a racing canoe under a highway on the Guadalupe River, 154 miles into a 264-mile paddling race called the Texas Water Safari. It was the very first DNF of my life. I laid down my paddle, sobbed a bit and barfed.

My team went on without me.

Quitting's a weird thing. When I tell this story to friends, a lot of them nod and say, "You might have hurt yourself if you'd continued."

But that's not it, exactly. I quit because a tiny voice inside my head suggested I do it, and I listened. I didn't want to slog 100 more miles in 106-degree heat. And so, after 32 hours of nonstop paddling,

I bid my tough-as-nails teammates adieu.

Looking back, I foretold my meltdown. I was afraid of the heat and the low river flow.

In 2019, I finished the race, which starts at Spring Lake in San Marcos and ends at Seadrift on the Texas coast, in about 53 hours as part of a three-woman team. I vowed then never to do it again. But when veteran paddler Deb Richardson invited me to join her five-person crew, I forgot about the alligators, mud, log jams, spiders and hallucinations and signed up.

I began spending every weekend on the river. On race day last June, we lined up our 40-foot boat at the back of the pack. When the starting horn sounded, we sliced through the crowd like we were parting the Red Sea. Then, just a few hundred yards in, our rudder cable snapped, and we fell into last place.

Over the next six hours, we picked off boat after boat, clawing our way from 138th position to 100th, then 50th. We nailed every portage and cut through every rapid. That first night, the frogs were so loud you couldn't hear anything else. I was giddy.

But it was hot, and the water was so low, we had to drag through dozens of gravel bars. My muscles got weak, my butt sore. Racers don't stop to sleep or admire the scenery, and I got weepy.

After I quit and went home, I slept 12 hours. I woke up to news that my team had climbed into 18th place. I sped back to cheer them on.

In the end, half the 138 boats that started quit. My team finished in just under 77 hours, in one of the toughest years in the race's 59-year history.

I couldn't be prouder.

And this time I'm not kidding. I'm never doing it again. ■



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