

JOHN S. CHASE CHANGED
TEXAS ARCHITECTURE

CHILL OUT WITH
ICE CREAM AND SORBETS

CHET PAYS HIS RESPECTS
AT THE FUNERAL MUSEUM

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

JULY 2021

A man with a beard, wearing a light-colored cowboy hat and a blue button-down shirt, stands with his hands in his pockets, smiling. Behind him is a mural of Willie Nelson, an elderly man with a white beard and a red bandana, playing a guitar. The mural is on a yellow wall with the words 'WILIE' and 'OF TEXAS' visible. The background is a clear blue sky.

Painting the Town

Mural artist
Matt Tumlinson
turns Rankin
into his canvas

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18

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July 2021



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08 Rankin as a Canvas

Artist Matt Tumlinson interprets the state's culture in murals around a West Texas town.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

An Unlikely Blueprint

John S. Chase charted a unique course to become Texas' first Black licensed architect.

By Michael Hurd

ON THE COVER

Thanks to Matt Tumlinson, Willie Nelson has a permanent residency in Rankin.
Photo by Erich Schlegel

ABOVE

John S. Chase and his sons in front of his signature Houston home, circa 1959.
Photo courtesy African American Library at the Gregory School | Houston Public Library

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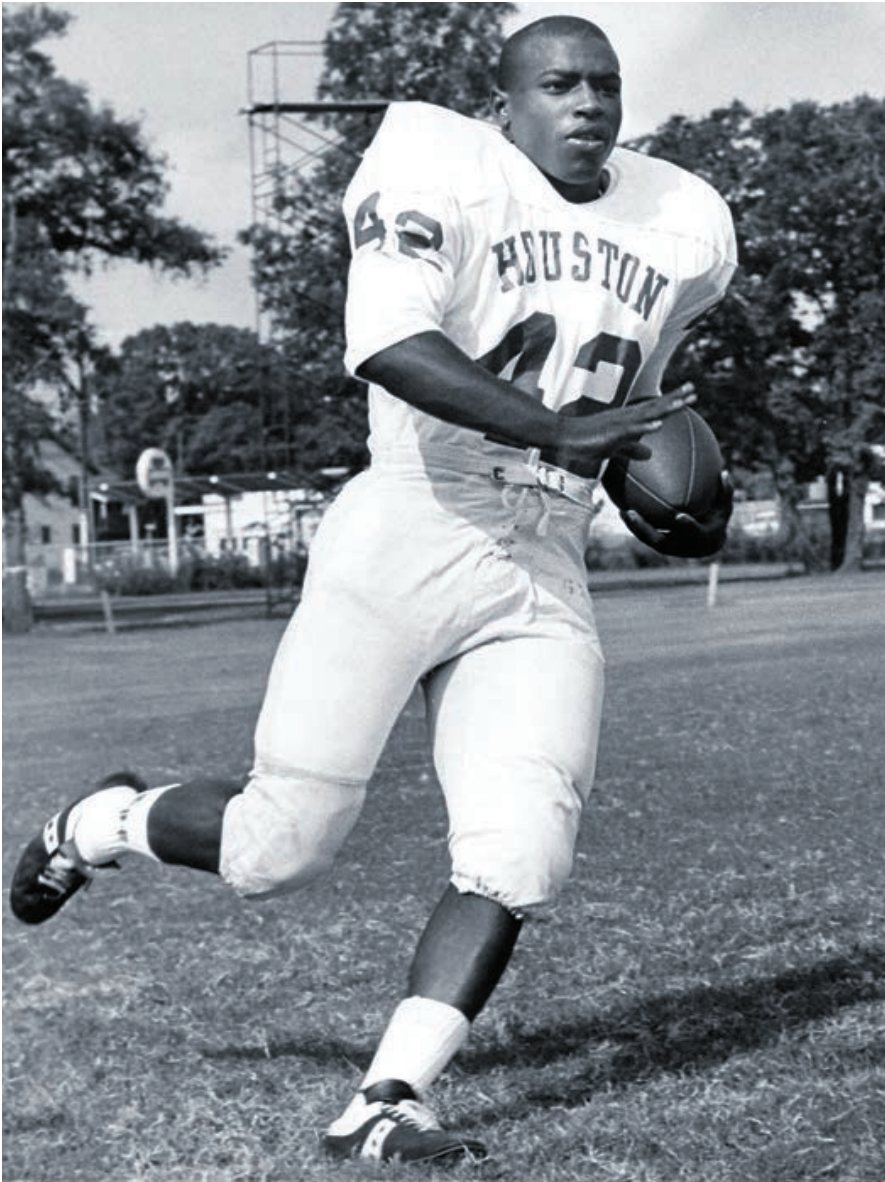
Observations
Common Ground
By Rhonda Reinhart

Groundbreaking Cougar

WARREN MCVEA was a high school football phenom—arguably the best running back in the country—at San Antonio’s Brackenridge High School in 1964, when he turned down more than 70 other scholarship offers and elected to play for the University of Houston.

The decision was historic, making McVea, who turns 75 this month, the first Black player to receive a scholarship to play football at any of the major college programs in Texas. He was a two-time All-American for the Cougars and later played six seasons in the NFL.

McVea was born July 30, 1946.



July 5

National Bikini Day

This year’s celebration takes on special meaning as it marks the 75th anniversary of the skimpy swimsuit.

Dancer Micheline Bernardini debuted the bikini, designed by Louis Réard, at a poolside photo shoot July 5, 1946, in Paris. A world just emerging from World War II considered the suit scandalous because it showed a woman’s navel.

Réard named the swimsuit, which used about a napkin’s worth of fabric, after the Bikini Atoll, the Pacific Ocean coral island where the U.S. tested nuclear weapons for more than a decade starting in 1946.



**That’s
roughly
the number
of times
a person
breathes
in a day.**



FERTILE FELINE

No cat on record has given birth more than a tabby born in 1935 in Bonham, in North Texas. Dusty produced 420 kittens during her life, according to Guinness World Records, giving birth to her last litter, a single kitten, in 1952.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

I SHOULD HAVE PAID MORE ATTENTION ...

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. Below are some of the responses to our May prompt: **This Memorial Day I remember ...**

All the fallen. War is hell, and we better remember too few come back from it.
SALLY WOLFE
VIA FACEBOOK

Not only those who fought and died in battle for this country but also those front-line heroes who fought and died in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic.
W. GRANT BRALY
GUADALUPE VALLEY EC
CUERO

Maj. Marie T. Rossi, the first female aviation combat commander to fly into battle. She was killed in action March 1, 1991.
TAMMY DUPLICHIN
TRINITY VALLEY EC
NEW YORK, TEXAS

Too many to list.
STEVE AND LISA BOSTON
VIA FACEBOOK

To see more responses, read Currents online.



Best Foot Forward

SOME PEOPLE in this country have two feet, and it's causing all kinds of problems. That's about to change, however. Wait. What?

One foot is the old U.S. survey measuring foot from 1893, according to *The New York Times*, that takes Earth's curvature into account. The other is the shorter and slightly more exact international foot from 1959, used by nearly everybody in the U.S. except surveyors in some states. The two feet differ by about one-hundredth of a foot per mile, or 2 feet for every 1 million feet.

But come January 1, 2023, the old foot gets the boot when the National Institute of Standards and Technology adopts the international foot as the official standard in the U.S.



TCP Contests and More

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RAUL ALLEN

The Hero of Cinco de Mayo

“You have made me feel very proud of being a Tejano. Thank you for your great story on Ignacio Zaragoza Seguín.”

ANTHONY BARRON
TRINITY VALLEY EC
TERRELL

San Jacinto Stands Alone

While I enjoyed the article about the Battle of Puebla and admire Gen. Ignacio Zaragoza Seguín’s part in it, I take exception to calling it “Mexico’s San Jacinto moment” [*The Hero of Cinco de Mayo*, May 2021].

San Jacinto was a victory that ended the war with Mexico and gave Texas independence, whereas the Battle of Puebla was just a lone victory in a war Mexico eventually lost to France the next year. Cinco de Mayo is not nearly as important as San Jacinto Day.

Steve Yates
Pedernales EC
Wimberley



I love any and all yarns [*Serendipity Spinners*, May 2021].

WENDY L. VERA
VIA FACEBOOK

Dear Texas

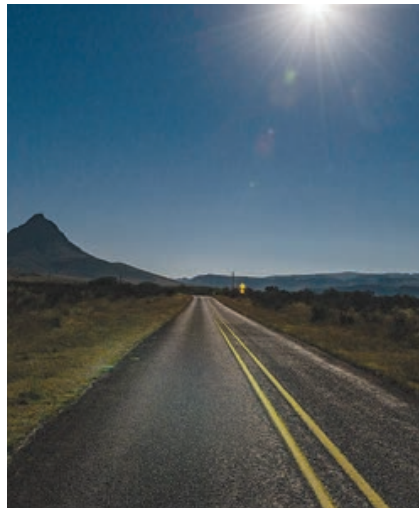
The writing and great photo of Eli Winter’s piece [*Few and Far*, March 2021] were so beautiful. It was a poignant, personal and perfect love letter to the entire state of Texas.

Suzanne Howalt
Pedernales EC
Austin

Falfurrias Beef

At one time the Lasater ranch encompassed 350,000 South Texas acres, and in 1912, somewhere on that huge spread, my mother was born [*A Name That Sticks*, February 2021]. The Lasaters were not only famous for their butter, but they were also known for developing the Beefmaster cattle breed in 1931.

Jerry Klumpp
Central Texas EC
Kingsland



WYATT MCSPADDEN

TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 78, Number 1 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC). Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 75 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power*'s website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.
SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is \$4.20 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50. Individual copies and back issues are available for \$3 each.
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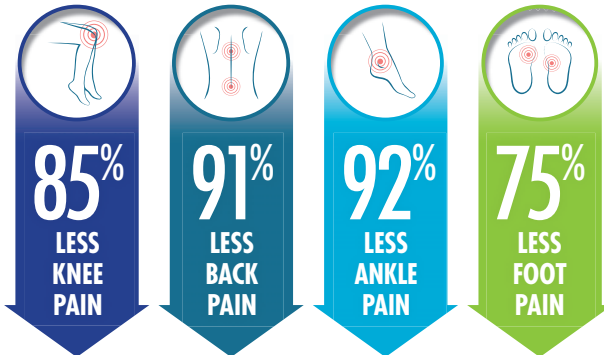


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Rankin as a Canvas

Artist Matt Tumlinson interprets the state's culture in murals around a West Texas town

ABOVE Life imitates art as Matt Tumlinson grabs a selfie in front of his modern take on a *Lonesome Dove* scene. RIGHT A palette of spray paint.

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL



Matt Tumlinson wanted to create a painting that stretched across an entire building, so when the opportunity arose to splash one on the side of a restaurant in tiny Rankin, he headed west, paintbrushes in tow.

“I was thinking if it turns out bad, very few people will see it in Rankin,” the San Antonio-based artist said.

The 8-foot letters that spell out the town’s name, in a style reminiscent of what you’d find on a cowboy’s belt buckle, turned out pretty good, in fact. And since that 60-foot mural went up in 2015, Tumlinson has painted seven more in the West Texas oil town, population about 850.

“With murals, it’s really tough to get permission or access to a wall and even tougher to get access without stipulations on it,” Tumlinson said. “I only wanted to do one if I could paint something I wanted to paint, and Rankin’s been really good about ‘I’ve got a wall you can paint.’”

Tumlinson grew up in Early. After graduating from Texas Tech University, he worked briefly as a history teacher

but disliked it. When he and his wife, Allison, moved to Nantucket, Massachusetts, he sold his first painting—a watercolor map. In 2013 they moved back to Texas, where he worked as a guide on the San Antonio Riverwalk while trying to kickstart his art career.

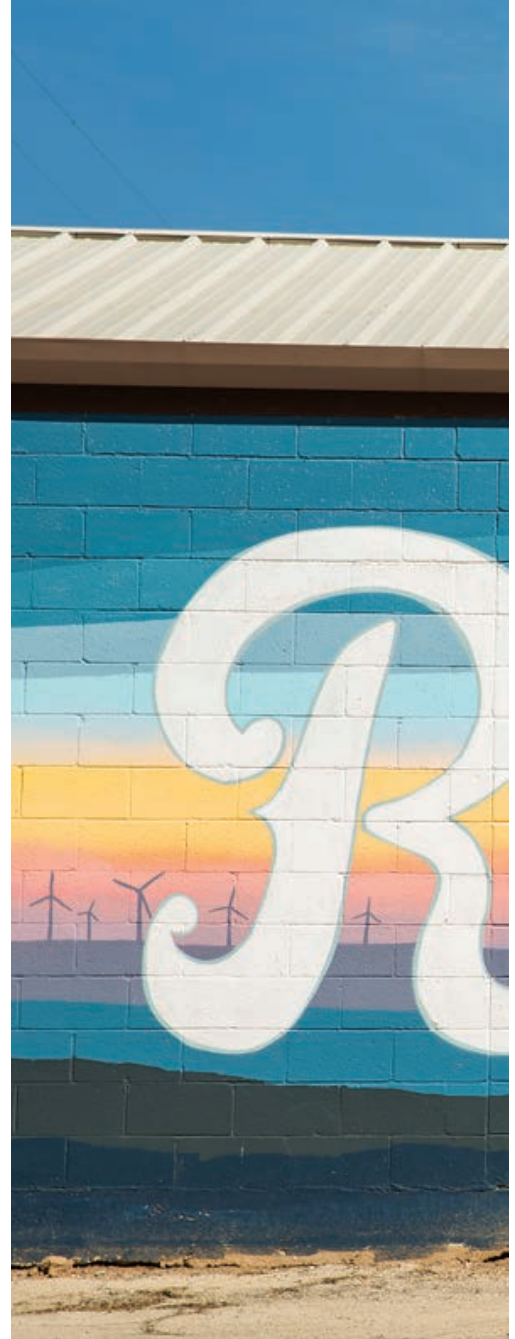
Tumlinson’s main business is in “brass canvas” paintings, made on groups of spent bullet casings collected from his uncle’s gun range. He also works in oil, painting his view of Texas’ quickly changing rural landscapes and drawing influence from Texas singer-songwriters.

“People have this idea that Texas is all boots and cowboys and open range,” Tumlinson said. “I just feel like being an eighth-generation Texan, if somebody’s going to tell the accurate story of what Texas is today, why not me?”

Rankin, 55 miles south of Midland, didn’t offer up its downtown as a canvas randomly. Tumlinson’s sister teaches at Rankin High School; his brother-in-law coaches the Red Devils, the school’s six-man football team. A local restaurant



ABOVE Tumlinson says the mural of Matthew McConaughey is about being confident in yourself. RIGHT Spray-painting in windblown West Texas can be tricky. OPPOSITE Rankin City Hall.



owner thought a mural would liven things up (which it did). Tumlinson's sister mentioned that her brother was an artist looking for a place to paint a mural, and an invitation was extended. The mural was Tumlinson's first.

Soon, locals suggested he paint the side of the city's water tower. The structure looked rickety to Tumlinson, so instead he painted a scene from Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* on the side of a building owned by the mayor. The mural shows characters Gus and Woodrow riding into San Antonio, marveling at how the city has changed. "It's all growed up," Gus says in the TV miniseries.

In Tumlinson's version of the scene, the cowboys are holding a selfie stick. He painted it in a single night, using his pickup truck's headlights to illuminate the wall.

"In a world where all the spaces are filled in on a map, I wonder what happened to the guys like that," Tumlinson says of the image. "I'm trying to put that concept of what it is to be Texan into a modern context."

Another mural sprouted on the wall of an abandoned gas station along U.S. 67 a few blocks away. Tumlinson checked tax records to find out who owned the building and then contacted the company to get permission. The CEO granted approval, and Tumlinson illustrated a saintly looking Willie

Nelson, halo overhead and joint in hand. Within a week, Tumlinson got a call. He'd received permission from the wrong building owner, and the true owner wanted the artwork removed. Tumlinson suggested a compromise—he'd erase the joint if the rest could stay.

It did.

A John Wayne mural adorns the other side of that gas station, alongside a graph marked "stupidity" on one axis and "difficulty in life" on the other, a nod to a quote often incorrectly attributed to Wayne: "Life is hard; it's even harder when you're stupid."

Tumlinson painted other murals, too: a pair of oil field workers on one wall, another Rankin sign on another and a state trooper ticketing a kid riding a Big Wheel on a pink cinder block building. (That one was modeled after his uncle but coincidentally looked like a local trooper at the



time. The trooper took it in stride, according to Tumlinson.)

The artist's most popular work decorates a metal tank near the railroad tracks. In it, actor Matthew McConaughey holds a can of spray paint next to the words, "You'd be a lot cooler if more people thought so," a twist on the actor's quote from the Richard Linklater movie *Dazed and Confused*: "It'd be a lot cooler if you did."

Tumlinson tried but never located the tank's owner to get permission to paint it. He decided to put up the artwork—painted in his studio in downtown San Antonio, then applied to the metal structure—anyway. As he worked in broad daylight, a state trooper stopped to inquire. He asked if Tumlinson had painted the city's murals, told him McConaughey looked great, then drove away.

Since painting the Rankin murals, Tumlinson has expanded his reach—part of a long-term goal to paint his way across the state. In San Antonio his *Puro San Antonio* mural is filled with nods to the local culture. One dubbed *King George* depicts country music singer George Strait in

royal garb, and a third features a woman dressed as Davy Crockett swinging a gun.

Tumlinson likes painting murals because anybody can see them. "It's the closest thing an artist gets to being on a stage," he said. "It's more communal."

The Rankin community, apparently, approves. None have been vandalized.

"You see people all the time taking pictures," said Brandon Brown, the mayor. "I don't think we're a destination yet, but I think the murals have sparked a little bit of new life in Rankin." ■

TCP WEB EXTRA See a slideshow of Tumlinson's Rankin murals.



An Unlikely Blueprint

John S. Chase charted a unique course to become Texas' first Black licensed architect

BY MICHAEL HURD

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE John S. Chase with his sons in front of the family's Houston residence, circa 1959. A rendering of the home's courtyard. A street view of the home from 2019.

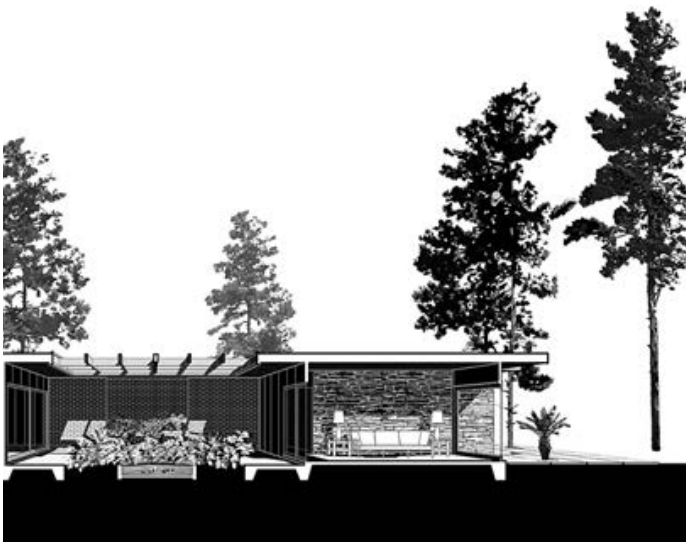


FAMILY: AFRICAN AMERICAN LIBRARY AT THE GREGORY SCHOOL | HOUSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY HOME: HESTER + HARDWAY

JOHNSAUNDERS CHASE didn't want Texas, and the state certainly wanted nothing to do with him. It was 1948, and race relations in the rigidly segregated South were heavily tilted toward nonexistent.

Yet as Chase pursued an education and started his career as an architect, he and the Lone Star State struck up a historic relationship despite an epic perfunctory legal battle, menacing stares, media glares, hate mail and death threats.

Because of this unlikely alliance, it was in Texas where the Annapolis, Maryland, native would, in 1950, become



Chase in a University of Texas classroom in 1950.

One of his most noted residential designs is the Phillips House in Austin—with its distinctive green, diamond-shaped roof; large expanses of windows; and long lines—built for Della Phillips, co-owner of East Austin's Phillips-Upshaw Funeral Home.

In Houston several buildings on the Texas Southern University campus, including the Martin Luther King Jr. Humanities Center and Thurgood Marshall School of Law building, are Chase designs. He also collaborated on construction of Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center and the Astrodome renovation and was commissioned to design the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. In 1980, Chase became the first Black man to serve on the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts.

As a young man, Chase could not have imagined doing any of that while based below the Mason-Dixon Line, but in retrospect his iconic, trailblazing career in Texas was fated. Chase had just received his architectural engineering degree from Virginia's all-Black Hampton College in 1948 when the school's placement officer presented Chase with several job possibilities. Chase told him, "You can strike Texas off the list." However, when the job he took in Philadelphia didn't work out, Chase wrote the officer to ask if he had other prospective employers and added a surprising stipulation.

"I underlined the Deep South, and I never did think I'd do something like that," he said in the HistoryMakers interview. "I just figured that in Philly, they got everything they need, but down in the Deep South, the opportunity to build would be greater, and I was right."

the first African American student admitted to a graduate program at a major university in the South—the University of Texas. Chase followed that victory in 1952, when he became the university's second Black graduate and, the same year, the state's first Black licensed architect.

"For the most part, they treated me with respect, and I treated them with respect," Chase recalled in a 2004 interview with the HistoryMakers, a research institution that archives African American oral history. "I got to know some very, very important architects and some very important people because of the work and relationships that I had at UT."

Chase went on to design an estimated 300 Black churches, primarily in Houston and throughout East Texas but also in Austin, where the angular roofs of Olivet Baptist Church and David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church, with their minimalist approaches, are indicative of Chase's style. They blend contemporary design with natural materials—wood and stone—and an abundance of open spaces and natural light. Inside David Chapel the amount of natural light increases as you approach the pulpit and a simple wooden cross on the wall, intentional symbolism Chase designed into the building.

DRAWING: DAVID HEYMANN, BROOKE BURNSIDE, SARAH SPIELMAN AND WEI ZHOU. CLASSROOM: THE DOLPH BRISCOE CENTER FOR AMERICAN HISTORY, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN



David Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in East Austin.

Chase started his own business, and his first clients were the congregants of African American churches.

N MOVING TO TEXAS, Chase worked for the Black-owned Lott Lumber Co., a homebuilder in East Austin, but he knew he needed more formal education in architecture, and that meant studying at the state’s segregated flagship university just across East Avenue, now Interstate 35.

Chase got two breaks: first, a friendly face in Hugh McMath, dean of the UT School of Architecture, and then the Sweatt v. Painter Supreme Court decision prompted by Chase’s friend Heman Sweatt, who gained admittance to the UT law school after the high court ruled in his favor in the case that outlawed the separate-but-equal doctrine and opened the door for school desegregation.

“I talked with Dean McMath,” Chase remembered. “He asked if I was familiar with the case in front of the Supreme Court. He said, ‘Well, give it just a little more time, and if that thing comes through, I think your prayers are answered.’”

The decision was handed down June 5, 1950, and two days later Chase registered for UT’s summer session. Chaos ensued.

“All the media made it difficult,” he said, “but you could pick the friends out right away; you could pick out the foes. The ones that thought you were OK would do things like if you’d been drawing and studying, they’d come in, saw you’d been working long enough and say, ‘Let’s go to the Union and get a soda or a sandwich or something; come on, get with us.’”

Outside the classroom, heads turned when Chase passed. He was shadowed around campus by reporters and federal marshals and received stacks of explicit hate mail that varied on the theme “You are less than a dog to force your way into someplace that you’re not wanted.”

Yet Chase persevered and completed the program, even making some lifelong friends. He and his wife, Drucie, moved to Houston, where Chase took a teaching position at Texas Southern University. No architecture firms would hire him because of his color.

Chase started his own business, and his first clients were the congregants of African American churches.

“To me, selling architecture is no different than selling insurance—you got to know somebody,” Chase said of his Sunday pilgrimages with Drucie and their three children in tow. “I figured it was the best way to know people—join church. We got so much work out of that.”

However, it is the home he built for himself in Houston’s Third Ward that is the focus of *John S. Chase—The Chase Residence*, a new book by David Heymann and Stephen Fox.

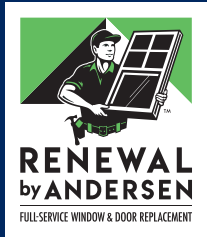
“It was designed around a completely open-air courtyard and exemplified the type of house that was very popular with Houston modern architects in the 1950s—flat-roof, courtyard houses, often with interior walls of glass that opened to the courtyard,” explained Fox, an architectural historian at Rice University. “When he added a second story, it reflected his great admiration for the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, so it kind of changed the tone of the house from an austere modern house to one that had a mixture of materials, a very exuberant interior.”

Chase died in 2012, leaving an inspiring legacy that continues to impact Black architects. He co-founded the National Organization of Minority Architects in 1971.

“He was one person against all odds,” said William Batson, an associate professor at the Prairie View A&M University School of Architecture, the country’s top producer of African American undergraduate architects. “Those people hated him, didn’t want him to succeed, but he did, no matter what. He didn’t have any crutches, he didn’t have any pampering. He didn’t go around protesting, whining and complaining. He set the example and dropped the mic 70 years ago.” ■

TCP WEB EXTRA Enter online to win a copy of *John S. Chase—The Chase Residence*.

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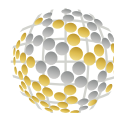
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 — Positivity Sparkles.com



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Just west of Giddings, hundreds of thousands of flowers and foliage flourish at Altman Plants, the largest commercial nursery in Texas

Fields of

PLENTY

Story by Kristin Finan
Photos by Sarah Beal

DRIVE THE CENTRAL stretch of U.S. 290 between Austin and Houston, and you will fly by mile after mile of uninterrupted farmland dotted with wildflowers, crops or cattle. But 3½ miles west of downtown Giddings, on the south side of the highway, a significant break in the scenery draws attention. Row after row of massive white greenhouses cover 50 acres, as far as the eye can see. Another 20 acres of fields are filled with plants shielded by sunshades.

This unusual landscape is all part of Altman Plants, the largest employer in Lee County.

The 140-acre facility is the biggest commercial nursery in Texas, according to Ron Fox, Altman's director of southwest U.S. operations. "If you go into the garden shop, say at the Home Depot or Lowe's, all the annuals, all the pretty flowers, the perennials, those would pretty much all be grown by us," Fox said.

Touring the facility on a golf cart is like seeing Van Gogh's palette come to life — rich swaths of purples, pinks, greens and yellows swirl and whirl into an incredible rainbow landscape, each sprawling stretch of greenhouses packed with up to 300,000 plants carefully attended by expert staff. When ready, the plants are trucked to chain retailers. The Giddings location is the primary plant supplier to more than 500 Home Depot, Walmart and Lowe's stores in Texas and the Southwest. It also distributes to Costco, H-E-B, other grocery stores and independent customers. The plants growing just outside Giddings are trucked as far south as Brownsville and north to Springfield, Mo.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic's negative effect on many businesses in the last year and a half, this Altman Plants facility has thrived just as much as the plants it houses. A rush of home-

IF YOU GO: ALTMAN PLANTS

WHERE: 1180 Private Road 2906, 3½ miles west of downtown Giddings off U.S. 290

ONLINE: altmanplants.com

HOURS: The Altman Plants outlet is usually open to the public from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

PHONE: 979-542-1165 during outlet hours

bound gardeners in 2020, as well as Altman's proximity to the Austin, San Antonio, Houston and Dallas markets, have been key to the nursery's success.

An expansion is planned on 114 already-purchased acres, which would enlarge the nursery by 81 percent. Greenhouses will sit on 30 acres of the expansion, and 5 acres will be new fields for planting. "We are purchasing more land than is needed for the current expansion, and roughing in what future

Continued on page 20



At left: Altman Plants is so huge that many employees, including site manager Jeremy Bruton, get around by bicycle. Below: Baskets of pink, white and purple petunias line the floor of one of the many greenhouses and shaded fields.





Ron Fox, Altman's director of southwest U.S. operations, is preparing for the nursery's expansion. Behind him is a bounty of begonias.

Continued from page 18

expansions might look like on our facility planning maps so we will be prepared," Fox said.

As a result of its success, the business has 360 employees (a 41 percent increase in workers since 2015), many of whom specialize in the care of a specific type of plant. Giddings State School, a juvenile justice facility run by the state, is the second largest employer in Giddings and Lee County, said Denice Harlan, executive director of the Giddings Chamber of Commerce.

Altman has seven smaller Texas locations: one in Austin, one in Huntsville, two in San Antonio and three in Troup, 20 miles southeast of Tyler in East Texas. The company also operates nurseries in California, Colorado and Florida. Altman purchased the Giddings nursery, which was previously Color Star, in 2014.

Altman Plants was founded in California by Ken and Deena Altman in 1975 after their hobby of collecting and growing cacti and succulents in their Los Angeles backyard outgrew their expectations. Today the couple remain active in the company, which states on its website that it is the largest cactus and succulent grower in the world. While some of those succulents now grow in Texas, the majority of them, and all of the cactus varieties, are grown in California.

In total, Altman Plants has nearly 35 million square feet of greenhouse space in the U.S., according to industry estimates.

Altman grows roughly 10 percent of the nation's poinsettias, more than 750,000, are grown at the Giddings facility annually. There are 124 different types of plants grown in Giddings: 85 percent are annuals such as petunias and vincas; 13 percent are perennials, like salvias and hostas; and 2 percent are bulbs. Over the course of a full growing season, 15.4 million individual plants can take root at the Giddings facility.

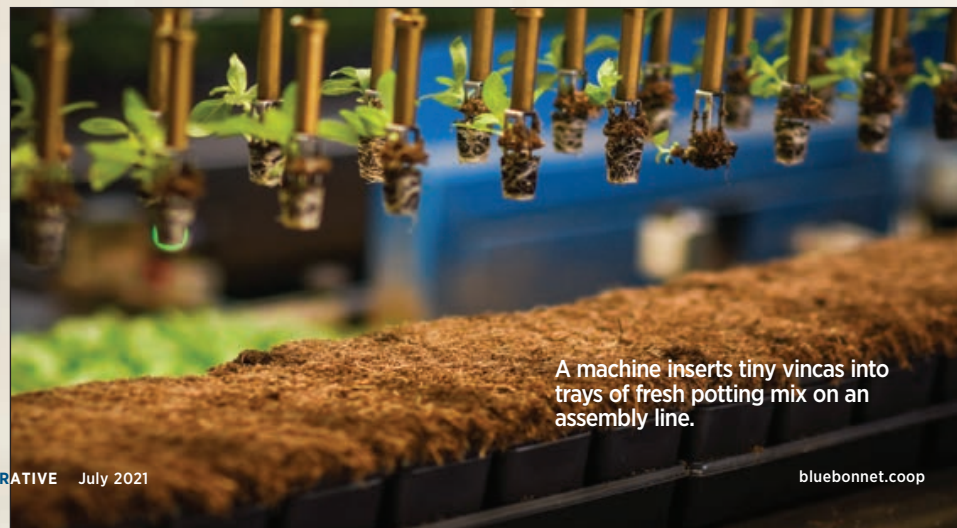
"The bar we set for ourselves is really high," said Fox, who has worked in horticulture since 1982 and joined Altman Plants in 2015. "As we get bigger, we won't be just as good as we are now. As we get bigger, we will get better. So far,

we've been able to do that."

On any given day, thimble-size plants, about 290 to a tray, that sprouted in California are trucked to the Giddings location. Workers move them into larger pots either by hand or with a mechanical transplanting machine that delicately and rhythmically plucks the tiny plants from their trays, repots them in a soil mix that's blended on site and sends them down the assembly line to be labeled.

From there, the plants go to the greenhouses, where workers closely monitor light, temperature, fertilizer and water, making adjustments in the greenhouses to suit each type of plant. The greenhouses include dual heat systems as well as an evaporative cooling system to support

Continued on page 22



A machine inserts tiny vincas into trays of fresh potting mix on an assembly line.



During installation, workers use personal watercrafts to maneuver parts of the array into position. Photo courtesy of Speir Commercial & Industrial

FLOATING SOLAR

Altman Plants boasts Texas' first array of its kind

By Lisa Ogle

IN MAY 2021, Altman Plants energized the first solar array in Texas that floats on water.

At 750 kilowatts of production capacity, it is one of the largest arrays on Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's electric grid. Large commercial solar installations make up 37 percent of the total renewable production capacity of 21 megawatts on the cooperative's system.

Floating arrays are unusual. Elsewhere in the United States, a few dozen of them can be found, mostly in California and on the East Coast. They are more expensive than land-based installations but provide interesting additional benefits.

Altman's array, for example, helps preserve the valuable water reservoir it rests atop because it reduces water evaporation, keeps the water cooler in summer and greatly reduces the growth of algae. Its size is intended to offset the energy costs of the huge commercial nursery and reduce its carbon footprint.

Mark Rangel, an executive vice president of New Braunfels-based Speir Commercial & Industrial, helped shepherd the idea of a floating array as a solution to avoid taking up valuable real estate, but knew the additional costs would need support from other sources.

Federal tax incentives took care of 50 percent of the cost, and a USDA Rural Energy for America Program grant paid

ALTMAN'S SOLAR ARRAY

750 kilowatts of production capacity, enough to power 93 homes

2,592 solar panels

94,145 square feet, roughly the size of two football field

1,122 tons of carbon dioxide offset, equivalent to planting 26,089 trees

for another 25 percent. The nursery is expected to see a return on its investment in six to seven years, Rangel estimated.

Rangel and Altman's construction project manager Daryl Noack worked with French-based floating solar specialist Ciel & Terre to build the floating devices, anchoring system and aluminum rack that secure and house the solar panels.

Anchoring the rack was one of the biggest hurdles. They initially estimated a need for six to eight anchors and ended up with 34, Noack said.

"We didn't think it was going to be that many anchors," Rangel said. "Driving it into the side of a bank is challenging. Not a lot of contractors do that specific kind of work."

Another challenge was working safely on water.

The workers were using personal water-

crafts, and "we had to make sure our guys could swim," Rangel said. It involved a little trial and error — and getting wet. And muddy.

The solar panels were assembled on land in sections. Each section was floated across the water and then pinned in place on the rack.

"It was interesting to watch it being built," Noack said. For the last section, "it was a perfectly calm day." He remembers seeing the set of panels gracefully float across the water right in place. "It was really cool."

Bluebonnet worked closely with the team for about a year to get the array connected to the grid and help maximize consumption of the solar power. Excess power is returned to the grid, and Altman is paid back at a set rate.

"This was a unique project for us — seeing how a floating array comes together and working with a commercial member in a way we've never done before," said Wesley Brinkmeyer, Bluebonnet's manager of energy services. "As with all of our members, we work to try to find ways to help them achieve their goals. In the case of Altman's project, we worked to consolidate multiple meters by adjusting the infrastructure, coordinated on long-term plans and evaluated all of the options. We learned a lot along the way."

This wasn't the average solar project, Rangel said. "It definitely took a team — a community — to get this project done."

Guadalupe Gonzalez does a quality control check of freshly planted purslanes. Altman sells more than half a million of this annual per year.

Continued from page 20

crops year-round. Rainwater and runoff is captured and funneled into four on-site reservoirs and circulated throughout the facility and onto the plants. The Giddings location gets its electricity from both Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative and a new floating solar array, the first of its kind in Texas. (See story, Page 21)

Depending on the size of a plant, an acre of greenhouse space may house anywhere from 30,000 plants in 6-inch pots to 300,000 plants in 1-inch cell packs. Each curved white roof you see from the highway is a 30-foot-wide greenhouse. The greenhouses are connected to one another with a rain gutter between them, and each total connected structure is a 5- to 10-acre “greenhouse range,” Fox said. Within each range, a single plant variety can grow in a 1- to 2-acre section where temperatures and light are controlled separately.

All that space is why many employees use bicycles to more easily traverse the expansive property.

In the fields, about 90 percent of the plants — such as autumn garden mums — are sheltered by sunshades to reduce the heat during scorching summers and protect tender plants from hail.

Once the plants are ready to leave for their retail destinations, they are stacked on tall metal shelves on wheels that are

connected to one another and pulled by tractors through the facility, looking like tall, thin plant trains.

On any given day, more than 70 trucks leave the Giddings location for destinations across the American Southwest.

Despite a year filled with growth and innovation, Fox said navigating the pandemic has “been an experience like no other.”

“In mid- to late March 2020, our business dropped off precipitously and we were concerned that our customers were going to be deemed non-essential businesses or that they might continue to operate but that they might decide to close their garden shops,” Fox said. “It was a particularly stressful time for us because we had our peak inventory in the greenhouses at that point, everything was potted for the spring to open up and the product is all highly perishable.”

By mid-April 2020, though, Fox said

ALTMAN'S MOST POPULAR POTTED PLANTS PER YEAR

1. **Vincas** — 1.7 million
2. **Petunias** — 1.1 million
3. **Mums** — 834,000
4. **Lantanas** — 768,000
5. **Poinsettias** — 705,000
6. **Zinnias** — 596,000
7. **Impatiens** — 590,000
(including New Guinea, Sunpatiens and the standard annual impatiens)
8. **Dianthuses** — 587,000
9. **Begonias** — 552,000
10. **Purslanes** — 502,000

Josue Lopez prepares to load baskets of freshly planted vincas after a quick shower on the assembly line.



the demand picked up dramatically “and continues to this day.”

“The demand for our product actually went up because people felt like planting flowers in their yard was something they could still do that was safe and wholesome and would relieve stress.”

The popularity of plants during the pandemic prompted Altman’s facility in Giddings to do something it had never done: sell plants directly to the public. Now, curious passers-by can finally see a bit of what’s growing in the big greenhouses. Six days a week, visitors can peruse aisles chock-full of discounted plants and flowers ranging from Boston ferns in hanging baskets to jalapeño plants. Because the outlet, which opened in March 2021, is easy to see from U.S. 290, Fox said they have an entirely new customer base.

“It was a very impromptu affair to start with, but we timed it just right because people were starting to come out and they had a severe case of cabin fever. We had an incredible number of customers during those first weeks when we opened it,” Fox said. “We have more interaction with the community in a day now than what we would have in a whole month. People just seem to continue to be really excited about it.”

Altman’s is always experimenting with new varieties of plants, Fox said. Home Depot runs a trial garden at the Giddings facility, where it tests new plants and flowers it might add to its aisles. Although none of the Giddings-based trials have impacted the retail market yet, Altman has seen successes from trials at other locations, such as the disease-resistant “True Bloom” rose and the “Purple Princess” bougainvillea, with blooms that retain a deep magenta color all year long.

“We’re always trying to figure out how we

GIDDINGS’ ALTMAN BY THE NUMBERS

15.4 million plants
grown per year

140 acres of campus
with 50 acres of greenhouse,
20 acres of field

114 additional acres
purchased for future expansion

360 employees,
largest employer in Lee County

500 retail locations
including Home Depot, Walmart
and Lowe’s sell the facility’s plants



can say ‘yes’ to the customer,” Fox said, “and do everything possible we can to keep them happy.”

It’s a philosophy that’s paid off for Lee County, said Harlan of the Giddings Chamber of Commerce. Altman has been generous, donating to local businesses and nonprofits. The company has donated plants to the chamber to beautify its courtyard and sponsored the Giddings High School plant sale.

“We are extremely happy to have Altman Plants in Giddings, Texas,” Harlan said. “We have watched them grow over the past several years, and we have seen them become an integral part of our community. The employees are our friends and neighbors. They are growing, innovative, community-conscious and a huge part of the culture of Giddings.” ■

SUGGESTED PLANTS FOR TEXAS GARDENS

Salvias — Depending on the variety, they can last until winter’s cold arrives. They are generally deer resistant, but butterflies hummingbirds and bees love them.

Rudbeckias (aka orange coneflowers or black-eyed Susans) — These can handle the heat, offer bright yellow and orange-yellow blooms and fuzzy foliage, and are somewhat deer resistant.

Asclepias (aka butterfly weeds) — They help build the Monarch butterfly population by providing food for the caterpillars to eat; they can also withstand the Texas heat.

Lantanas — This hardy plant can hold up in all kinds of gardens and keep blooming even in Texas summers.

Vincas — This gets the prize as the top annual to hold up in the heat. Altman grows the Titan series in Giddings because it can handle high humidity without having disease issues.

Verbenas — These pretty plants will continue to bloom, even in summer.



Marixa Alvarez tows a train of empty carts back to the assembly lines in the main building. It is not uncommon to see more than 20 carts being pulled at one time through the maze of greenhouses.

Angela Coy, manager of accounts receivable at Bluebonnet, assists in registering member Linda Makowsky of Burton during the cooperative's drive-through Annual Meeting at the Silos on 77 near Giddings on May 11, 2021. Sarah Beal photos



An Annual Meeting like no other

Drive-through event gives members a chance to safely register, greet, get information

BLUEBONNET'S ANNUAL Meetings are big events steeped in tradition. Every year for decades, hundreds of cooperative members have gathered on the second Tuesday in May to chat with other members, shake the hands of co-op leaders, get information, ask questions, get a snack and perhaps win a door prize.

The 2020 meeting was held without public attendance due to COVID-19. This year, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative brought back a bit of the in-person feel to the event with its first drive-through Annual Meeting on May 11.

In the parking lot of the Silos on 77, an event facility in Giddings, members were guided through two white tents, each wide enough for several lanes of vehicles. The threat of thunderstorms didn't deter nearly 200 members, many accompanied by spouses, kids or pets, from driving through. They were able to register, greet employee volunteers, get answers to questions, chat from their front seat with cooperative leaders, and get a bag full of useful news and information. Attendees even received the traditional kolaches, safely tucked in individual bags.

"We were all happy to return to having our Annual Meeting with members this year," said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet's Board chairman. "It sure was nice to see and visit with our friends and neighbors."

During the Annual Meeting, two incumbent members of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors were re-elected: Shana Whiteley, District 2, Travis County, and Bryan



Doyle Janner of Brenham won the 2008 Chevrolet 1500 that was retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. Prize winners' names were drawn at random from all the Bluebonnet members who submitted a proxy form or registered at our Annual Meeting on May 11.



Shana Whiteley



Bryan Bracewell

Bracewell, District 3, Bastrop County.

Whiteley has served on the Board since 2017 and owns the Good Luck Grill in Manor and the Lucky Duck Cafe in Taylor.

"Bluebonnet is an organization of exceptional quality and integrity," she said. "It is my privilege and honor to be re-elected to the Board during this exciting time of growth and prosperity."

Bracewell joined the Board in 2018 and owns Southside Market & Barbeque, with locations in Elgin, Bastrop, Austin and Hutto.

"The commitment and care everyone at Bluebonnet has for the members and

communities we serve are rooted in the co-op's 82-year history," he said. "I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to Bluebonnet's success."

Before the event, 6,682 Bluebonnet members participated in the Annual Meeting by submitting proxy forms. Those, along with the 193 members who registered at the event, constituted a quorum for the meeting.

"We weren't sure what to expect from a drive-through meeting," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager. "Judging from my conversations with members, it was a great success."

Every member who submitted a proxy or registered at the drive-through was also entered into drawings for numerous door prizes. Doyle Janner of Brenham won the big prize — a 2008 Chevrolet 1500 extended cab being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. "It'll make a great farm truck," he said. Daniel Muff of Bastrop and Kenneth Sprinkles of Manor each won a Cub Cadet zero-turn riding lawn mower.

— Melissa Segrest

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Bluebonnet, LCRA grants support community projects in the region

THE LOWER COLORADO River Authority and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative recently awarded several grants in Bluebonnet's service area. The grants are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program to give back to the communities it serves. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and a partner in the grant program. Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted in July. More information is available at lcra.org/cdpp.



A \$50,000 grant will help the Caldwell County Fire Chiefs Association construct a new training facility for area fire departments. The grant is paired with matching funds of \$60,000 raised by the association with generous support from the community. The new facility will include movable walls and windows designed to withstand repeated fires. Hands-on, live-fire training provides valuable opportunities for firefighters to improve and maintain their skills in real-life fire conditions. Area departments will be able to train close to home, creating better regional coordination in emergency situations. Pictured, from left to right, are Joyce Buckner, Bluebonnet community representative; Danney Rodgers, the fire association's vice president; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Phil Wilson, LCRA general manager; Jerry Doyle, association member; Edward Hanna, association president; Linda Haden, association fundraising organizer; Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board member; Hoppy Haden, Caldwell County judge; Hector Rangel, Caldwell County emergency management coordinator; and Hank Alex, Caldwell County assistant emergency management coordinator.



A \$19,848 grant will help Round Top install energy-efficient outdoor lighting on its historic town hall and the public square that surrounds it. The grant, along with \$7,000 in matching funds will pay for eight vintage-style fixtures that will hold LED bulbs. The fixtures will complement the design of Round Top's mid-1920s town hall and be dark sky-compliant, directing their light downward. Pictured, from left to right, are Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board assistant secretary/treasurer; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet community representative; Mark Massey, Round Top mayor; Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet community representative; and Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member.

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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.



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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— H., Arvada, CO





An Early RGV Mover

Col. Sam Robertson envisioned Boca Chica as the place to launch his highway on the beach

BY W.F. STRONG

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, Col. Sam Robertson stood on the same Boca Chica Beach that Elon Musk owns today and dreamed a different dream. Instead of Musk’s spaceport, Robertson dreamed of seaports and an oceanside highway.

Robertson owned 800 acres at Boca Chica, and it was likely some of the same 1,000 acres now managed by Musk’s companies. Back then Robertson built the railroad that connected the Rio Grande Valley to the wider world. He had founded the town of San Benito, serving as sheriff and helping to run the Ku Klux Klan out of the region.

He had repurposed the old resacas to irrigate the lower Valley. In 1926 he gathered RGV leaders in Brownsville’s El Jardin Hotel to make his pitch for an

oceanside highway that would run from Boca Chica to Corpus Christi and become, in his words, “the most beautiful 150 miles of highway in the world.”

Robertson laid out his vision before the Rio Grande Valley Commercial Club. “I have traveled somewhat extensively in this world,” he said, “and have never seen any scenery wilder or more beautiful than this stretch of beach.”

Robertson was not only an entrepreneur; he was a decorated soldier and noted engineer. In 1916 he served as a scout for Gen. Jack Pershing in the pursuit of Pancho Villa in Mexico. During World War I, he served in Europe as a commander of the 22nd Engineers, building railroads and bridges for Allied troops in France. He was awarded the

TCP WEB EXTRA

Listen to W.F. Strong read this story.

Distinguished Service Medal for bravery under fire.

The business leaders of the Valley trusted his vision because they believed his claims. He wasn’t pitching a black-top road.

“The beach is as smooth as a billiard table,” Robertson said. “No road can be constructed by man as good for autoing as the beach, and the Gulf of Mexico maintains it.” All you would need is maintenance crews to move driftwood out of the way, he said, telling those assembled that he had explored the beach from Corpus Christi to the mouth of the Rio Grande River and that a highway was quite possible and would bring in enormous numbers of tourists.

Robertson advocated the laying in of water lines for irrigation because then the beachscapes could be enhanced with “bermuda grass, live oak trees, palms and other beautiful trees along the sand hills of the beaches.”

Such a development would be good for the Rio Grande Valley, too, he argued. With good roads to Boca Chica Beach, Valleyites could have a Sunday lunch at home, then drive to the beach for a Sunday afternoon swim at the beach and still be home by 10 p.m.

Robertson’s oceanside highway was never developed. But looking at South Padre and North Padre today, with their causeway bridges, carefully maintained beaches, opulent hotels and verdant landscaping, you can see that his dream for the island has been partially realized.

Robertson opened his Del Mar Resort on Boca Chica Beach in 1931, but the resort was virtually wiped out by a hurricane in 1933. He rebuilt within six months and constructed an asphalt road from Brownsville to Boca Chica Beach because his personal mantra was “Civilization follows transportation.”

Musk would like that, too. ■

Ice Cream and Sorbets

Churn out flavorful treats sure to take the edge off a Texas summer

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

One blessing of the Texas heat is that we rarely need an excuse to indulge in a cool, creamy bowl of ice cream. When I make ice cream, I tend to opt for Philadelphia-style, which does not use eggs. After chilling the liquid, you can let your machine churn it while you're eating dinner and have fresh soft serve for dessert. Amaretto helps keep this ice cream soft enough to scoop, but if you prefer, you can substitute ½ teaspoon of almond extract.

Cherry Amaretto Ice Cream

1 jar (11 ounces) maraschino cherries, without stems, divided use

1½ cups heavy cream

1½ cups whole milk

½ cup sugar

2 tablespoons amaretto liqueur

1. Strain cherries over a bowl, reserving liquid. Slice half the cherries into quarters and set aside.
2. Purée remaining cherries with the reserved juice, then pour into a medium bowl. Whisk in cream, milk and sugar. Cover and chill 2 hours.
3. When ready to make the ice cream, add amaretto and mix well. Pour the mixture into an ice cream maker and freeze according to the manufacturer's instructions. In the last few minutes of churning, mix in the reserved sliced cherries. Scoop ice cream into freezer containers and chill completely, until ready to serve.

MAKES 1.5 QUARTS

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Chocolate Frozen Yogurt.





Texas Wildflower Honey Ice Cream

MELISSA TURLEY
BANDERA EC

This ice cream is sure to be a hit for honey lovers. Turley re-created the recipe after tasting a similar version at a local restaurant. Note that the honey makes this a very soft ice cream, so be sure to keep it frozen right up until serving.

1 cup whole milk
¾ cup raw honey
2 cups heavy cream
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1. In a bowl, whisk together milk and honey until well blended. Add cream and vanilla and mix well. Cover and refrigerate 1–2 hours or overnight.
2. When ready to make the ice cream, stir mixture and pour into an ice cream maker. Freeze according to the manufacturer's instructions.

MAKES 1.5 QUARTS

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Pecan Caramel Pear Ice Cream

KRYSABELLE GILBERT
WOOD COUNTY EC



Don't be daunted by the extra steps for the mix-ins in this ice cream—the results are well worth the effort. "It tastes just like eating a pear upside-down cake a la mode," says Gilbert, who came up with the recipe after a neighbor shared a harvest bounty. If you can't find Asian pears, Bosc pears make a suitable substitute.

MAKES 1.5 QUARTS

ICE CREAM
2 eggs
½ cup sugar
1½ cups heavy cream
1½ cups whole milk
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

CARAMEL PEARS
2 Asian pears
¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter
½ cup sugar

PECANS
1 egg white
1 tablespoon water
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups pecans, chopped
¼ cup sugar
½ teaspoon cinnamon
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
¼ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ cup diced crystallized ginger

COOK'S TIP Crystallized ginger can be found in the spice section, but you can also leave it out.

1. ICE CREAM In a small bowl, whisk eggs and ½ cup sugar together until thickened and pale.

2. In a medium saucepan over medium-low heat, bring cream and milk to a simmer. Slowly whisk half the heated liquid into the egg mixture to temper, then pour tempered egg mixture back into saucepan.

3. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture is thick and coats the back of a wooden spoon.

4. Strain into a large bowl and let cool to room temperature, then stir in vanilla and cinnamon. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

5. CARAMEL PEARS About an hour before churning, make the mix-ins. Peel pears and chop into ½-inch chunks.

6. In a large skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Add ½ cup sugar and cook until it starts to turn golden. Add pears, stirring to coat, and cook 10–15 minutes, or until golden brown and caramel has thickened.

7. Pour pears onto a parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet to cool.

8. PECANS Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium bowl, whisk together egg white, water and vanilla. Add chopped pecans and toss to coat.

9. In a large plastic bag, combine sugar, cinnamon, salt, nutmeg, cloves and ground ginger. Add pecans and shake to completely coat nuts.

10. Spread nuts on a rimmed baking sheet and bake 20 minutes, stirring once halfway through. Stir again and let cool completely.

11. When ready to make the ice cream, stir the ice cream base and pour into an ice cream maker. Freeze according to the manufacturer's instructions. Add pears, pecans and crystallized ginger in the last few minutes of freezing. Scoop ice cream into freezer containers and let chill completely before serving.





Strawberry Perfection

LAMONT PETERSEN
 NAVARRO COUNTY EC
 BANDERA EC

Ideal for summer, when strawberries are at their peak, strawberry ice cream is a hit for all ages. The fruit is macerated before blending to soften and release juices, which allows the berry flavor to pop.

1 pound strawberries, hulled and sliced
¾ cup sugar
⅛ teaspoon salt

Which Ice Cream Maker Is Right for You?

BY MEGAN MYERS

When it comes to making ice cream at home, there are two main types of machines: electric and traditional.

Electric

Countertop electric ice cream machines are widely available and make churning at home a breeze. Their smaller size makes them ideal for those who like to make ice cream often or enjoy experimenting with flavors. Keep in mind, however, that the mixing bowl needs to be pre-chilled, so you'll need to plan ahead.

Traditional

If you grew up with hand-churned ice cream makers, you'll be familiar with this style, which uses rock salt and ice packed around a center compartment. While hand cranks are still available, these now have an electric motor option as well. The standard size makes 4 quarts of ice cream, so make room in your freezer.

2 cups heavy cream
1 tablespoon vanilla extract

1. In a bowl, combine sliced strawberries, sugar and salt. Cover and refrigerate 1–2 hours to release juices.
2. Stir mixture well and purée berries with the accumulated juices.

3. Whisk together purée, cream and vanilla. Cover and chill in the refrigerator 2 hours.

4. When ready to make the ice cream, stir mixture and pour into an ice cream maker. Freeze according to the manufacturer's instructions.

MAKES 1.5 QUARTS



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The reverse of the 2021 release displays a scene from the famous Battle of the Alamo. It depicts two Texian soldiers including the American icon, Davy Crockett, attempting to fend off Mexican soldiers attempting to breach the walls of the Alamo.



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BATTLE OF THE ALAMO

second in the series ● ● ● ●

The events of this famous battle took place on the days of February 23rd - March 6th, 1836. At the end of a 13-day siege, President General Antonio López de Santa Anna and his Mexican troops reclaimed the Alamo Mission, killing the Texian and immigrant occupiers.

The Texas Silver Round can be purchased in a monster box produced exclusively for the Texas Mint. Packaged in 20 protective tubes of 25 rounds each, the monster box holds 500 1-ounce Texas Silver Rounds. Built from durable cold-rolled steel and finished with a matte black powder coat, the monster box lid features an orange cutout of the state of Texas. Each sealed monster box is secured with a unique serial number and a holographic seal to ensure maximum product protection.

The Texas Silver Round is also available to purchase in a similarly designed and secured mini-monster box, which contains 10 protective tubes of 25 rounds each for a total of 250 silver rounds.



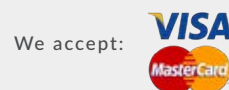
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Serious Undertaking

Houston funeral museum pays its respects to the inevitable

BY CHET GARNER

AN OVERCAST SKY painted the North Houston landscape with a somber shade of gray, which seemed appropriate as I approached the National Museum of Funeral History. Based on the institution's name, I expected an experience akin to a carnival sideshow or a roadside attraction full of plastic corpses and otherworldly burial stories. Instead of a tribute to the bizarre, I found a museum staffed by funeral directors who take their profession—and its history—very seriously.

Starting with a narrative of Egyptian mummies and mummification, I followed a serpentine path through the cavernous building, learning about funerary topics such as custom casket-making and the embalming techniques of the Civil War. Each lesson was communicated through detailed displays or life-size dioramas. Most impressive was the collection of classic hearses, one of which served in the funerals of presidents Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. Also fascinating was the step-by-step description of how a pope is laid to rest. This sequence chronicled the death and burial of Pope John Paul III, whose funeral was one of the largest in history.

As expected, I saw displays to satisfy the morbidly curious, such as a three-person casket and the ghost stories that accompany one of the horse-drawn hearses. I found one entire room with memorabilia from the funerals of celebrities such as Michael Jackson, Neil Armstrong and Gene Wilder. That room seemed like a funeral home version of Planet Hollywood.

I could have spent hours learning more about every detail of how we humans mourn and pay tribute to those we've lost. It turns out that honoring the dead is a tradition that goes back to the earliest days of humans. This strange yet compelling museum can help us become a little more comfortable with our own inevitable conclusion. ■

ABOVE Even at a funeral museum, Chet's mug is half full.

TCP WEB EXTRA Chet ponders life's grave consequences in his latest video. See all his Explorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Some events may have been affected by COVID-19. Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

JULY

03

Bandera [3, 10, 17, 31]
Cowboys on Main,
 (830) 796-3781,
banderacowboycapital.com

Bulverde [3, 10, 17, 24, 31]
Saturday Night Rodeo,
 (830) 980-2226,
tejasrodeo.com

05

Salado [5–Aug. 26] Women, Aviation and WWII,
 (254) 947-5232,
saladomuseum.org

07

Goliad [7, 14, 21, 28]
Wayback Wednesdays,
 (361) 645-3752,
presidiolabahia.org

08

Palestine [8, 10, 15–17, 22–24, 29–31] Diesel Round Trip,
 1-855-632-7729,
texasstaterailroad.net

09

Palestine Wines in the Pines, 1-855-632-7729,
texasstaterailroad.net

Gladewater [9–10] East Texas Gusher Days,
 (903) 845-5501,
gusher-days.com

10

Arlington Micky and the Motorcars, (817) 543-4301,
levittpavilionarlington.org

Corpus Christi Plumeria Passions, (361) 852-2100,
stxbot.org

11

Arlington Courtney Patton,
 (817) 543-4301,
levittpavilionarlington.org

15

Fredericksburg [15-18]
Beauty and the Beast Jr.,
1-888-669-7114,
fredericksburgtheater.org

16

Taylor [16-17] Taylor
Rodeo, (512) 238-2101,
wilcoexpo.com

Temple [16-17] Wildflower
Quilt Guild Quilt Show,
(254) 220-5597,
wildflowerquiltguild.com

Fredericksburg [16-18]
Trade Days, (210) 846-4094,
fbgtradedays.com

17

**Fredericksburg Night in
Old Fredericksburg**, (830)
997-2359, gillespiefair.com

**Howe Hotter 'N Howe Sum-
mer Bash**, (903) 532-6080,
howechamber.com

Lockney Christmas in July,
(806) 983-6228

23

Fredericksburg [23-25]
Hill Country Swap Meet,
(254) 751-7958, earhart
productions.com/
hill-country-swap-meet

24

**Arlington Green Day,
Fall Out Boy and Weezer**,
(817) 533-1972,
hellamegatour.com

**Bandera National Day of
the Cowboy**, (210) 215-1995,
nationaldayofthecowboy
bandera.com

**Bandera Ridin' the River
Cowboy Fellowship Ranch
Rodeo**, (830) 460-0710,
ridintheriver.com

**Waxahachie Indian Artifact
Show**, (979) 574-6501

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24

Buffalo Gap [24–25] Tour de Gap, (325) 829-0617, tourdegap.com

29

Clute [29–31] Great Texas Mosquito Festival, (979) 265-8392, mosquitofestival.com

Brenham [29–Aug. 1] The Wizard of Oz, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

Fredericksburg [29–Aug. 1] Hill Country Film Festival, 1-866-224-7714, hillcountryff.com

30

Bonham [30–31] Quilt Hop, (903) 583-9830, visitbonham.com

31

Columbus Country Market, (979) 732-8385, columbusfmtx.org

AUGUST

06

Kerrville [6–7, 13–15, 20–22] Murder on the Orient Express, (830) 896-9393, caillouxperformingarts.com

07

Bellville Farmers Market, (979) 865-3407, discoverbellville.com

Fredericksburg Texas Ranger Day History Symposium, (830) 990-1192, trhc.org

Freeport KidFest, (979) 233-0066, freeport.tx.us

Palestine Saturdays on Main, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

South Padre Island [7–8] Pro-Am Beach Soccer Tournament, (415) 308-0603, sopadre.com

Bulverde [7, 14, 21, 28] Saturday Night Rodeo, (830) 980-2226, tejasrodeo.com



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Night Life

No, it isn't hot in Texas; and the cool night dews are falling,
 And the katydids are chirping in the grass beside the pool;
 And from out the moonlit distances the mockingbirds are calling,
 And I know the days are hazy and the nights perfumed and cool.

From *Longing for Texas* by Judd Mortimer Lewis

GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT

MICHELE TECH
 UNITED COOPERATIVE
 SERVICES

Honky-tonk nights at Billy
 Bob's Texas in Fort Worth.

CHARLES BAXTER
 COSERV

The Fort Davis Drug Store
 and Hotel.

KYLEIGH HOLLE
 HILCO EC

The Dallas skyline at night
 with car light trails.

ELYSE KANA
 BLUEBONNET EC

The other side of nowhere,
 Big Bend Ranch State Park.



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DUE AUG 10 **Bridges**

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Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Common Ground

Whether many acres or a pint-size lot, there's pride and joy in land ownership

BY RHONDA REINHART
ILLUSTRATION BY LINDA BLECK

IN THE BLACK-AND-WHITE Westerns that my dad used to watch when I was a kid, a cowboy hat-clad rancher might head out on horseback to survey his domain, a vast expanse of dusty terrain spanning thousands of acres. My father wasn't a rancher by any means, but he did own a 10-acre spread in deep East Texas where he raised all manner of animals, including guinea fowl, hogs and cows.

He loved "going to the land," as we called it back then, and he spent countless hours building pens, planting vegetable gardens, clearing sections of the property and walking mile after mile through the seemingly endless stretch of pines.

I did not share my father's affinity for going to the land, and even though I spent plenty of time out there with

him over the years, I would have much preferred to be back in Houston, reading a book, hanging out with friends or sitting in a cool, dark theater watching a movie—definitely not a Western. In fact after I left home, I spent two decades living in apartments, townhouses and condos—surrounded by land covered in concrete instead of pine needles and serenaded by the sounds of traffic instead of livestock.

About five years ago, however, I reached my limit on sharing walls with nosy neighbors and knowing that I was spending my hard-earned money to live atop ground that would never be mine. So I decided to purchase my own tiny patch of land.

At my little homestead in northwest Dallas, unlike the sprawling ranches in those old Westerns—or even my father's modest parcel in the Piney Woods—I merely have to peek out the back door to take in the full 7,976 square feet of North Texas soil that belongs to me. After 20 years of having little more than a balcony or patio at my disposal, the 0.18 acre on which my 1952 cottage sits feels enormous to me. I've even dubbed the small section of yard behind the garage "the back forty."

My dad died years ago, and his land was sold. While I don't have his knack for animal husbandry or even one-tenth of the acreage he owned in Sam Houston Electric Cooperative's service area, I do have a dog who loves to roll in the grass, sunbathe in the driveway and patrol the grounds for squirrels and opossums. I've also been thinking about starting a garden where I can grow my own tomatoes and cucumbers, some of my dad's favorite crops.

I can't be certain, but I'm betting that if he were still around, those things alone would earn me his signature grin and a nod. ■

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