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AUGUST 2021

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**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18



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August 2021



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Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research.

*By Melissa Gaskill
Photos by Julia Robinson*

Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through life transitions.

*By Chris Burrows
Photos by Eric Pohl*

ON THE COVER

Diane Wilson shows nurdles—plastic pellets—she has collected at the Texas coast.
Photo by Julia Robinson

ABOVE

One of the thousands of bags Hunter Beaton has prepared for foster youths.
Photo courtesy NRECA

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Chess Royalty

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS Rio Grande Valley chess team won its third consecutive national championship, defeating Webster University in April for the President's Cup.

Our June 2012 story *The Kings and Queens of Brownsville* told how young students made all the right moves to turn the U.S.'s southernmost border town into a chess powerhouse.



Members of the UTRGV chess team often mentor K-12 students in Brownsville schools.



TCP Contests and More

[ON TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM](http://ONTEXASCOOPPOWER.COM)

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST

Soups and Stews

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Bridges

POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Know anybody as inspired and exceptional as Hunter Beaton, featured on Page 12? Let us know so we can shine the spotlight on them.

August 22

National Tooth Fairy Day

The tooth fairy forks over an average of \$4.70 per visit in the U.S., a recent poll shows. That's a far cry from the nickel recommended more than a century ago.

The *Chicago Tribune* carried the first published mention of the tooth fairy—in 1908. Writer Lillian Brown advised that parents might have an easier time persuading children to have loose teeth pulled if a "tooth fairy" left a small gift of 5 cents under youngsters' pillows for each tooth lost.





SCORE ONE FOR THE CO-OP

When Hereford Sports & Wellness took delivery of two digital scoreboards for its soccer field in the Panhandle town, the non-profit community center realized it didn't have the means to install them.

Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative did. The co-op sent a bucket truck outfitted with an auger and a crew of linemen, who drilled a half-dozen 6-foot-deep holes to securely mount the new displays.



Cool Coat

ENGINEERS HAVE CREATED the whitest paint ever—a paint so white that building surfaces coated in it are 8 degrees cooler than the air on a sunny day. The innovation could reduce air conditioning demands and mitigate the effects of climate change, Vice reports.

The new paint, developed by a team at Purdue University, reflects 98.1% of sunlight. Researchers used barium sulfate, a powder that's reflective across all wavelengths of sunlight, to pigment the new paint—unlike most white paints, which tend to use titanium dioxide as pigment.



“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

—STEPHEN KING

FINISH THIS SENTENCE IT'S SO HOT ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our June prompt: **I always laugh when my dad ...**

Says rain sounds like a cow peeing on a flat rock.

SUE BIGAY
SAM HOUSTON EC
LIVINGSTON

Read the comics to me—in different voices to match the character.

BETTY BILLINGSLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Couldn't pronounce a word, so he made up a new one that sounded similar.

CRAIG MASSOUH
PEDERNALES EC
SATTLER

To see more responses, read Currents online.



COURTESY PEDERNALES ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

'That's What Co-ops Are For'

“We are blessed to have co-op employees who persevere in all types of weather to restore electricity and risk their lives to do so.”

JANE PATTERSON
BOWIE-CASS EC
TEXARKANA

Wheel Fact

Texas Talk Man [June 2021] describes a trip that some of the cast of the movie *Giant* took to the state fairgrounds in Dallas in 1955, mentioning they “boarded the soaring Texas Star” Ferris wheel. That particular wheel was shipped over from Europe and set up in Dallas in 1985.

William F. Culver III
Farmers EC
Collin County

Jessica Ridge wrote a great story. Also, the photo by Wyatt McSpadden of Hinkle leaning on the tree branch with the horse in the background was perfect.

Larry Reese
Bluebonnet EC
Brenham



The most glorious sight in Aransas County after Hurricane Harvey hit was the arrival of the line-men from all over [‘That’s What Co-ops Are For,’ June 2021]. Heroes all.

KAREN BEVERLY
VIA FACEBOOK

Fruitful Adventure

Armed with our April issue, we went in search of Alphonse and Martha Dotson on a recent trip to the Hill Country [The Seed Flourishes, April 2021]. What we thought would be a short wine tasting turned into an afternoon of great memories. We left with extraordinary stories, exquisite wine, an auto-graphed cover, new friends and a promise to return.

Traveling is really about the people you encounter along the way.

Patti and Larry Terrell
Bowie-Cass EC
Red Lick

Fleeing Thought

I never realized that while the armies of Texians and Mexicans fought, many civilians found it necessary to abandon everything they owned and relocate in a hurry [The Runaway Scrape, April 2021]. This makes me wonder what I would do if that situation arose in my lifetime.

B. Jason Epps
Trinity Valley EC
Heartland



COURTESY PATTI TERRELL

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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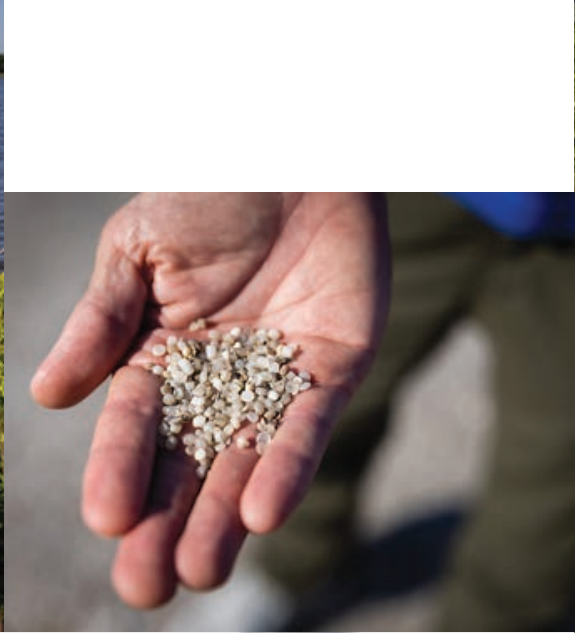
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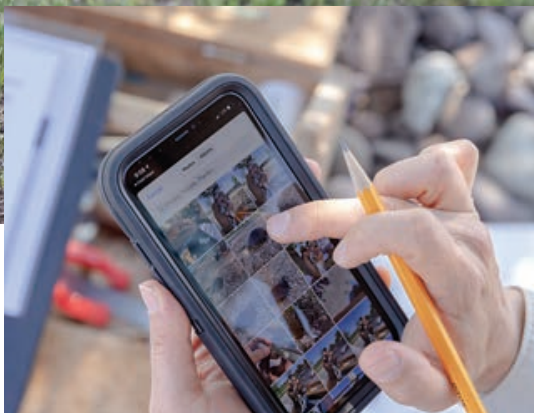


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Channel Your



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Diane Wilson has gathered millions of nurdles—like the handful shown—in her decades as a citizen scientist. Jace Tunnell collects nurdles near a Port Lavaca estuary. Tania Homayoun, an urban conservation biologist, uploads a picture of a turtle using the iNaturalist app.



BY MELISSA GASKILL
PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

Inner Scientist

Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research

Victoria resident and shrimp boat captain Diane Wilson often walks along the shoreline. She keeps a sharp eye out, not for seashells but for small pellets of plastic. Called nurdles, these lentil-sized bits are raw material used for manufacturing plastics. She has found as many as 21,000 nurdles at one time.

“They’re like little peas, or lentils, with different shapes,” says Wilson, who reports her finds to Nurdle Patrol at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas. This work makes her a citizen scientist—one of thousands of people who lend their eyes, ears, hands and time to professional scientists conducting all kinds of research around the world.

“To date, we’ve had more than 2,000 volunteers remove more than 1.5 million nurdles from beaches spanning from Brazil to Canada,” says Jace Tunnell, director of the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve at the institute, which runs Nurdle Patrol. After a spill left nurdles all over coastlines around Corpus Christi in September 2018, Tunnell started a Facebook group for people to report the pellets. Within a few weeks, posts had poured in from every U.S. state along the Gulf of Mexico; a university in Veracruz, Mexico; and a nonprofit on the Yucatán Peninsula. That led him to create the full-blown citizen science project.

“If this was just a university project, three or four of us going out and trying to figure out where nurdles are com-

ing from, we would never be able to do it,” Tunnell says. “It is really the citizen scientists who are making this project a success.”

Early Nurdle Patrol volunteers reported high concentrations of pellets in bay systems along the Texas coast, where many plastic manufacturers are located. A map created from these reports uses warmer colors to depict higher concentrations of pellets. “Texas and Louisiana are purple, indicating more than 1,000 pellets found in 10 minutes,” Tunnell says, adding that the project hopes to stop plastic from entering the environment and to give volunteers the opportunity to be involved in impactful work.

“You just collect a sample and estimate the count from what you can pick up in 10 minutes,” Wilson explains. “You don’t remove all the pellets or you’d go nuts. It’s very easy and is a way to protect your own health as well as the bays and wildlife.”

Nurdle Patrol, like most citizen science projects, requires no special skill or knowledge. Some citizen science even can be done sitting on your couch with a computer or smartphone. The FISHstory project asks people to identify and count fish in historical fishing photos, helping to estimate what kinds of and how many fish people caught in the South Atlantic during the 1940s through the 1970s. That information supports current management of those waters. Other couch-bound projects include transcribing historical



documents, playing video games to show how people solve problems and completing a survey about your dog.

Other tasks can be done just outside your door. For Globe at Night, a worldwide map of artificial light pollution, simply go outside after dark, use a night sky phone app to find a designated constellation and then use a star chart to identify the faintest star you can see nearby.

Still other projects provide the perfect excuse to go exploring. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's dozen Texas Nature Trackers projects ask people to report sightings anywhere in Texas of specific plants and animals using the iNaturalist app. The information helps the department understand the distribution and seasonality of species and how they change over time.

"Every county in Texas has one assigned wildlife biologist, and it's impossible for one individual in any given county to keep track of all the flora and fauna," says the program's Craig Hensley. "Through citizen science, we gain information that leads to better conservation decisions." The projects focus on species with the greatest conservation need, such as the Texas horned lizard, whooping cranes, monarch butterflies and milkweed, and freshwater mussels, which are threatened by invasive species.

Lee County resident and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member Linda Jo Conn, a Texas master naturalist, participates in Nature Trackers projects on milkweed and mammals. "I call myself an iNaturalist addict," Conn says. "I learn a lot. That's one of the reasons I'm involved. I go places just to see what I can find and am known to stop on highways. My friends know that if I'm not waving my arms, I'm OK."

Elaine Cowley, a Guadalupe Valley EC member who lives in Luling, helps Nature Trackers refine data on mammals in Texas, specifically the swamp rabbit. "I was already using iNaturalist for some other projects, so I said yes to this curation project," she says. "There is so much data out there,

LEFT TO RIGHT Biologist Craig Hensley examines a wing banding to find the age of a loggerhead shrike. Hensley helps train citizen scientists to monitor target species all over the state. He and Homayoun attach leg bands to a loggerhead.

TCP WEB EXTRA See what links we have to help you contribute to citizen science projects.

but unless it is in the right category, TPWD can't use it.

"There are so many ways to get involved in citizen science that don't take a lot of time," she adds. "It's enjoyable at the same time. You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize."

Weather watchers can turn their interest into citizen science as well. For six years Chris Keating of Mason has collected data for the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, known as CoCoRaHS. At the most basic level, volunteers report the amount of rain in their gauges daily. Keating also submits a weekly report summarizing conditions in his Hill Country town, the number of thunderclaps when there is a storm and extreme weather details when something unusual happens, such as hail.

"I have read scientific papers that refer to CoCoRaHS, so it is a productive project, with the data put to scientific use," Keating says. "You can do it on a phone app or a computer. It's designed for the layperson. You just have to be able to read a rain gauge."

A related project, the Global Learning and Observations



'You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize.'



photographers and eventually want to know what they're taking pictures of," Tjelmeland says. "Others are more like me and want to know what's in their backyard or favorite natural area. You can just grab a camera and start snapping pictures, even without knowing a lot initially."

Insects can seem overwhelming in terms of sheer numbers of species and the difficulty of identifying them. Tjelmeland advises starting with things you are interested in, perhaps moths or grasshoppers, and expanding from there. On the plus side, you do not have to go far to find insects.

Volunteers at the preserve have tallied almost 2,000 species of plants and animals, including insects. "Almost anywhere you go, biodiversity is weighted toward those smaller things that are often overlooked but really important in terms of ecology," he says.

Citizen scientists contribute information needed by scientists and project managers, providing much more than those professionals could obtain on their own. These contributions are equally if not more important in rural communities, Hensley says, especially when information is collected on private land. He notes that iNaturalist allows users to protect the location of their reports, sharing it only with the project and not the public.

"The more we know, the better we can be at managing things," Hensley says. "An animal may be more common than we know it to be because there is good habitat on private land holdings but no one is sharing the information. As a result, we may be making decisions without all the facts. Citizen science is vital to conservation efforts going forward." ■

to Benefit the Environment Observer Program, asks citizen scientists to submit photographs of cloud cover.

People who live near or visit the Texas coast can use the iSeaTurtle app to report sightings of these endangered reptiles. The data helps scientists at Texas A&M University map and understand their distribution.

At the Nature Conservancy's Texas City Prairie Preserve, outside Houston, volunteers can photograph and report plants and animals observed on its 2,300 acres using iNaturalist. Aaron Tjelmeland, preserve manager, has tallied almost 600 species of moths there. The project grew from his participation in the 2019 City Nature Challenge, an annual international event that mobilizes citizen scientists to record urban biodiversity on iNaturalist.

"That interested me in the depth and breadth of biodiversity here at the preserve, things other than the more obvious birds and reptiles," Tjelmeland says. "From moths, it grew into the broader insect community—anything I could take a picture of, basically."

People come into the project in different ways. "Some are

POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through difficult transitions

Hunter Beaton has delivered some 45,000 bags since he started his project in 2016.

Serenity Packs

With bags supplied by Hunter Beaton and donations from Houston County businesses, Allen created packs of snacks, activities and other items designed to comfort children caught up in police incidents—especially in rural areas, where family members or Child Protective Services may be miles away.

“It could be 30, 40 minutes, and they don’t know what’s going on; there’s lights flashing, and the officer has to take care of an accident scene or an arrest,” said Allen, who is president of the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards, in which capacity he met Beaton in 2017, and a member of Houston County EC.

To equip police vehicles with bags for children, Allen worked with nearby departments, who were enthusiastic about the A Serenity Activity Packs, or ASAP bags, as he called them. Beaton was too, and his bags, sourced from Boerne-based Flying Circle Gear, were a perfect match.

“It seems odd maybe to have a bag full of toys and trinkets in a patrol car, but from what I’ve heard, the police officers love it,” Beaton said. “It’s something that can build a little bit of trust.”

Since January, ASAP bags have spread from Houston County to more than 30 police agencies in Texas—a total of 2,500 bags.

“It just kind of took off,” Allen said. “One county after the next—about every week or two we’ll hear about a new county implementing it.”

Adopt a Senior

Allie Grace Graves knows how life can be different for foster children because she was one before she was adopted as a 6-year-old.

“I had to grow up a lot faster than the average child,” said the native of Lone Star, in northeast Texas. “I was doing the dishes, getting on the church bus, roaming around town by myself before I was 4 years old.”

That was on Graves’ mind in 2020 as she was set to graduate from high school. She had her family to celebrate with but knew that more than 500 graduating high school students still in foster care in Texas would not.

She wanted to help and reached out to someone she knew could bring her idea to life: Hunter Beaton.

“Most high school students have someone to celebrate their graduation with,” Graves said. “We want that to be the case for every foster youth in Texas.”

Graves and Beaton teamed up to send duffel bags full of goodies, including personalized letters, to each graduate still in foster care. Donors “adopt” a senior through the program.

About 1,200 foster youths in Texas turn 18 each year without being reunited with their birth family or adopted. More than a quarter of them exit the system without a high school diploma or stable housing, and nearly half are unemployed, according to Texas CASA.

“When I first started, I was so focused on the younger side of

BY CHRIS BURROWS • PHOTOS BY ERIC POHL

The police cruiser barely registered with Tim Allen when it moved past the porch where he was meeting with a child in the foster care system.

But the 11-year-old girl from rural Houston County noticed. “She just started shaking,” said Allen, a volunteer for Court Appointed Special Advocates, which assists children in the foster care system. “And I realized that the only context she’s ever had for a police officer was when her mother was pulled over with her in the car, for a drug violation.”

Stirred by the young girl’s response, Allen wanted to do something to help other children in her position, who may be entering the foster care system after a traumatic police encounter.

He knew who could bring his idea to life.

Hunter Beaton started Day 1 Bags in 2016, after his own foster siblings arrived at the Beaton house in Boerne with their belongings in trash bags. “How awful is that?” Beaton told *Texas Co-op Power* in July 2018. “No kid deserves this.”

In the five years since, what started as an Eagle Scout project with \$10,000 in community donations for 15-year-old Beaton has become a full-fledged independent nonprofit that has delivered some 45,000 locally made duffel bags to children in foster care in 22 states. The premise is simple: Give those kids a reason to smile and something to call their own. Beaton, 20, now serves as CEO of the organization while he studies at the University of Texas at Austin, even spending his spring break meeting with police agencies and donors, looking over the finances, and crafting social media strategy.

“We are continuing to do our main mission: providing backpacks and luggage for foster children and at-risk youth who are moving from home to home,” Beaton said. “So many youth have been moved around so much—so to have something they can keep, that is really nice and to put any belongings inside really means so much to them.”

But now Day 1 Bags is expanding its reach, partnering with advocates like Allen to help more children and shine a light on lesser-known issues faced by youths in the foster system.

“I never envisioned it taking off like it did,” said Paula Beaton, Hunter’s mom and a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative. “And it’s overwhelming at times. I mean, we’ll have boxes arrive, and my husband’s like, ‘Ugh, another set of boxes’—and we never intended for our house to be a warehouse.

“But honestly, every quarter I ask Hunter, ‘Do you want to keep doing this?’ And he says, ‘Absolutely.’”



LEFT Comal County sheriff's deputies carry ASAP bags in their cruisers. BELOW Beaton loads boxes from Flying Circle Gear, the Boerne company that makes the bags, into his family's van for delivery.

TCP HOW TO HELP Visit day1bags.org/donate to help Hunter Beaton further his mission.

the board. The Beatons' Hill Country neighbors also have kept up their support.

"People think it's the corporate donors who do all the heavy lifting, but it's really all the \$10, \$20, \$50 donations here and there that really build it up," Beaton said. "People are just so generous."

He said he plans to continue his nonprofit work after college, where he's studying communications and leadership. And while he accomplished more than most on spring break this year, Beaton still made time for the former

foster children in his life—his own siblings, who started it all.

They played board games, basketball and tennis. "It's fun to come back home and be around kids," he said. "They aren't so serious and make you laugh a lot." ■

things, toddlers and children, that I completely overlooked high school," Beaton said. "So now we're doing our best to help."

Beaton expanded the program this year, outfitting all 562 graduates in the class of 2021 with a vital documents bag, gift cards, reusable water bottles and other items.

"Just so they have something to celebrate their graduation with," he said.

Riding to the Challenge

A few years ago, when Beaton was preparing to get his driver's license, he didn't want to drive a vehicle with an automatic transmission. That would be too easy.

"I wanted to test in a stick shift," he said. "So I practiced a lot, burned out my dad's clutch but ended up being able to pass the driver's test. I like big challenges like that."

That same ethic is visible in Beaton's commitment to foster children. Being named the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars Scout of the Year and winning a Congressional Gold Medal for his work was just the start.

"There's always going to be a need," Beaton said. "I want to continue to grow and do new things and make Day 1 Bags incredibly influential for these youth."

It's still a family effort behind him with Paula (his "top pusher and supporter," he said) as treasurer; his sister Hailey as social media guru; and his dad, Kevin, serving on



TCP POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

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If You Knew Then What You Know Now...

If you'd had a crystal ball in 1986, you undoubtedly would have grabbed every Silver Eagle you could get. Those coins in uncirculated condition continue to be sought-after. Now you're getting another chance to land a big Silver Eagle first, a Key Date. Additionally, since these newly designed Silver Eagles are only being released during the second half of 2021, it's quite possible this will be one of the lowest mintages we've seen. That's significant because it could make 2021 a DOUBLE Key Date, with both a new design and a low mintage. Demand for these coins is already sky-high, but if that

happens, watch out! No one can predict the future value of silver, but many Americans are rushing to stock up, for themselves, and their loved ones.

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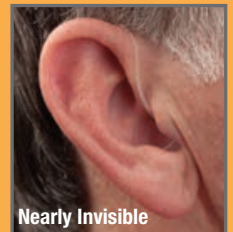
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A closer look at some of the lively murals brightening walls across the Bluebonnet region



THESE walls CAN talk

Story by Kristin Finan
Photos by Sarah Beal

THEY ARE THE POPS of color that liven up Main Streets, historic buildings and city parks across the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area, which stretches across 3,800 square miles of Central Texas. Behind every bright mural that can be spotted in local cityscapes is a story.

One eye-catching mural pays tribute to a town's juicy famous fruit, while another gives a nod to its community's industrial roots. New murals pop up with some regularity, while older, fading murals can show visitors a side of a city's past. Another plus: The larger-than-life murals are on public display all the time.

"The murals in downtown Brenham have become a

destination for people in the surrounding area and beyond. They are available for viewing 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. From family photos to senior portraits and even car shows, the murals provide a colorful backdrop to capture a memory," said Jenny Van Dorf of the Texas Arts and Music Festival. "Each mural is unique to Brenham and tells a different story."

If you've been looking for some new spots to shoot a selfie or family portrait, or simply want to learn more about the region's bigger-than-life art scene, here are seven outdoor murals that can make for a perfect day trip stop.

More murals starting on page 20



Visitors to Giddings can't miss the massive 15-by-90-foot 'Giddings Pride' mural painted in five days in 2020 by Los Angeles-based artist Matt 'Kiptoe' Dean. The mural is on the wall of Orsag's Furniture, 201 W. Austin St.



Sisters Christina, left, and Jackie Venson and dog, Jack, stop for a selfie at the 'Diving into the Divine' mermaid-themed mural in San Marcos at 202 E. Hopkins St. Jackie might look familiar: She is a popular Austin-based recording artist — a guitarist and singer/songwriter. More on the mural and mermaids, Page 21.

“Giddings Pride”

GIDDINGS

(Shown on previous page)

Los Angeles-based artist Matt “Kiptoe” Dean painted the 15-by-90-foot “Giddings Pride” tribute to the city on the wall of Orsag’s Furniture, 201 W. Austin St. Dime Box Distillery, which helped pay for the artwork, owns the empty lot facing the artwork. The mural, created in late October 2020 over a five-day period, incorporates images relevant to Giddings history such as trains, oil derricks and buffalo.

“It had been many years since a mural had been painted (here), and we thought that one that depicted Giddings heritage would be a source of pride for residents as well as another reason for travelers to stop and stretch their legs,” said Michael Leidel, Dime Box Distillery owner. “Since it was painted, we have seen people photograph quinceañeras, wedding parties, family portraits, classic cars and gleaming motorcycles in front of it.”

The mural was paid for by the City of Giddings, the Giddings Economic Development Corporation and Dime Box Distillery. This was Kiptoe’s first mural in Texas.

Go to YouTube and search for “Kiptoe Giddings mural” to watch some of Kiptoe’s five days of mural painting.



Brenham is home to many murals, including the 2017 ‘Owl Family,’ created by California muralist Jeff Soto.



“Owl Family”

BRENHAM

Jeebers, creepers, where’d you get those peepers? Animal enthusiasts and anyone who enjoys large-scale art won’t want to miss downtown Brenham’s brilliantly hued “Owl Family” mural, where huge-eyed, soulful creatures stare back at their inquisitive visitors. Created by renowned muralist Jeff Soto as part of the Texas Arts and Music Festival in Brenham in 2017, the mural stands four stories tall on the back of the historic JH Faske Building, 114 E. Alamo St., facing Commerce Street.

Many colorful murals featuring animals, Brenham-centric icons and other striking images adorn walls on Commerce and adjacent streets.

“We know this creates excitement downtown and has visitors returning to see what’s new,” said Jenny Van

Dorf, a member of the arts festival board. “We have seen the vital importance over the last year of something that can be enjoyed 365 days a year. Even while folks were staying socially distanced, they were able to walk around downtown and take in the beautiful colors and murals.”

The festival is about more than downtown art. “We provide funding for different programs that encourage and support students in their efforts to pursue art and music education,” Van Dorf said.

The annual Texas Arts and Music Festival is Oct. 16-17 this year. It is free and open to the public. Get information about the festival at texasartandsandmusicfestival.com, and look for information on the Art Walk on the visitbrenhamtexas.com website.

Watch Soto’s three days of Brenham owl mural painting on vimeo.com/239538253.



Bastrop is an official ‘Bird City,’ so it’s apropos that the mural at 1200 Willow St. features hummingbirds. It was painted in 2020 by, from left, Maria Montoya Stayton, Theresa Dawson and Jeffrey Stayton. *Courtesy of Maria Montoya Stayton*

“A Charm of Hummingbirds”

BASTROP

Send your heart aflutter at this mural, “A Charm of Hummingbirds,” in Fisherman’s Park, 1200 Willow St., in Bastrop. The mural commemorates the city’s 2020 designation by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Audubon Texas as one of four Bird City Texas-certified communities. Nearly a dozen rainbow-hued

“Dive into the Divine”

SAN MARCOS

Thanks in part to more than 200 springs at the headwaters of the San Marcos River — and mostly to the Aquarena Springs theme park that operated there from 1951 to 1994 — mermaids may be the most beloved mascots in this bustling college city.

For several decades, the Aquamaids donned fancy swimwear and even mermaid tails to perform graceful underwater shows for tourists who filled the park’s glass-bottom boats.

If you want to snap a picture with a mermaid, stop by the Root Cellar Catering Co., 202 E. Hopkins St., where the vibrant “Dive into the Divine” mural by artist Morgan Haberle Egan of San Marcos and fine art and sign painter Jana Swec of Austin reminds passersby to “Keep San Marcos Beautiful.”

The 19-by-14-foot mural was completed in 2016 as part of the City of San Marcos Mural Arts Program, paid for by hotel occupancy tax collections. The program provides artists with grants and design assistance to paint murals on private property throughout the city. “Murals can enliven an otherwise drab alley or parking lot and add to the character and sense of place in a community, and can also beautify an area by covering and preventing graffiti,” the program’s website states.

Other can’t-miss art sightings in San Marcos include the vibrant underwater scenes by San Marcos artist Mabel Sirup in



Above, a mermaid can’t be missed in this San Marcos mural. Mermaids are a popular icon in the city, in part due to the ‘Aquamaids’ who swam in Aquarena Springs theme park there for more than four decades.

In a photo circa 1952, Margaret Russell feeds fish before her underwater performance at Aquarena Springs. She and her husband, Don, came from the Weeki Wachee Springs underwater tourist attraction in Florida to help at Aquarena Springs. She was one of the original performers at Weeki Wachee, which opened in 1947. *Courtesy of San Marcos Convention and Visitor’s Bureau*

Children’s Park, also a project of the mural arts program, and the Mermaid March, a public art project from the San Marcos Arts Commission that showcases 10 mermaid sculptures, each 7

feet tall, around town.

At Spring Lake, where the mermaids swam, the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment has been conducting research since 2012. Visitors to that Texas State University facility can still see the pristine waters from glass-bottom boats. Get information and make reservations at meadowscenter.txstate.edu (click on the “Explore Spring Lake” tab.)

See more of San Marcos’ art by going to the Art Map on the sanmarcostx.gov website. Under the Community link, look under Arts.

hummingbirds fly across the mural that was created by artist Maria Montoya Stayton of Bastrop in partnership with artists Theresa Dawson of Red Rock and Jeffrey Stayton of Bastrop.

The 25-by-8½-foot mural was painted in August 2020, “the hottest month of the year during a pandemic,” Montoya Stayton said. It features ruby-throated, Rufous and black-chinned hummingbirds, which can be spotted in Bastrop. The mural was commissioned by the Bastrop County Audubon Society in celebration of the Bird City designation.

“During a time of pandemic, when one of the few things people could do was to walk or hike outside, this mural provided the community an opportunity to watch as it developed,” Montoya Stayton said.

The artists selected an abstract composition that is “colorful, can be seen from far away, and blends in nicely with the environment. ... It is also interactive and allows people to hold the trumpet plant in the mural,” she said. Don’t miss the whimsical, animal-themed mural on the flip side of the building, either, painted by K.M. Fritz.

“An outdoor mural is intended to stay fresh amid the elements for many years,” Montoya Stayton said. After preliminary treatment, she uses professional grade acrylic paint and varnish, then tops that with “sacrificial” varnish to guard against graffiti. “If the steps are not taken, murals will not last,” she said.

Get more information about Fisherman’s Park at visitbastrop.com (search for “Fisherman’s Park”) or about bird-watching in Bastrop (search for “birding in Bastrop.”)

More murals on pages 22-23



“Quilts ... History in the Making”

LA GRANGE

Housed in two historic buildings at 140 W. Colorado St. in La Grange, the nonprofit Texas Quilt Museum is dedicated to showcasing both antique and contemporary quilt art. The museum also has a must-visit mural called “Quilts ... History in the Making.”

This intricately detailed 13-by-85-foot outdoor mural depicts 15 traditional 19th-century quilts. It was designed by Austin artist Duana Gill and painted in 2011 by muralist Brent McCarthy, who lives in the Hill Country. The mural’s centerpiece is the museum’s emblem quilt — a red, white and blue Founders Star.

“The mural was one of the best things we did,” museum manager Julie Maffei said. “It’s a wonderful complement to our one-of-a-kind period garden.”

The colorful garden was patterned after a typical “city garden” in a Central Texas town in the 1890s, when the museum’s buildings were erected. It is called the “Grandmother’s Flower Garden” in tribute to a Depression-era quilt pattern that is still beloved today. Each year the quilt mural is touched up by McCarthy to eliminate stains and fading, Maffei said.

Get more information at texasquiltmuseum.org.

“Welcome to Luling”

LULING

Luling loves to show pride in its famous watermelons, from the fanfare around its annual summer Watermelon Thump to the local favorite fruit in shops and restaurants around town. It makes sense that the “Welcome to Luling” mural at the corner of East Davis Street and South Magnolia Avenue would feature a bright red truck loaded to the brim with, yes, watermelons.

The 19-by-18-foot mural was created in 2011 by Luling artist Joshua Farrell. It was commissioned by Luling Main Street, an organization of local business owners committed to revitalizing the Main Street District.

You can time your visit to Luling with the Watermelon Thump, always the last full weekend of every June since 1954. Or, you may simply revel in a relaxed day trip or weekend escape that, in addition to mural sightings, may include antiquing, shopping boutiques, enjoying barbecue or sampling produce, including watermelon, at the Farmers Market at 700-798 FM 1322.

Look closely at the mural to get some hints at Luling’s heritage: Learn more at lulingmainstreet.com/projects.php.



Historic murals

Preserving visions of Texas history

IN THE 1930S and early 1940s, a striking feature was added to the walls of hundreds of federal post offices across the country: oversized colorful murals depicting life in America. The paintings were commissioned as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal to provide work for struggling artists and to boost American morale as the adversities of the Great Depression began to lift.

Hundreds of the murals remain on display in post offices, including many in Texas. Most of the paintings are on canvas attached to the wall, but some are frescoes painted directly onto plaster. Six of the Depression-era post office murals are in Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative’s service area.

The mural artists were chosen through an anonymous competitive process run by the U.S. Department of the Treasury. About 1,400 dramatic murals, averaging 12-by-5-feet, were created for post office buildings in more than 1,300 cities. Artists were paid an average of \$700 per mural.

Artists were instructed to depict realistic scenes of ordinary people and to avoid controversial topics, according to the book, “The Texas Post Office Murals: Art for the People,” by Philip Parisi, published by Texas A&M University Press in 2004. Government guidelines and themes for the murals were provided to each artist, with an emphasis placed on scenes of local interest and events.

Across Texas, murals featured everything from the Alamo and other landmarks to American Indian life to jobs, such as oil-field laborers or cowboys with cattle. While some of the original murals have been lost or are in need of repair after post office renovations and demolitions, there is renewed interest in preserving these pieces of the past. The U.S. Postal Service even released a line of stamps featuring five post office murals in 2019.

The post office murals were designed as art for the masses, and these six are well worth visiting.

— Kristin Finan



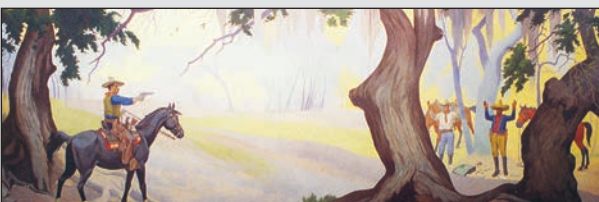
GIDDINGS 'Cowboys Receiving the Mail' by Texas artist Otis Dozier, 1939. This mural showcases cowboys at a rural mailbox opening their mail, including a package of new red cowboy boots. The mural was intended to emphasize the mail's importance in daily rural life. 279 E. Austin St.



LA GRANGE 'Horses' by San Francisco artist Tom E. Lewis, 1939. There is little public record about this mural, which reflects a rural scene of pasture with cattle and a farmhouse in the background and horses in foreground. 113 E. Colorado St.



LOCKHART 'The Pony Express Station' by Scottish-born John Law Walker, 1939. This piece includes a Pony Express rider changing horses while, in the background, a wagon train of settlers and a group of American Indians head into town. 217 W. Market St.



SMITHVILLE 'The Law — Texas Rangers' by Texas artist Minette Teichmueller, 1939. A mounted Texas Ranger confronts two suspected bandits with a box of loot under an oak tree. 400 Main St.



CALDWELL 'Indians Moving' by California artist Suzanne Scheuer, Burlleson County Courthouse, 1939. This mural, depicting the migration of nomadic American Indians of the Plains, was restored in 1989 and moved to the courthouse after demolition of the local post office. 100 W. Buck St.



ELGIN 'Texas Farm' by Texas artist Julius Woeltz, 1940. Agrarian life is documented in this colorful mural of farm scenes showing workers picking corn, harvesting wheat and storing grain. 21 N. Ave. C.



“Welcome to Smithville, Train 286”

SMITHVILLE

Smithville, known for its railroad history, offers a mural of a barreling train to welcome visitors to town. The “Welcome to Smithville, Train 286” mural, 217 Main St. at Loop 230, was painted in 1976 by a local Presbyterian minister. The train art is painted on the side of a building that used to be the Bayer Pharmacy and now houses a law firm.

Smithville works to prioritize the arts, from nearly a dozen stages and venues for live music and theatrical productions to three art galleries. The city recently opened the new home for the James H. Long Railroad Park and Museum, at 106 N.E. First St. The building also houses the city visitor center and chamber of commerce.

There are other photo-worthy murals in town, including the rainbow-adorned sprawling piece on an exterior wall of Smithville Elementary School at Bishop and N.E. Seventh streets. That mural was featured in the 1998 Sandra Bullock film, “Hope Floats.”

Get more information about the city’s murals at smithvilleculturaldistrict.com/murals/.

Railroads figure prominently in Smithville’s history, although a mix of murals can be found around town.



Bluebonnet member competes on 'MasterChef'

MARY JAYNE Buckingham, a Bluebonnet member in Bastrop, is one of 15 cooks who earned a spot to compete for \$250,000 and other prizes on the reality television show "MasterChef: Legends."

Bluebonnet



Mary Jayne Buckingham

The show, featuring home cooks, is in its 11th season and is Fox's highest-rated cooking program. In addition to star chef and host Gordon Ramsay, Season 11 has included cooking legend guests Emeril Lagasse, Curtis Stone and Masaharu Morimoto.

Buckingham made her signature Just Peachy Key Lime Habanero Pie for her audition in the third episode. Celebrity cook Paula Deen, a guest judge in that episode, described Buckingham's dessert as "perfect — and perfectly delicious. I make a key lime pie, but ... I think I like it better than mine!"

As of Bluebonnet's publication deadline, Buckingham was still in the competition. The show airs at 7 p.m. Wednesdays on Fox. Learn more about Buckingham and her recipes on our social media and in the upcoming November issue of Texas Co-op Power magazine.



The new Cooks Point substation, above. Below, substation technicians Brian Seymour, at left, and Michael Gholson installed the wiring in the facility outside of Caldwell.

Better reliability for members in Burleson County



Sarah Beal photos

IN JUNE, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative completed construction of a new substation northeast of Caldwell, in Cooks Point. A substation converts high-voltage power that comes in on transmission lines to lower voltages that go out on Bluebonnet's distribution lines to homes and businesses.

The Cooks Point substation will allow the cooperative to better serve members in the area by splitting up existing distribution lines into shorter segments. More than 1,200 meters will be served, including some larger commercial sites, along with

future growth in the area.

The new facility will reduce the distance from the substation to the meters, which will decrease exposure to issues that can cause outages and provide more reliable service.

The substation will also allow Bluebonnet to install devices that can reduce outage times. This is one of many projects intended to improve electric service reliability across Bluebonnet's territory.

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Bluebonnet, LCRA grants support community projects

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC

Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority 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. More information about the program is available at lcra.org/cdpp.

A \$16,499 grant will help the Beaver Creek Volunteer Fire Department in Burtleson County buy emergency gear for its firefighters. The grant, along with \$4,123 in matching funds, will allow the department to replace aging self-contained breathing apparatus units and buy portable 5-gallon water tanks to fight grass or brush fires. The grant also will help purchase fire-resistant hoods to protect firefighters during emergencies and pagers to quickly notify first responders of an emergency call.



Above, from left, are Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Joseph Walden, Beaver Creek VFD chief; Gary Kovar and Zechariah Keener, Beaver Creek VFD firefighters; Johnny Sanders, Bluebonnet manager of community and development services; and Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet Board chairman.

The South Lee County Volunteer Fire Department will repair and update the parking lot of its station south of Giddings, thanks to a \$25,000 grant. The grant, along with \$20,000 in matching funds, will replace the gravel parking lot with 8 inches of reinforced concrete and add parking in front of the station for visitors with disabilities.

In the photo, from left to right, are Ronald Zoch, South Lee County VFD secretary; Chris Becker, South Lee County VFD president; Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet community representative; Mason Becker, South Lee County VFD drill captain #2; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; and Russell Jurk, Bluebonnet Board member.



An \$18,300 grant will help the newly incorporated City of Ellinger establish its first city hall. The grant, paired with matching funds of \$4,575, will allow the Fayette County community of about 200 residents to buy a portable building to house city records and act as a hub for city-related business. The grant also will pay for a gravel pad for the building, establish electrical service and make the site accessible to visitors with disabilities.

In the photo, from left to right, are Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Joseph Lamer, city commissioner; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Kenneth Stojanik, city commissioner; Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board assistant secretary/treasurer; Matt Mikulenko, mayor of Ellinger; and Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet community representative.



Photos courtesy LCRA

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Nelson Algren
circa 1949.

Stolen Words

While in Texas, author Nelson Algren was a man with a thieving arm

BY CHRISTOPHER ADAMS

THE AWARD-WINNING author who would go on to write the classic novel *The Man With the Golden Arm* entered a building at Sul Ross State Teachers College in Alpine in early 1934 and made off with one of the institution's typewriters. The next morning, the thief hopped a train out of town.

Nelson Algren won the National Book Award in 1950 for the aforementioned novel and earned three O. Henry Awards for his short stories, but the "poet of the Chicago slums" found trouble in Texas before achieving national literary acclaim.

Algren couldn't find work in his hometown of Chicago or anywhere else in the greater Midwest during the Great Depression and eventually traveled to Texas to pack black-eyed peas and run a Sinclair gas station between Rio Hondo

and Harlingen. But neither venture provided Algren satisfactory income, and he sought other opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.

"He crossed the border to Matamoros and came back again, ate in missions, slept in hobo jungles, lost in crap games, rode in cattle or refrigerated boxcars," wrote author Bettina Drew in the introduction to the book *The Texas Stories of Nelson Algren*.

An exhausted Algren returned to Chicago at the end of 1932 and, having written a well-received short story, decided that creative writing was his path to fulfillment. He persuaded a New York publisher to give him an advance for a novel that was to be about the illusion of the American dream and based on

his experiences in Texas.

"He saw a lot of poverty and contradictions, such as poor whites who were oppressed by the rich but took out their anger on Mexicans and Blacks who were even poorer and more oppressed," Mary Wisniewski, author of a 2016 Algren biography called *Algren: A Life*, explained in an email.

Algren returned to Texas in September 1933 and made his way to Alpine to create his crucial work. He convinced the president of Sul Ross State Teachers College (now Sul Ross State University) that he was "a big-time New York writer," granting him access to the college's typewriters to draft his novel. However, his advance hadn't amounted to much, and by January 1934, he was broke, with an unfinished manuscript. He had no choice but to return home, where accessing a typewriter would be a real challenge. So he stole one from Sul Ross.

"I think he just figured he needed the typewriter more than the college did, so he had a right to it," Wisniewski said.

Algren fled Alpine on a freight train but was subsequently caught and locked up in the Brewster County jail. It proved to be a temporary setback. He returned to Chicago after his release and completed his first novel, *Somebody in Boots*, about his experiences living in Texas.

And the typewriter? Algren left it at an Alpine freight depot where it was to be shipped to Chicago.

"The typewriter was not sent to Chicago," Wisniewski said. Its whereabouts seem to be unknown. "Algren had used it to write *Somebody in Boots* while he was working at Alpine—but didn't finish it on that typewriter. He had to finish it back in Chicago on another machine." ■

Kids Cooking

Youngsters in the kitchen help make family meals truly rewarding

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

I've encouraged my children to join me in the kitchen ever since they were little. Cooking with kids requires extra patience but reaps rewards down the line. Small children can practice mixing and measuring ingredients and kneading dough, and older kids can learn how to chop and take charge of the stove. Encouraging their efforts makes all the difference in kids' kitchen success. My son adores meatballs, and this baked version keeps it simple. Serve with your favorite pasta or just scoop onto slices of garlic bread.

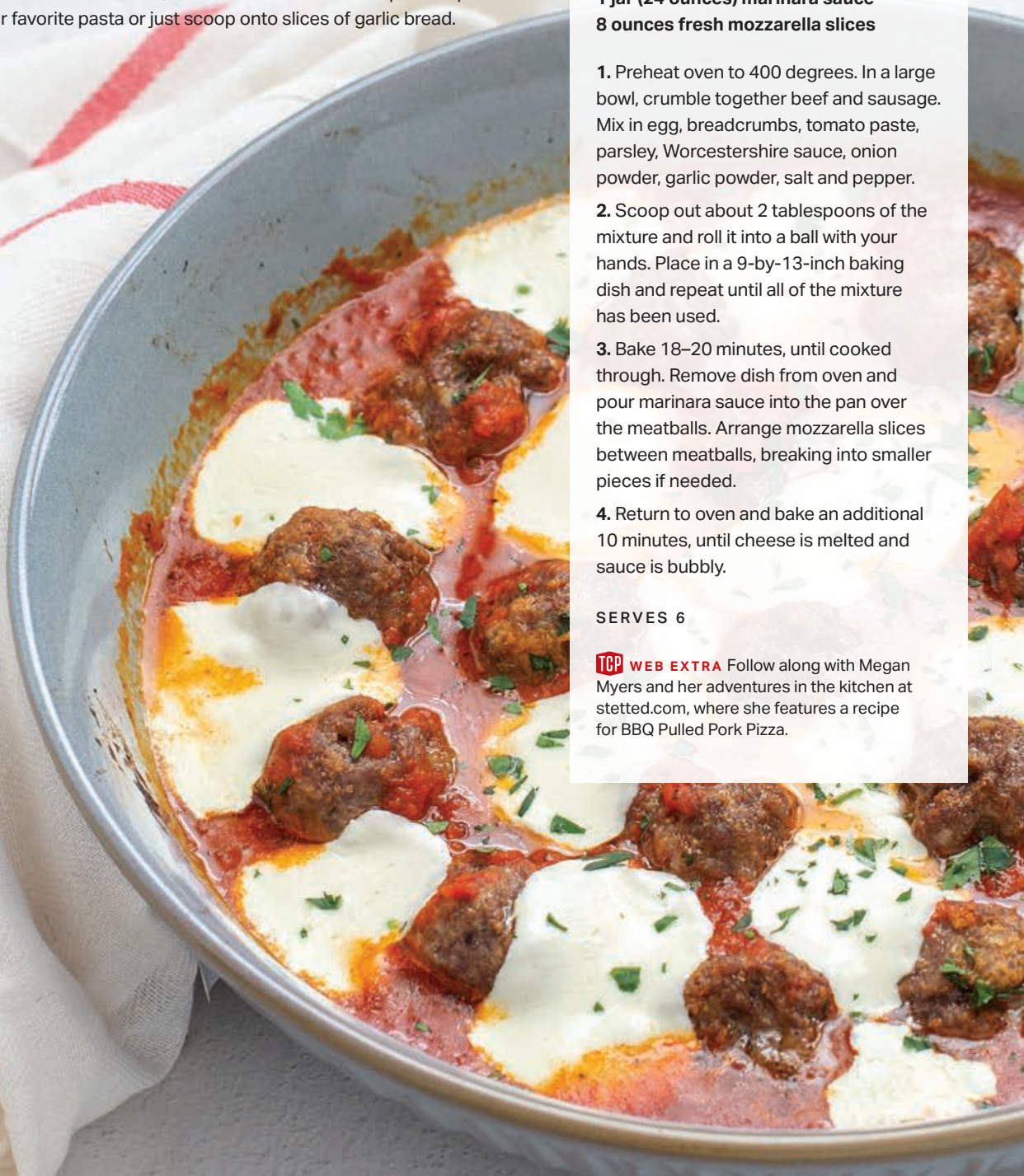
Cheesy Baked Meatballs

1 pound ground beef
½ pound pork sausage
1 egg
¼ cup breadcrumbs
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 tablespoon chopped parsley
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon onion powder
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
1 jar (24 ounces) marinara sauce
8 ounces fresh mozzarella slices

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, crumble together beef and sausage. Mix in egg, breadcrumbs, tomato paste, parsley, Worcestershire sauce, onion powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper.
2. Scoop out about 2 tablespoons of the mixture and roll it into a ball with your hands. Place in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and repeat until all of the mixture has been used.
3. Bake 18–20 minutes, until cooked through. Remove dish from oven and pour marinara sauce into the pan over the meatballs. Arrange mozzarella slices between meatballs, breaking into smaller pieces if needed.
4. Return to oven and bake an additional 10 minutes, until cheese is melted and sauce is bubbly.

SERVES 6

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for BBQ Pulled Pork Pizza.





Guacamole

IVAN REMLEY
BLUEBONNET EC

Adults can take care of the chopping while little hands do the mashing and mixing of this fresh guacamole. Don't limit yourself to eating it with just chips or tacos—Ivan, 14, recommends serving with fresh veggies such as sliced radishes, carrots and cucumbers or even kale chips.

½ onion, diced

2 Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced

½ jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced

1 clove garlic, minced

Juice of 1–2 limes, divided use

½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste

3 avocados, divided use

1. In a large bowl, stir together the onion, tomatoes, jalapeño, garlic, 1 tablespoon lime juice and salt.

2. Slice two avocados in half lengthwise, making one long cut around the pit. Separate the halves and remove the pits. With a spoon, scoop out the flesh and add to the mixture in the bowl.

3. Mash and stir everything together, until the ingredients are well combined.

4. Slice the third avocado lengthwise, separate the halves and remove the pit. With a small knife, cut the flesh into small cubes. Scoop out the cubes and add them to the bowl with the avocado mixture. Add 1 tablespoon of lime juice and fold the avocado cubes in just enough for a slightly chunky texture.

5. Taste and adjust seasoning with lime juice and salt as needed.

MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

Cooper's Bacon Cheddar Chicken Pasta

COOPER JOHNSON
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES



This family-friendly pasta recipe is a great way to teach older kids a variety of skills, such as sautéing and creating a simple cheese sauce. Cooper, 12, recommends adding chopped green onions to serve along with the extra bacon.

SERVES 6–8

1 pound pasta, any type

6 strips bacon, diced; divided use

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts; cut into 1-inch chunks

Salt and pepper, to taste

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons flour

1 packet ranch dip mix

2 cups milk

1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese

1. Cook pasta according to package directions, drain and keep warm.

2. While pasta is cooking, cook bacon in a large, deep-sided skillet over medium heat until crisp, then remove and drain on a paper towel. Drain all but one tablespoon of bacon drippings from pan.

3. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add butter to the skillet with the bacon drippings, stirring to melt, then add chicken. Cook until tender and no longer pink, 8–10 minutes.

4. Mix together flour and ranch dip mix, then sprinkle evenly over the chicken and stir to coat. Stir in the milk and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened and bubbly.

5. Stir in cheddar and half of the reserved bacon, stirring to melt the cheese completely. Add the pasta and stir to mix well. Serve with remaining bacon sprinkled on top.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

SOUPS AND STEWS DUE AUGUST 10

Winter is the ideal time to cozy up to a warm bowl, so we want your best soup and stew recipes.

The best reader recipe wins \$500. Enter at TexasCooPower.com/contests by August 10.



Texas-Style Chorizo Frittata

MATTHEW PEÑA
PEDERNALES EC

Breakfast for dinner is always a great way to get kids involved in the kitchen. Matthew, 16, came up with this recipe to help out his parents on a busy day using ingredients they already had in the fridge.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ onion, chopped

- 1½ cups chopped bell pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound Mexican chorizo
- 9 eggs
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 8 ounces Oaxaca cheese, sliced

OPTIONAL GARNISHES

- Chopped parsley
- Sour cream or Mexican crema
- Sliced avocado
- Pico de gallo

COOK'S TIP For a spicier frittata, add sliced jalapeños or hot sauce to the egg mixture before baking.

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Heat a 10-inch ovenproof skillet over medium heat and add olive oil. Stir in onion and bell pepper and sauté until tender. Add garlic and cook an additional 3 minutes, stirring often to prevent garlic from burning. Remove vegetables to a bowl and set aside.

3. Crumble the chorizo into the skillet and sauté until fully cooked, breaking up any large chunks. Remove from heat and drain excess oil if needed.

4. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, cheddar, parsley, salt and pepper. Add egg mixture and sautéed vegetables to the cooked chorizo in the skillet. Stir to combine and distribute ingredients evenly. Add Oaxaca cheese evenly on top of frittata.

5. Place skillet in oven and bake 20 minutes, making sure the frittata has fully set. Garnish with parsley, sour cream or Mexican crema, sliced avocado, and pico de gallo.

SERVES 6

TCP WEB EXTRA We have more than 900 searchable recipes at TexasCoopPower.com. You're sure to find others with which children can lend a helping hand.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Head Honcho

The barbacoa at Vera's in Brownsville rises to the occasion

BY CHET GARNER

TO MANY TEXANS, Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish explorer who shipwrecked near Galveston Island centuries ago. For folks in Brownsville, *cabeza de vaca* (head of the cow) has a much tastier meaning. And you won't find a more authentic version of real-deal cow head *barbacoa* than at Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que.

Before lunch, I asked owner Armando Vera for a look at his pit because you can learn a lot about pit bosses by seeing the tools they use. Vera's pit was unlike anything I've seen. It's literally a pit in the ground, about 4 feet deep and full of blazing logs. It looked like a gateway to Hades.

Vera explained that an open pit is the traditional way to cook Mexican-style barbacoa. An entire cow head is wrapped in foil, placed in a hole and covered with burning logs for 10–12 hours. Vera's is the only place in Texas that still cooks barbacoa underground, the traditional way that Vera's father used when he started the business in 1955.

Even though I found the sight of the head to be less than appetizing, I decided to judge the barbacoa with my mouth instead of my eyes. The menu included almost every part of the head: *lengua* (tongue), *ojos* (eyes), *jeta* (jaw) and *cachete* (cheek). I ordered a bit of everything, along with homemade tortillas and salsa.

With each bite, the image of the full head faded, replaced by savory flavors of perfectly smoked meat, tangy salsa and pillow tortillas. The barbacoa offers flavor, smoke and texture that you can't get cooking it in an oven or over a stove. The experience at Vera's prompted me to do something I never expected to do in my lifetime: I ordered a second helping of *lengua*. ■

ABOVE Chet isn't sure he sees eye to eye with the cow head in front of him.

TCP WEB EXTRA Chet finds that barbacoa, much like his musings, is tongue in cheek in his latest video. See all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

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

AUGUST

04

South Padre Island [4–7]
U.S. Lifesaving Association National Championship, (956) 761-3000, sopadre.com

05

Levelland [5–8] SPOTC Dog Agility Trials, (806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com

Palestine [5, 7, 19–21, 26–28] Palestine Diesel Roundtrip, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

06

South Padre Island [6–8] Ladies Kingfish Tournament, (956) 761-4412, sopadre.com

07

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

Corpus Christi Summer PolkaFest, (361) 215-9163, facebook.com/chssouthtexas

Frankston Neches River Wilderness Race, (903) 245-9490, necheswildernessrace.com

Graham Cars & Stars Car Show, (940) 550-8468, grahamcarsandstars.org

McKinney Sips of Summer, (318) 527-9221, mckinneysipandstroll.com

Palestine Dogwood Jamboree: If That Ain't Country, (903) 723-6291, dogwoodjamboree.com

Temple Dig It Family Day, (254) 298-5378, downtowntemple.com

Bandera [7, 14, 21, 28] Cowboys On Main, (830) 796-3045, banderacowboycapital.com

Allen [7, 21, Sept. 4] Radha Krishna Temple Chess Club Tournaments, (860) 605-3683, radhakrishnatemple.net/chess-tournament

Palestine [7, 14, 21, 28, Sept. 4] Market Day, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

Palestine [7, Sept. 4] Saturdays on Main, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

09

Palestine [9, 16, 23, 30, Sept. 6] Trivia Night at the Pint, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

12

Palestine [12-14] Palestine Steam Roundtrip, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

Addison [12, 26] Vitruvian Nights Live, (972) 590-8866, udr.com/vitruvian-park

13

San Antonio Iliza Shlesinger, (210) 223-8624, tobincenr.org

South Padre Island [13-14] Shallow Sport Owners Tournament, (956) 761-3000, shallowstournament.com

Fredericksburg [13-15, 20-22] Always ... Patsy Cline, 1-888-669-7114, fredericksburgtheater.org

14

Lake Jackson Farmers Market, (281) 924-0596, lakejacksonfarmersmarket.com

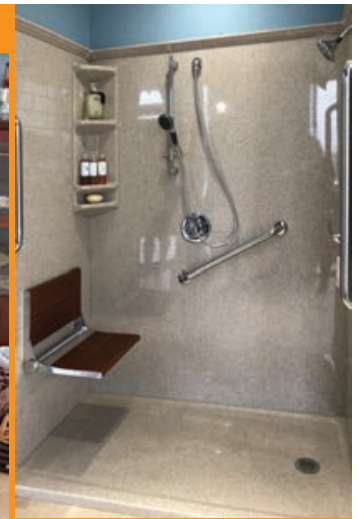
Leming Battle of Medina Symposium, (830) 480-2741, facebook.com/atascosahistory

MORE EVENTS >

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AUGUST EVENTS CONTINUED

14

Temple Farmers Market, (254) 298-5378, downtowntemple.com

New Braunfels [14-15] Hill Country Comicon, (830) 221-4011, hillcountrycomicon.com

McKinney [14, 22] Zip Line Day, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org/ropescourse

Boerne [14, 28] Bluegrass Jam, (210) 445-1080, theagricultural.org/bluegrass-jams

20

Crockett Exile, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

Fredericksburg [20-22] Trade Days, (210) 846-4094, fbgradedays.com

Ingram [20-22, 27-29; Sept. 3-4] Nobody's Perfect, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

21

Arlington Chris Stapleton's All-American Road Show, (817) 533-1972, arlington.org

Boerne Moondance Outdoor Concerts: Big Cedar Fever, (830) 249-4616, cibolo.org

Palestine Summer Concert Series: Carson Jeffrey, (903) 724-4385, visitpalestine.com

Castroville [21-22] St. Louis Day, (830) 931-2826, saintlouisdalay.com

26

Kerrville Symphony of the Hills: Homecoming, (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

Fredericksburg [26-29] Gillespie County Fair, (830) 997-2359, gillespiefair.com

27

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

Tyler [27-29] Texas Rose Breed Horse Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

28

Austin Bat Fest, (512) 441-9015, roadwayevents.com/event/bat-fest

Brenham Lee Greenwood, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com/events

Bryan BCS Library Friends Book Sale for Young Readers, (979) 209-5600, friendsbcs.org

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

Lakehills Last Saturday Market, (254) 979-1073, lakehillssaturdaymarket.com

Waco Karem Classics Car Show, (254) 855-3722, karemshriners.com

SEPTEMBER

02

La Grange Fayette County Fair, (979) 968-3911, fayettecountyfair.org

04

Driftwood Sip & Stroll, (713) 299-1728, sunrisebeachvfd.org

Bulverde [4, 11, 18, 25, Oct. 2] Saturday Night Rodeo, (830) 980-2226, tejasrodeo.com

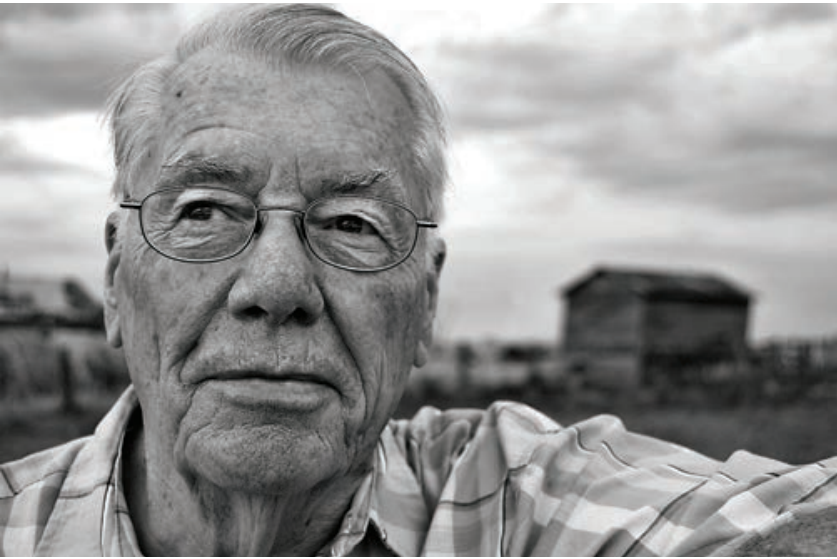
05

New Berlin Sausage Festival, (210) 343-9570, facebook.com/nbtxsausagefest

Portraits

Deep lines and wrinkles tell a person's story, but a twinkle of the eye or sly smile makes us wonder what more there is to tell. Whether carefully posed or caught spontaneously, these Texans have great heads on their shoulders.

BY GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

PAUL HOLLAND
PEDERNALES EC

James Hinkley, an artist and longtime resident of the Panhandle who now lives in Leander.

PATSI TINDEL
LAMAR ELECTRIC

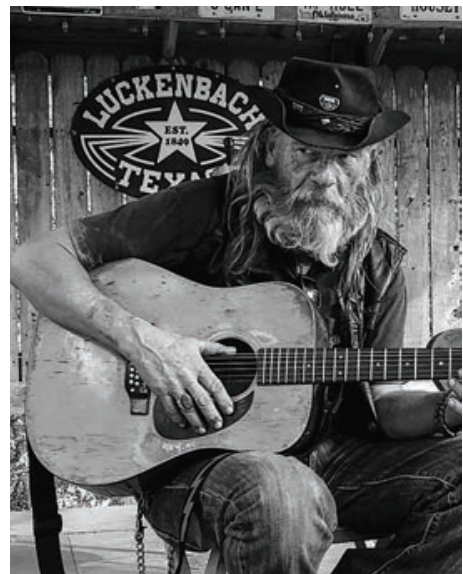
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- DUE AUG 10** Bridges
- DUE SEP 10** Fired Up!
- DUE OCT 10** Public Art

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Pools in the Pasture

Summers on a ranch promise swimming in stock tanks

BY BRENDA KISSKO

WHEN YOU GROW UP on a ranch in West Texas, you learn early about the finer things in life. You eat oysters (of the mountain variety), you hire a full-time lawn service to maintain every acre of your spread (some call it grazing cattle), and you even get your own pair of jeans with free designer rips. And of course, *dahling*, we always had a pool.

Granted, the cows thought those live-stock tanks were for them, but I believed my dad put those tanks all over the ranch just so us girls could take our pick of swimming locations for the day. The water was always ice cold and as pure as it comes, straight from the ground. If we were thirsty, we'd just stick our tongue under the fill pipe for a gulp of goodness straight from God to our mouths. I swear it was better than Fiji Water or Topo Chico.

That's how we spent our summers, my mom, sister and I—with the pickup backed up to a stock tank, pulp fiction in hand, George Strait serenading us from the stereo speakers. No sunscreen allowed because cows don't really like drinking oxybenzone. Any time we had a slumber party, swimming was on the agenda, followed by rolling in a huge pile of cottonseed.

If the tank hadn't been cleaned out in a while, we'd just grab chunks of the moss (picture the Grinch's snot) and throw it to the ground below. Totally cool. But not if you tried to do a handstand and came up with it all over your face. Gross.

My favorite tank—I mean pool—was at my grandparents' ranch. My aunt freed her pet goldfish in it before going off to college at Texas Tech, and—no kidding—those suckers grew to be a foot long and multiplied like rabbits. All us grandkids loved learning to swim there, racing from side to side and seeing who could catch the most fish with our hands. I'm sure their great-great-great-grand-fishes are still swimming around in the tank today.

I think Kevin Bacon did his part to bring tank swimming back in style. In *I Love Dick*, an Amazon series set in Marfa (another one of my favorite places), he ends the pilot episode with a skinny-dip in a tank with a gorgeous view of the mountains. That's some good living right there.

As I'm writing this, I'm trying to remember the last time I swam in a live-stock tank. Sure, I've done rooftop pools, lazy rivers and hot tubs right off the ski slope, but it's been far too long since that good old-fashioned, back-to-my-roots dunk in a redneck infinity pool. Good thing summer's not quite over. ■

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