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BLUEBONNET NEWS
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Eduardo Garza of Mission was one of the big winners at the 2019 Big Squeeze youth accordion competition.

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By Joe Nick Patoski

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By Joe Nick Patoski

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GARZA: COURTESY TEXAS FOLKLIFE. RATTLESNAKE: FIVESPOTS | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



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ON THE COVER Flaco Jiménez brought the conjunto accordion to Amsterdam in 1989. Photo by Frans Schellekens | Getty Images

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ITEM 67514 **13824748**

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Scrumptious and Healthy

I am tickled to death to welcome Megan Myers as the new food editor [*New Year's Resolution*, January 2020]. I have eaten healthy most of my life and am excited to be able to consult *Texas Co-op Power* for new recipes.

The January meals look scrumptious, so I am already a fan.

ELAINE FRIEDBERG | BRENHAM BLUEBONNET EC

When I was in college, I had to subsist on the meal plan since money was tight. A vegetable that was often served in the cafeteria was Brussels sprouts. I absolutely hated them.

As I have gotten older, I have learned how important it is to eat fresh vegetables.

I can't say enough good things about Megan Myers' recipe for Spicy Glazed Brussels Sprouts. It was easy, and even my husband enjoyed the tasty vegetables.

NANCY GLASSCOCK | SONORA SOUTHWEST TEXAS EC



Brews and Pews

Back Pew Brewing in Porter is located on acreage that once belonged to a little country church [*Texas Feels a Draft*,

Courthouses as Art

As an artist and student of Texas courthouse architecture, I loved Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' article about architect James Riely Gordon [*Gordon's Gold*, January 2020]. Gordon's iconic structures make some of the most interesting subjects for my Texas courthouse drawings [Wise County, right].

I suspect that there was a rivalry between counties for who could commission the grandest structure, and Gordon was certainly proactive promoting his vision of civic buildings.

NORMAN BEAN | MARTINDALE | BLUEBONNET EC



January 2020]. The church interior has been redesigned into a taproom for customers.

The owners invited the priest from St. Isidore Episcopal Church and the congregation to come and help bless their brewery.

MARY VAZQUEZ | MONTGOMERY MIDSOUTH EC

Tamalada Tradition

We used to do *tamaladas* with my mom and all eight daughters [*The Call of the Tamalada*, December 2019]. Sadly, we lost Mom [a] few years ago, and this year we lost one of our sisters, but the tradition continues even as our circle gets smaller.

BETTY KEIPER | VIA FACEBOOK

At the risk of coming across too picky, I would like to point out that the singular of tamales is not *tamale*; it is *tamal*. In Spanish, when a word ends in "l," it

will be pluralized by adding "es."

MIKE MCEWEN | JACKSONVILLE CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

Editor's Note: Yes, in Spanish, the singular is *tamal*, originally tamalli in the Nahuatl language. However, the word has been adapted into English as *tamale*.

Letters About Letters

Having grown up in a ranching family, I knew how to change a tire and drive stick shift early on [Letters, January 2020]. Having taught high school 37 years, I always told my students they needed to know those two things, even if they never needed to use them.

CHARLOTTE CASSIN | BATESVILLE MEDINA EC

A reader proposes a "dues requirement in Texas for VFDs." Emergency services districts may

be created where all property owners—not just those who feel like it—contribute, and many volunteer fire departments receive funding via the ESD mechanism. Voters must approve the proposed district and tax rate.

RON BOERGER | BRUSHY CREEK PEDERNALES EC

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

   Texas Co-op Power

TEXAS CO-OP POWER VOLUME 76, NUMBER 9 (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. **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. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Texas Co-op Power* (USPS 540-560), 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. Please enclose label from this copy of *Texas Co-op Power* showing old address and key numbers. **ADVERTISING:** Advertisers interested in buying display ad space in *Texas Co-op Power* and/or in our 30 sister publications in other states, contact Elaine Sproull at (512) 486-6251. Advertisements in *Texas Co-op Power* are paid solicitations. The publisher neither endorses nor guarantees in any manner any product or company included in this publication. Product satisfaction and delivery responsibility lie solely with the advertiser.

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HAPPENINGS

The Box Tops Are Back

A theater from the 1940s brings a soul band from the 1960s to a 2020s Texas audience.

The **BOX TOPS** of Memphis, Tennessee, who released a string of hit singles in the late 1960s, are back on the scene and play a show **MARCH 13** at the Brauntex Theatre in downtown **NEW BRAUNFELS**.

The Box Tops' heyday was short-lived, but they became a sensation with hit singles *The Letter*, *Cry Like a Baby* and *Soul Deep*.

The Brauntex has a storied history, opening a month after the bombing of Pearl Harbor with a showing of *Birth of the Blues*, starring Bing Crosby and Mary Martin. Today, it is a regular stop for touring and Texas acts.

INFO ▶ (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org/tickets.html

WEB EXTRAS
▶ Find more happenings online.



BOX TOPS, 1968

FLASHBACK

175 Years Ago

Congress passed a joint resolution annexing Texas on March 1, 1845, and on December 29 that year, Texas joined the union as the 28th state.



SPORTS SECTION

RANGERS ARE MADE IN THE SHADE

Plenty of Texas Rangers fans will tell you it was the best catch they've ever seen. During a game at then-Ameriquest Field in Arlington on July 1, 2006, Mike Lamb of the Houston Astros sent a shot barreling toward the wall in center field. The Rangers' Gary Matthews gave chase, leapt and snagged the ball with his back to home plate, twisting in the air to rob a home run.

"People are always bringing it up," Matthews told the *Los Angeles Times* a year later. "A few days ago, I was on deck in Cincinnati, and I heard a guy in the crowd say, 'That's the best catch I've ever seen.'"

Over the course of 26 seasons, sunny Globe Life Park in Arlington saw scores of big moments, including a perfect game pitched by Kenny Rogers on July 28, 1994.

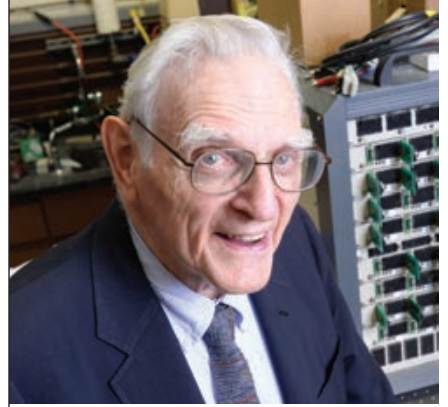
But when the Rangers take the field for the start of the season March 31, players—and fans—will no longer have to contend with the sun. The new \$1.1 billion Globe Life Field, just across the street, features 40,000 seats under a retractable roof.

BY THE NUMBERS

➔ *Did you know?*

The rubber band was patented 175 years ago. British inventor Stephen Perry received his patent March 17, 1845.

More than 30 million pounds of rubber bands are sold in the U.S. every year.



TECH KNOWLEDGE

Powering the World

The average Texan retires when they're about 64 years old.

John Goodenough passed that mark back in 1986, the same year he joined the University of Texas, after decades spent developing lithium-ion batteries.

He hasn't stopped.

Now, Goodenough, who's 97, is the oldest person to win the Nobel Prize—for his battery breakthroughs that power the smartphones, laptops and cars we use every day. He shares the prize with two other scientists.

Of course, Goodenough is still going. He still works 8-10 hours a day, according to his assistant at UT, and just last year announced a breakthrough: non-flammable, glass powder-based lithium-ion batteries with twice the energy density of traditional lithium-ion cells.

Maybe he'll retire at 100. We hope not.



The largest rubber band ball ever made used 700,000 rubber bands and stood 6 feet, 7 inches tall. It was made by a Florida man. Some things aren't always bigger in Texas.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Why do dogs always . . .



► Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Your answers can be silly, serious, deep or superficial. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or post them on our Facebook page. Please include your city and co-op.

Below are some of the responses to our January prompt:
I knew I was grown up when ...

I could kill my own spiders.
SYLVIA WILLIAMS | NEW BOSTON | BOWIE-CASS EC

I sat at the dinner table and realized my feet touched the floor.
GEORGE MCNEW | SPRING BRANCH | PEDERNALES EC

I realized I could eat ice cream for breakfast if I wanted.
ROBIN HODGES | BANDERA | BANDERA EC

To see more responses, read Currents on our website.



SOUL MUSIC OF SOUTH

BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

CONJUNTO, BUILT UPON A POLKA RHYTHM, TURNS ACCORDIONS AND 12-STRING GUITARS INTO A UNIQUE SOUND AND SUBCULTURE



Darren David Prieto played the accordion in Carnitas Uruapan, a meat market on the west side of San Antonio, one Sunday morning in 2016 while customers lined up for tamales and carnitas. Back then, the market hosted a weekly residency with accordionist Santiago Jiménez Jr., younger brother of accordion legend Flaco Jiménez. The gig was practice for Jiménez, but for Prieto, it was an apprenticeship and a steppingstone to a career performing the soul music of South Texas.

Jiménez introduced the shy teenager from New Braunfels, then 16, as “*mi protegido*”—his protégé—and, blushing, Prieto nodded toward Jiménez and added, “*Mi profesor.*” This unlikely venue and early start time was a very big deal for the slight, quiet young man because as part of a new generation of conjunto accordionists, it was his opportunity to learn from a master.

As Jiménez played his diatonic button accordion, accompanied by a sideman strumming chords on a 12-string guitar called a *bajo sexto*, pounding out a rhythm to propel the sounds from Jiménez’s accordion, the meat market’s owner occasionally walked out from behind the counter to harmonize with Jiménez in vocal duets. “Margarita, Margarita,” they crooned, faces inches from each other. Sit-ins from the neighborhood were part of the weekly routine. Grammy Award winner Max Baca of Los Texmaniacs walked into Carnitas wearing a football jersey and shorts rather than his western stage outfit and sat in with the band, playing bajo sexto.

**Opposite: Joel Guzmán at the Alamo.
Above: Teenage conjunto performer
Darren David Prieto in 2015.**

TEXAS

GUZMÁN: JOHN DYER. PRIETO: COURTESY TEXAS FOLK LIFE

AT A TIME WHEN MOST AMERICAN
ROOTS MUSIC'S POPULARITY
IS ON THE DOWNSWING,
CONJUNTO'S ROOTS
ARE SPREADING.



Conjunto's bouncy rhythm, typically a polka, is why it is also known as *música alegre*, happy music. Like blues and country, conjunto—pronounced coh-noon-toe—is indigenous, only regionally specific to South Texas, with mostly Spanish lyrics. In South Texas, and anywhere conjunto's influence extends, the term is applied to both sound and subculture.

Conjunto has two key instruments: the diatonic button accordion, which, like a harmonica, changes notes as air is pushed or pulled past vibrating reeds, and the bajo sexto, which provides the rhythm and backbeat. Most modern conjuntos also include drums, guitar and bass.

At a time when most American roots music's popularity is on the downswing, conjunto's roots are spreading. Public school programs in La Joya, Los Fresnos, Brownsville and other towns across the Rio Grande Valley have added conjunto to their curricula,

and bajo sexto classes are taught weekly at the Conjunto Heritage Taller and the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio. "We get them from 8 to 80," said Rodolfo Lopez, Conjunto Heritage Taller director. "Conjunto is us, *la gente*. This is a unique music form." Kids from the *taller* (workshop) have dominated the statewide Big Squeeze youth accordion competition sponsored by Texas Folklife since its inception in 2007.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to learn where to see and hear conjunto music. And check out our playlist.

Conjunto was born in the late 19th century when German immigrants introduced the button accordion to South Texas. In part because of its rural roots, it was known as cantina music. Conjunto made its commercial debut in the 1920s and '30s, when Columbia and Bluebird joined other labels in the fledgling recording business, setting up



Clockwise from opposite page: Santiago Jiménez Jr., who gave accordion lessons to Prieto. Los Texmaniacs have taken conjunto as far as China. With her 12-string guitar, Lydia Mendoza became the first female star of Mexican American music. San Antonio's Eva Ybarra is known as the Queen of the Accordion. Narciso Martínez was one of the recording pioneers of conjunto.

studios in rooms at San Antonio's Gunter and Bluebonnet hotels as well as at local WOAI radio to record musicians solicited by talent scouts. Conjunto accordionists were recruited to San Antonio alongside bluesman Robert Johnson, western swingsters Bill Boyd & His Cowboy Ramblers and the Tex-Czech sounds of Adolph Hofner as well as Texan Mexican singer Lydia Mendoza.

The instrumentals by those conjunto accordionists sounded Mexican with additional Bohemian, Czech and German elements, reflecting the influence of the immigrant communities of South Texas.

Texas conjunto recording pioneers Bruno Villarreal from Santa Rosa, Narciso Martínez of La Paloma and Santiago Jiménez of San Antonio all eavesdropped on Czech, German and Polish dances in South Texas and incorporated what they heard into their own music.

Conjunto follows neither mariachi nor ranchera traditions, nor is it *norteño*, the accordion style popular in northern Mexico. "It's a melding of European music and the Mexican bajo sexto," Rodolfo Lopez explained, noting that Czech *redowas*, Bohemian *schottisches*, waltzes and polkas all came from Europe. "We just added our jalapeño chiltepin flavor to it."

Flaco Jiménez, the older of conjunto pioneer Santiago Jiménez's two sons, expanded awareness of the genre in 1973, appearing on the album *Doug Sahm and Band*, featuring the rock musician from San Antonio and an all-star lineup that included Bob Dylan. Sahm sought out and played bajo sexto with Flaco Jiménez in his back-



yard on San Antonio's west side. "He could groove," Jiménez said.

Flaco Jiménez would ultimately take conjunto accordion around the world, recording with Ry Cooder, Peter Rowan, the Rolling Stones, Dwight Yoakum and Emmylou Harris before joining the Tex-Mex supergroup Texas Tornados.

Esteban "Steve" Jordan of Elsa, a dashing figure with an eyepatch known as the Jimi Hendrix of the accordion, also worked as a conjunto innovator. One record label described Jordan's style as *acordeón psicodélico*. If Jiménez was the standard-bearer, Jordan was the experimentalist—always pushing the envelope until his passing in 2010.

Another notable exporter of conjunto accordion is Joel Guzmán of Buda, who performs with his wife, Sarah Fox, as Aztex; plays and records with country rocker Joe Ely; and joined Paul Simon on his Homeward Bound tour. One of few professional female accordionists, Eva Ybarra earned a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2017.

Conjunto is no longer exclusively a Texas thing. Japan has several conjuntos who were inspired by Flaco Jiménez's appearance in their country with the Texas Tornados. Dwayne Verheyden from the Netherlands mastered Jiménez's playing style, then mastered Spanish to better communicate with Jiménez and conjunto audiences. After his performance at the Tejano Conjunto Fest in San Antonio in 2014, fans patiently lined up to have their picture taken with him, as if he was the Justin Bieber of conjunto.

Conjunto's crossover appeal comes to life in the music of Conjunto Los Pinkys, an Austin band led by octogenarian Isidro

Samilpa; a middle-aged Polish import from Saginaw, Michigan, named Bradley Jay Williams; and Mark Weber, an accordionist from San Antonio. Another crossover success is Stevie Ray Vavages of the Tohono O'odham Nation in Arizona, who learned the bajo sexto playing the native sound called chicken scratch.

Darren Prieto is part of the next wave.

Typical of most Texas kids, he grew up listening to rock, country, jazz and hip-hop. Not typical of most Texas kids, he chose to play accordion when he was 14. "I was always with my grandfather," he explained. "Around our house, conjunto music was always on. I listened to all types of conjunto, from Los Pavo Reales to Ruben Naranjo." The summer before he entered high school, Prieto picked up his grandfather's accordion, just as his own father once had. By that September, he'd learned some polkas. "I started falling in love," Prieto said.

Those Sunday morning performances on the small stage at Carnitas Uruapan, where he learned from Santiago Jiménez Jr., stoked Prieto's creative fire. "He helped me learn to get over stage fright, how to talk to the crowd and even how to be a humble musician," Prieto said.

The gigs at Carnitas Uruapan stopped in 2018 when the owner retired. But Prieto remains tight with Jiménez. "You can hear a little bit of Santiago Jiménez Jr.'s style in my own playing," Prieto said. "Playing conjunto music is so fun. It isn't like any other music. It has that beat that makes you want to dance. It makes you feel alive."

Writer **Joe Nick Patoski**, a confessed conjunto addict, lives outside Wimberley and is a member of Pedernales EC.

Esteban "Steve" Jordan began playing accordion at the age of 7.

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TEXAS' MAIN SQUEEZE

Chris Rybak continues a tradition brought to Texas by European settlers in the 1800s. Inset: Rybak as an 11-year-old.



BY JOE NICK PATOSKI

THE ACCORDION HAS BEEN A BELOVED MUSICAL INSTRUMENT SINCE IT GOT HERE

Of all the musical instruments brought to Texas by German, Czech, Polish and Moravian immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the accordion made the most unexpected inroads among Mexican, Cajun and Creole communities who embraced it as their instrument of choice. Generations later, squeezeboxes still move Texans.

Chris Rybak, known as the Accordion Cowboy, who hails from Hallettsville, explains that when he picked up the instrument 30 years ago, at age 11, accordion-playing bandleader Lawrence Welk was a big thing. “But that also made accordion not so cool,” he says, adding that now it’s heard in jazz, rock and a wide variety of other musical genres. “It doesn’t have to be just your grandpa’s ompah anymore.”

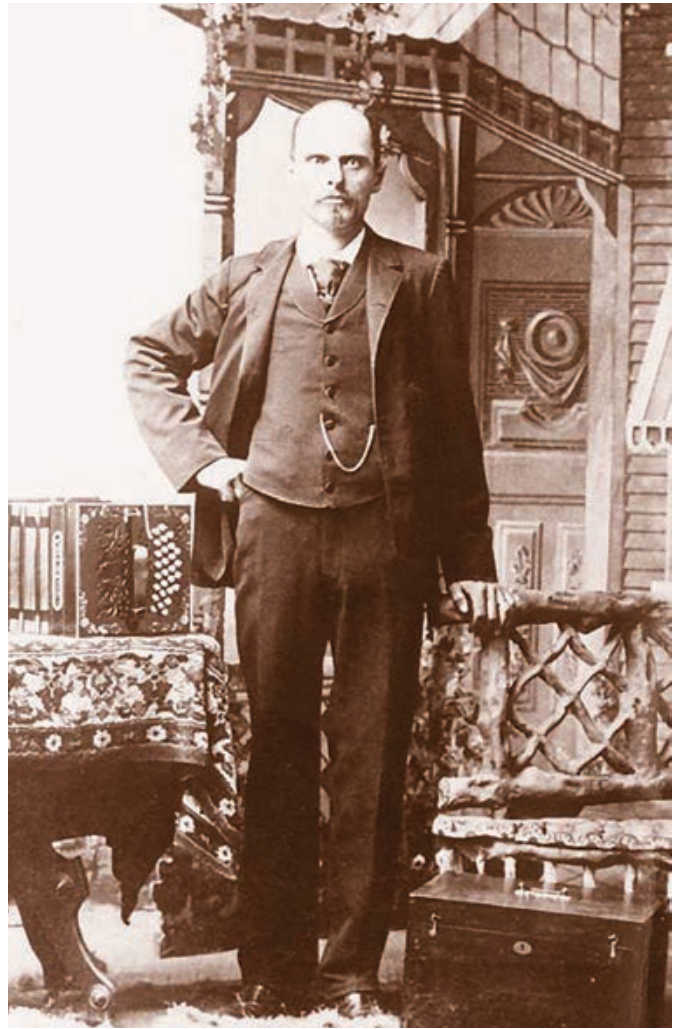
Packing the full-bodied sound of an entire band into one instrument, the accordion, invented in Europe in the 1820s, provided entertainment at dances of all kinds as Texas was settled. Without the need for electricity or amplification, its sound carried farther than stringed instruments.

The accordion was a key instrument for western swing bands in the 1930s and ’40s. It remains the most versatile musical instrument going in Texas, straddling regions and borders and injecting its sound into rock, country, blues, jazz and zydeco. It’s the defining instrument of conjunto, the folk music of South Texas, and the faster-paced *norteño*, a folk music of northern Mexico that is similar to conjunto.

Without the accordion, there would be no Mark Halata at Wursthfest, no Brave Combo playing WestFest, no Ennis Czech Boys working the National Polka Festival, no Fritz Hodde and the Fabulous Six performing at an SPJST hall.

The European-style accordion, the traditional large instrument with piano keys on the right-hand side that functions like a glorified organ, is favored by the Bohemians, Czechs, Poles and Germans of South and Central Texas; some Zydeco bands around Houston and southeast Texas; and Fort Worth’s Ginny Mac and Austin’s Debra Peters. It can weigh upward of 30 pounds.

Conjuntos and some zydeco bands favor the smaller, diatonic model of accordion with buttons on both sides that change notes as you push and pull and has considerably faster action. Texas Cajuns play an even smaller, simpler diatonic model with fewer buttons.



Accordionist and band leader Emil Schuhmann of Fayette County in the 1890s.

Rybak explains that Czech, German, German-Polish, Tejano and Cajun music each embody a distinct style. “On the other hand, when you go to a conjunto place,” he says, “the band will

throw in a few Czech songs. And vice versa. The accordion is distinctive, and it can cross boundaries and cultures.”

The universality of the accordion is celebrated at the Accordion Kings and Queens at the Miller Outdoor Theatre in Houston on the first Saturday in June, a production of Texas Folklife. All the bands onstage feature accordions as the lead instrument, but the performers sing in English, Spanish, French, German, Polish and Czech, reflecting each group’s ethnic background. Despite those differences, everyone dances the same on the dance floor, moving in a counterclockwise direction.

These days, Rybak says he mostly uses a digital accordion, which has changed his instrument much the way a digital keyboard changed piano playing. He can create blaring trumpets to open the Johnny Cash standard *Ring of Fire*.

“I would say for most shows, I play 70 or 80% with a digital accordion,” he says. “And that’s what the new generation really loves, too. They can do anything on it.”

Although Joe Nick Patoski gave up piano accordion for violin at age 7, he owns a button accordion autographed by Flaco Jiménez.

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One in a series of stories on fitness, recreation and outdoor adventure in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative region.

Get Going

— WITH —
Pam LeBlanc

Whether you prefer biking on a smooth surface or grinding on gravel, here are roads and rides for cyclists in the Bluebonnet area.

to GRIN or not to G

Story by Pam LeBlanc

Photos by Sarah Beal

Warm days and budding wildflowers always trigger the same response: My bicycle flexes its gears and spokes and practically points its way out the door.

In Central Texas, we have plenty of terrain to explore on two wheels.

Biking gets you outside and, if you stick with it, can improve your cardiovascular fitness and decrease stress levels. Springtime, before nature cranks up the furnace of summer, is the best time to get rolling. You just need to decide if you prefer spinning down paved streets or gravel roads.

If you like swift and smooth miles, you'll probably prefer traditional road riding, on a built-for-speed bicycle with skinny tires. If you don't mind bumpy, unimproved gravel roads, and care less about going fast, you might like gravel riding.

Road cyclists should note that there's a new twist in the 2020 Texas MS 150 — a two-day, two-wheel fundraising spin May 2-3 through much of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area. For the first time, cyclists can choose to start either from Austin or the Houston area. The routes merge in La Grange and end at Texas A&M University's Kyle Field in College Station.

Some of the organized events double as recommended training rides for the MS 150, which began in Houston in 1985 and can draw 10,000

Continued on page 21



GRIND



This Tomasso Siena Shimano Tourney Gravel Adventure Bike is a budget-priced option for beginning gravel grinders. Designed to be comfortable for long stretches of gravel but still fun on paved roads, it sells for \$550 on Amazon.com.

WHAT'S THE DIFF?

You probably recognize the difference between a road bike — which is streamlined, lightweight and built for speed — and its beefie, more rugged cousin, the mountain bike. But where does a gravel bike fit in the picture?

Think of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Gravel bikes are more durable than road bikes but not as thick-boned as a mountain bike. They have a more comfortable design, with a longer wheelbase and more standover height. That makes them ideal for the jolts and jars of rugged surfaces. You can even buy special seat posts and gel pads that go under the handlebar tape to reduce vibration.

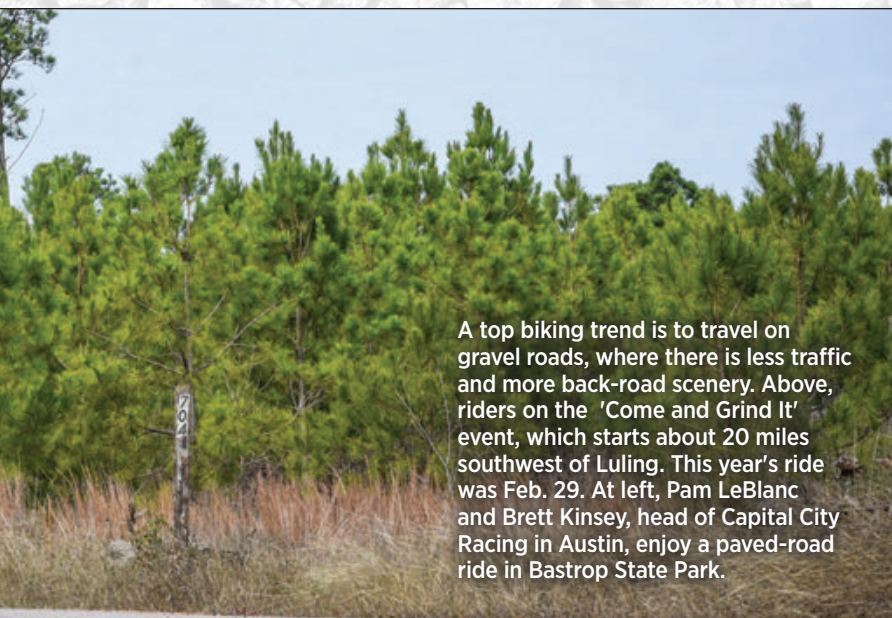
All gravel bikes use disc brakes instead of rim brakes, which accommodate wider tires that smooth out the ride and provide better grip on uneven surfaces. (A standard road bike runs 23 mm tires, while gravel bikes use 40 to 45 mm tires.) Gravel bikes also come with more mounting points, so you can carry more water bottles or attach a rack.

Gravel bikes weigh a little more than road bikes. The average road bike tips the scales at 17 or 18 pounds, while gravel bikes come in between 19 and 22 pounds.

You can pay from \$300 to nearly \$2,000 for a good entry-level road bike. Gravel bikes start at about \$500. The price increases as the quality of the bike's components increases.

You might not need a new bike if you decide to ride gravel. An old mountain bike gathering dust in a garage can be outfitted with thinner tires for the area's gravel roads.

"I'm a big believer in don't go buy a bunch of stuff you don't need, and I love that with gravel you don't have to have the latest and greatest to have fun," Kinsey says.



A top biking trend is to travel on gravel roads, where there is less traffic and more back-road scenery. Above, riders on the 'Come and Grind It' event, which starts about 20 miles southwest of Luling. This year's ride was Feb. 29. At left, Pam LeBlanc and Brett Kinsey, head of Capital City Racing in Austin, enjoy a paved-road ride in Bastrop State Park.



IS IT SAFE TO BIKE ON COUNTRY ROADS?

Bicycling down a two-lane country road is entirely different than pedaling through an urban area.

Instead of rumbling city buses and drivers pulling in and out of shopping centers, you'll more likely encounter a pasture of grazing cows and the occasional farm tractor. You'll also find less cycling infrastructure and motorists less accustomed to mingling with two-wheeled vehicles.

Cyclist Brett Kinsey, director of Capital City Racing, offers tips for rural biking:

Attach a red blinking light to the back of your bike, and use it even during daylight to make you more visible.

Wear bright-colored clothing, such as a day-glow yellow cycling vest.

Wave at motorists as you approach. "It humanizes you and captures their attention," Kinsey says.

Don't weave. Set as straight a course as you can, so motorists can predict your moves. "Don't get so distracted looking at



A hint: Pack enough food and drink for distance rides on rural roads, as corner stores are less common.

cows that you swerve out into the road," Kinsey says.

Observe traffic vs. "If you can't do it in a car, don't do it on a bike," Kinsey says. For example, be sure to stop at stop signs. It's a safe practice, and motorists grow weary of cyclists blowing through intersections.

Look for roads with less traffic Avoid multi-lane highways like Texas 71, U.S. 290 or Texas 95. "Distracted driving due to texting has been a game changer for any athlete who wants to use public roads," Kinsey says.

Remember that country roads don't have bike lanes. Pay attention and make eye contact with passing drivers.

Consider switching to gravel riding. Generally, traffic moves more slowly on gravel roads in rural areas. Park roads are an option, but remember that drivers may be distracted by scenery.

Pay attention to terrain, especially on gravel. You don't want to hit a larger piece of gravel or a rut.

Carry everything you need, including spare bike tubes, tools for quick repairs and a pump or CO2 cartridge to inflate a flat tire.

Hydrate. Drinking a standard-size bike water bottle per hour is a good rule of thumb. Hydration packs worn on your back work, too.

Bring snacks. "City riders get a little spoiled knowing there's a convenience store at every intersection. On gravel you need to be self-sufficient," Kinsey says.

At left, Pam LeBlanc attaches a gravel-tread bike to the back of a vehicle after a ride in Bastrop State Park. The tires of the gravel-grinder style bike are wider, with more nub.

‘It’s always going to be an adventure because crazy things happen on gravel roads.’

—Brett Kinsey,
HEAD OF CAPITAL CITY RACING

Continued from page 18

riders. (Find more information about the MS 150 on page 23.)

If gravel’s more your speed, just remember that even though you’ll travel slower, you’ll work harder.

“Gravel is about 15 percent more strenuous mile for mile, just because the rolling resistance on uneven surface of gravel itself is not the same as asphalt,” says Brett Kinsey, head of Capital City Racing in Austin, which puts on organized bike rides around Central Texas. “A 35-mile gravel ride is going to feel a lot harder than 35 miles on pavement, and you’re probably going to stop and take more selfies with that donkey.”

Gravel riding — or “grinding,” as some call it — is growing in popularity. It appeals to those who want to get out of heavy, fast-moving traffic. Because vehicles don’t drive 65 mph on gravel roads, traffic moves more slowly and beginning cyclists may feel safer. Plus, it’s a different experience.

“It’s always going to be an adventure, because crazy things happen on gravel roads versus paved roads,” Kinsey says. You’ll likely see cattle, horses and the occasional deer. One year, during Capital City Racing’s Come and Grind It ride near Gonzales, about 50 feral hogs ran along a fence line next to the cyclists. “You probably don’t see that on a highway,” Kinsey says.

Whether you decide to get in on the gravel craze, or tune up for the MS 150, we’ve scouted the area to find the best places to log some miles. Now’s the time to pump up your bike tires, fill a water bottle, grab your helmet and pick one of these routes to explore. ■

Pam LeBlanc has written about fitness, adventure and recreation in Central Texas for decades. Her work has appeared in Texas Monthly, Texas Highways, Texas Parks & Wildlife and Real Simple magazines, and the Austin American-Statesman.



The two primary distinctions between a gravel-grinder style bike and road bike are the width of the tires and the bike’s weight. A road bike, above, is built for cruising speed with a lighter frame and skinny tires.

SAFETY TIPS

The Texas MS 150 offers these guidelines to bicycle safety:

Don’t wear headphones or earbuds. (But do wear sunscreen.)

Know and obey all traffic laws so motorists can predict where you’re heading.

Obey all traffic signs and signals Avoid following the leader through traffic signs and signals by checking to make sure it’s still a cyclist’s turn to cross the intersection.

Ride in the right portion of the rightmost lane in the direction you are traveling.

Leave at least 4 feet between your handlebars and parked cars, other hazards or riders.

Ride no more than two abreast and do not impede traffic

Be verbal by communicating to let other riders know about hazards or your movements. Call out “on your left” before passing someone, “slowing” if riders in front of you are slowing down, and “stopping” if a rider ahead stops. “Car back” means a car is approaching from the rear. Alert riders to hazardous road conditions by calling out “gravel,” “pothole,” “sand” or “tracks” and pointing at the hazard.

A SAMPLING OF RIDES TO CONSIDER, next page

A SAMPLING OF RIDES TO CONSIDER



head4hills.org photo

Head for the Hills

TYPE OF RIDE: Organized, on paved roads
DISTANCE: 22-, 40- or 66-mile circuits
LOCATION: Brenham area
WHEN: 8 a.m.-3 p.m. March 28
COST: \$35-\$50 (early registration costs less)
INFORMATION: head4hills.org

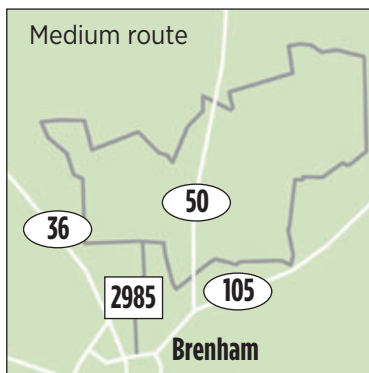
If hills and paved roads are your thing, consider the Head for the Hills Ride that starts in Brenham and unfurls through the rolling terrain of northeast Washington County.

The Rotary Club of Washington County hosts the annual group fundraising ride there — March 28

this year — but you can pedal its 22-, 40- or 66-mile circuits any time. All three routes start and finish at the Washington County Fairgrounds, 1305 East Blue Bell Road in Brenham.

The 22-miler takes cyclists past the Antique Rose Emporium north of Brenham, which should be in full bloom at ride time. The longest route goes all the way to the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site, where the Texas Declaration of Independence was signed on March 2, 1836.

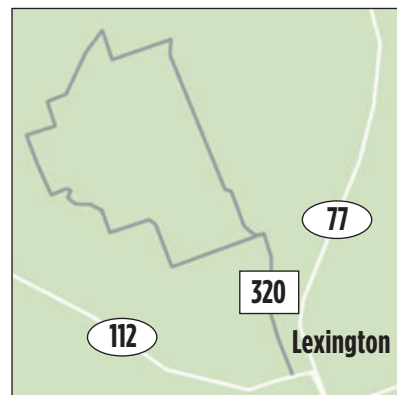
“All three routes are hilly,” says Roger Ross, facilitator of the organized ride, which benefits local charities, including Boys & Girls Clubs, Child Protective Services, the Brenham Heritage Museum and Miracle Farm. “The scenery is phenomenal. During the spring, the bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes are out. It’s just a beautiful ride.”



Lexi’s Midnight Runners

TYPE OF RIDE: Organized, on paved and gravel roads; night
DISTANCE: 21-, 31- or 51-mile circuits
LOCATION: Lexington
WHEN: Sunset-midnight July 11
COST: \$30
INFORMATION: capitalcityracingtexas.com

Capital City Racing puts on a slate of mostly gravel rides in Central Texas, and this one unfolds after dark. All routes begin in Lexington in Lee County. Make sure you’ve got a good headlight and a blinking taillight before the organized ride on July 11. Or try the 21-, 31- or 51-mile routes on your own anytime.



On event day, rides will start an hour before sunset at the town square. Cyclists will follow roads through rural areas northwest of Lexington before returning to town. At the finish line, riders can find music, food and beer.

Bastrop Gravel Grinder

TYPE OF RIDE: Self-guided, paved and gravel
DISTANCE: 35 miles
LOCATION: Bastrop State Park to Paige and back
WHEN: Any time
COST: \$5 state park entry fee
INFORMATION: tinyurl.com/u46lcne

If you like to mix up your ride with a little bit of pavement and a little bit of gravel, try this easy-going loop. Park at Bastrop State Park, where you’ll find restrooms, campgrounds and a swimming pool. Head north on Park Road 1C, but instead of going toward Buescher State Park, take the left fork at County Road 146.

You’ll hit gravel in a few miles. Notice the sign on a pasture on the left, warning cyclists to not raise the ire of the resident stallion. Stop and check out Antioch Cemetery, where some of Bastrop’s earliest pioneers, including veterans of the Civil War, are buried.

Continue toward the town of Paige, past the pump jack and cows. Brace your abdominals for the last section because stretches of gravel in the “lollipop” (or loop) part of this route are rough as a washboard. You can shorten the ride 10 miles by parking at Antioch Cemetery and riding to Paige from there.



explorebastropcounty.com photo

Bastrop State Park to Buescher State Park

TYPE OF RIDE: Self-guided, paved

DISTANCE: 12 miles each way

LOCATION: Park Road 1C

WHEN: During park hours, 6 a.m.-10 p.m.

COST: \$5 state park entry fee

INFORMATION: tinyurl.com/tcgsn2x

Prefer to stick to pavement? Try pedaling the beginner-friendly 12-mile paved road that connects Bastrop State Park with its Lost Pines neighbor, Buescher State Park just north of Smithville.

Pay the entrance fee at one of the parks and enjoy the route, which features plenty of rolling hills and not much motor vehicle traffic. Keep an eye open for birds along the way — besides the usual assortment of red-tailed hawks, cardinals and turkey vultures, you're likely to spot a woodpecker or two hammering away. Keep an eye out for snakes on this ride.



Texas MS 150

TYPE OF RIDE: Organized, on paved roads

DISTANCE: 155-177 miles over two days

LOCATION: Austin to College Station via La Grange, or Houston to College Station via La Grange

WHEN: May 2-3

COST: Requires minimum of \$400 in pledges plus \$100-\$140 entry fee (early registration costs less)

INFORMATION: tinyurl.com/uuzqt8y

The champion of all organized group road rides in Texas kicks off May 2 this year, with new routes that allow cyclists to begin in Austin, Houston, Katy or Waller. All routes — which range from 155 miles to 177 miles over two days — cut through Bluebonnet's service area,



nationalmssociety.org photo

merge in La Grange for the first night, and finish at Kyle Field in College Station on May 3.

Cyclists stop at Lake Somerville on the second day for lunch before heading to Texas A&M University. Cyclists must raise a minimum of \$400 for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society to ride. Proceeds fund research aimed at ending the disease.

Holey Roller

TYPE OF RIDE: Organized, on paved and gravel roads

DISTANCE: 30- or 50-mile circuits

LOCATION: Rocky Hill Ranch, north of Smithville

WHEN: 7:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. March 7

COST: \$40

INFORMATION: bicyclesportshop.com/holey-roller

On March 7, Bicycle Sport Shop in Austin hosts the Holey Roller ride, a 30- or 50-mile journey over a combination of paved and gravel roads north of Smithville in Bastrop County. That's "holey," as in "potholes" and other obstacles (ruts, cow pies and the occasional rattlesnake, according to race organizers).

The self-supported annual cruise starts and finishes at Rocky Hill Ranch (an excellent place for mountain biking, too). The ranch is two miles east of Buescher State Park. After the event, riders get beer, lunch and a T-shirt.

The main route is tweaked every year as organizers try to incorporate as much gravel riding as possible. The current route is about 75 percent pavement and



bicyclesportshop.com photo

25 percent gravel.

"It's more of a 'groad' ride instead of a gravel ride," says Laura Neighbors, community engagement coordinator for Bicycle Sport Shop. Still, the laid-back vibe of the ride stays true to the gravel riding spirit. "On a gravel road, you pull over and let people pass and maybe stop and have a conversation."

As you ride, keep an eye out for a ranch gate painted like a Texas flag, plenty of cows, and some long stretches of gravel road lined by pine trees. "It's gorgeous — I love it," Neighbors said.

If you ride the route on your own, try starting at Buescher State Park instead, because traffic whizzes by in front of Rocky Hill Ranch.

Everyone counts!

Why it's essential to participate in the 2020 census

By Melissa Segrest

At the start of every decade, all people living in the United States and its territories are counted. A request for you to participate in the 2020 census could arrive in your mailbox by the middle of March. The U.S. census began in 1790 — 230 years ago — and has happened every decade since. There are lots of reasons for everyone to participate. Here are just five

1. The Constitution mandates that everyone in the country be counted every 10 years.
2. The results of the census are used to determine how many seats Texas — and our Central Texas region — has in the U.S. House of Representatives. That ensures fair representation in Congress.
3. Schools, hospitals, infrastructure like

roads and bridges, senior centers, public works and other important programs receive federal money based, in part, on census data. Nationally, that totals about \$675 billion and means support for Texas, our counties and communities.

4. The population has changed in Texas and our region in the last 10 years. As a result, new census data are used to redraw the boundaries of the U.S. congressional and state legislative districts for the next decade.

5. It is your civic duty! Completing the census is mandatory and a fundamental way to participate in our nation's democracy.

The census is used to make a lot of other decisions, too. Businesses study it to decide where to build, which creates jobs. Real estate developers look at the census to decide where they should add homes. Regional and community governments use the data for public safety and emergency preparedness. Residents use the census results to support community initiatives.

The Census Bureau will ask how many

people were living or staying in your house, apartment or mobile home on April 1, 2020. It also will ask for some information about each of the residents.

There are three ways to respond: by mail, online (for the first time) or by calling a toll-free number. Residents of remote areas or those who don't submit a census form may get a visit by a door-knocking representative.

Your privacy is protected, and your answers to the questions cannot be used against you in any way. It is against the law for the Census Bureau to release responses in any way that could identify you or your household to the public or government agencies. Your anonymous responses are only used to create statistics.

The results will begin to be made public by Dec. 31, 2020.

Get more information and answers to frequently asked questions online at census.gov or by calling 800-923-8282 (toll free).

— *Information courtesy of U.S. Census Bureau and census.gov.*

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Call member services at 800-842-7708 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday

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If you have a cell phone on file, you're automatically enrolled in Bluebonnet's Outage Alerts text service. Text BBOUTAGE to 85700 to enroll or confirm enrollment, then text to that number:

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- STATUS for an outage update
- HELP for more information
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Online

At bluebonnet.coop, click Report Outage at the top of any page

By mobile app

Download the Bluebonnet app on your smartphone and log in, or report an outage online or by phone from the login screen

SAVE THE DATE

Annual Meeting, Board election set for May 12

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be May 12 at The Silos, formerly the Sons of Hermann Hall, in Giddings. Four of nine seats on the Board of Directors will be up for election that day, and co-op official will present members with the annual State of the Cooperative report.

Board members serve staggered three-year terms. The four seats up for election this year are from District 3, Bastrop County; District 4, Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; District 6, Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties; and District 7, Washington County.

The deadline to declare candidacy and file required documentation and fees in order to seek a seat on the Board was Feb. 12. Look for information about all candi-

dates and more details about this year's Annual Meeting in Bluebonnet's pages of the April edition of Texas Co-op Power magazine or on our website.

The Silos is at 1031 County Road 223, Giddings. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. May 12, and the meeting will begin at 2:30 p.m.

If you are unable to attend, you can vote by proxy. Proxy forms will be mailed to Bluebonnet members this month and must be postmarked by, or dropped off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor by 5:30 p.m. May 5.

If you have questions about the meeting, call 800-842-7708 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop.



Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting gives members a chance to vote for Board members, meet Bluebonnet leaders and get the latest news about the cooperative. Entertainment includes a live band, information tables, kolaches and door prizes. *Sarah Beal photo*

REMINDER

Have you changed your Bluebonnet username?

If you have an online account and haven't already changed your username to your email address, please make this update by May 1.

Making the change in advance will simplify your login process when Bluebonnet implements website changes this summer in an effort to provide better online member service.

Any member who hasn't made the change yet will receive an email this month. When you log in at bluebonnet.coop, you will be prompted through the change.

Once you've submitted the change, you will automatically be logged out and taken to a new login screen confirming that your username was successfully changed. You may then log in with the new username to access your account.

Questions? Please contact a member service representative at 800-842-7708 or memberservices@bluebonnet.coop.

Hurry!
Deadline
March 6

SCHOLARSHIPS TO POWER YOUR EDUCATION



Bluebonnet will award \$2,500 scholarships to **60 area high school seniors** who plan to pursue a **trade or technical program** or **bachelor's degree**.

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5 p.m. March 6**

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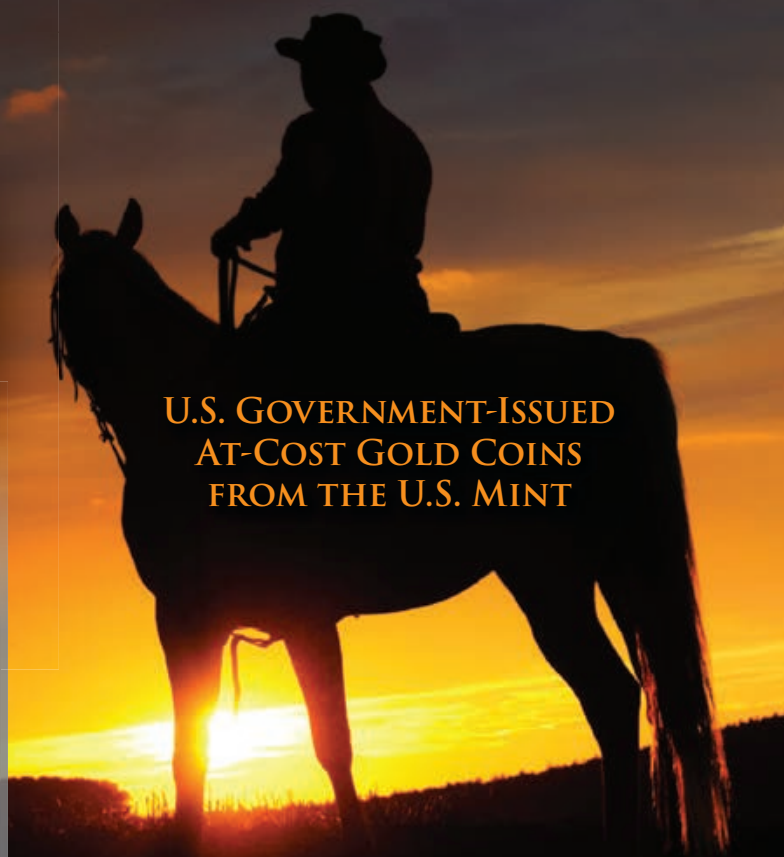
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The Dirt on Soapy

Onetime Texan cleaned up as a nefarious con man and syndicate boss

BY CLAY COPPEDGE



THOUGH HIS LEGEND IS most associated with skulduggery in Colorado and Alaska, Soapy Smith spent his teenage years in Round Rock and began his career as a swindler in Fort Worth.

Before he was Soapy Smith, he was Jefferson Randolph Smith II, son of a wealthy Georgia family that lost everything after the Civil War and moved to Round Rock in 1876. Smith and a cousin reportedly witnessed the shootout there that killed outlaw Sam Bass in 1878. But the crime-doesn't-pay lesson inherent in the Bass incident was apparently lost on Smith: His two years in Round Rock were his last as a law-abiding citizen.

Jefferson Smith morphed into Soapy Smith following his most famous swindle, the "Prize Package Soap Sell." He'd set up a display featuring bars of soap on a street corner, establish a friendly patter with passersby and then wrap some of the soap with paper money. He then rewrapped the bars in plain paper, mixed them in with the others and sold them for 50 cents—about \$12 in today's money.

Someone—a ringer—always bought a bar of soap, unwrapped it and found money. The excitement spread to passersby who took the bait and bought up the whole pile of soap. Only Smith cohorts

ever bought a bar with money. He ran this swindle for decades.

Fort Worth was Smith's first operational base. He assembled a skilled gang, and they pooled their money, paid off cops and bribed politicians to overlook their nefarious activity. Jeff Smith V, Smith's great-grandson and biographer, wrote that Soapy's particular gift was organization.

"Alone, these men were forced to be drifters, moving from one town to the next, as Jefferson had done," Jeff Smith wrote. "Jefferson united the men, and together as an organization, they were almost unstoppable. ... In the late 1870s Jeff became so powerful and known for his crimes that laws were enacted at Fort Worth especially due to him. It was time for Jeff to move on."

Though the gang opted for Denver and points north, Smith maintained contact with Texans for the rest of his life. His younger brother, Bascom, was arrested in 1883, when he was 14, for trying to set fire to a Belton hotel, and two sisters lived in Bell County.

Jefferson "Soapy" Smith stands at the bar in a Skagway, Alaska, saloon.

Smith's reputation as King of the Frontier Con Men prompted him to seek dishonest work beyond Colorado. He traveled to Skagway, Alaska, gateway to the Klondike gold fields.

In Skagway, citizens formed a vigilance committee to run Smith and his confederates out of town. Smith responded by announcing his own committee to run the original committee out of town.

The tipping point came when a theft of \$2,000 was pinned on a Smith associate, and Smith wouldn't give up the robber or return the money. A group met at the Juneau Wharf on July 8, 1898, to discuss their next move. An armed and intoxicated Smith confronted the meeting. His enemies claimed his last words were, "My God, don't shoot!"

Twenty years to the month after Sam Bass was gunned down in Round Rock, Soapy Smith met the same fate in Alaska.

Clay Coppedge, a member of Bartlett EC, lives near Walburg.

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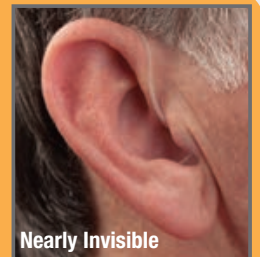
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Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More

FROM A SIMPLE FISH FRY TO SHELLFISH harvested from the Gulf, Texas' bounty of seafood is one of the state's great pleasures and a wonderful blank slate for applying layers of flavor.

Chef Maggie Perkins, a food writer and former farmer, frequently uses Texas seafood in demos at farmers markets and in cooking classes. Perkins took inspiration from Texas' coastal ingredients and combines them with her Creole roots for this approachable dish.

It's easy enough to prepare on a weeknight but still impressive should guests pop by. The key is to be patient in making the roux—cook it fully to achieve a beautiful, deep color.

MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Shrimp Étouffée

- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 small green or red bell pepper, chopped
- 2 large ribs celery, chopped
- 3 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) whole tomatoes, drained and chopped
- 2 cups shrimp stock
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- 2 pounds medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- ¼ cup chopped green onions
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Cooked rice, for serving
- Hot pepper sauce, for serving

1. In a large heavy skillet or Dutch oven, melt butter over medium heat. Increase heat to medium-high and whisk in flour until incorporated fully. Whisk continuously until roux is the color of peanut butter, about 10 minutes.

2. Add onion, bell pepper, celery and garlic, mixing into roux. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until vegetables are softened and onion is

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Recipes

Crawfish, Oysters, Crab and More



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

DEANNA PAYNE | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

This easy yet flavorful recipe is perfect for entertaining, as it comes together quickly. Payne learned of it through a chef at a private club in Corpus Christi, where it was often served as an appetizer. Scoop the crab onto toast points or simply enjoy on its own; it's equally delicious chilled. When serving, squeeze the paprika-dipped lemon slices over the crab for a citrusy kick.

Gulf Lump Crabmeat Sauté

- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 pound lump crabmeat, picked through for shells
- ½ cup slivered almonds, toasted
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Lemon slices
- Paprika
- Salad greens or toast points, for serving

1. Melt butter in a skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté until golden, 2–3 minutes.
2. Add crabmeat and stir-fry until all meat is very hot, 3–5 minutes, stirring carefully to keep crab pieces intact.
3. Stir in almonds and parsley, adding salt and pepper to taste. Heat through 1 minute and ladle onto a preheated serving platter.
4. Garnish with lemon slices dipped in paprika. ▶ Serves 8 as an appetizer.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

transparent, about 5 minutes. Add tomatoes and stir to combine well.

3. Increase heat to medium-high and slowly stir in the stock. Continue to stir until sauce is smooth and bubbling and has thickened. Stir in seasoning.

4. Bring to a low boil, stirring, then reduce heat to medium. Cook, stirring occasionally, about 15 minutes.

5. Fold shrimp, parsley and green onion into sauce and cook until shrimp is opaque, about 3 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings, adding more Creole seasoning, salt and pepper as needed. Serve over rice with hot pepper sauce on the side. ▶ Serves 8.

COOK'S TIP In lieu of shrimp stock, use seafood stock, chicken stock, clam juice, water or any combination thereof.

Follow along with **Megan Myers** and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com.

Crawfish Bread

GERI HUPP | DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

This unexpected side dish is a wonderful addition to a larger seafood spread. Look for the crawfish tail meat in the freezer section of your grocery store. Try experimenting with a variety of cheeses.

- 1 package (6 ounces) cornbread mix
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 1 tablespoon Creole seasoning
- ⅓ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper, plus more to taste
- 12 ounces fully cooked crawfish tail meat, thawed
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 can (15.25 ounces) corn, drained
- 3 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup diced green onions
- ½ cup diced white onion
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a small bowl, whisk together cornbread mix, baking soda, Creole seasoning and cayenne pepper.
3. In a large bowl, stir together crawfish, cheese, corn, eggs, onions and bell pepper. Fold in dry ingredients until well incorporated. Mixture will be thick.

New
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\$500 Recipe Contest

August's recipe contest topic is **Cool Foods**. Ease this month's swelter with some no-stove-or-oven-needed dishes. Send us your best. The deadline is **March 10**. Readers whose recipes are featured will receive a special *Texas Co-op Power* apron.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

4. Spread batter into an ungreased 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Bake 30–40 minutes or until golden brown. Let cool slightly before cutting, then serve warm. ▶ Serves 12.

Gulf Coast Corn Chowder With Shrimp and Pico de Gallo

SHERRY SCOTT | PEDERNALES EC

Chowder is always a winning way to enjoy seafood. This version uses potatoes, corn and plenty of toppings. “While visiting South Padre Island one fall, we were experimenting with seafood recipes and came up with this delicious option that has become a requested favorite,” Scott says.

- 1 poblano pepper
 - 4 slices bacon
 - ½ cup (⅓ stick) butter
 - 1 cup diced white onion
 - 6 cloves garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks

- 2 cups vegetable broth
 - 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
 - 2 tablespoons seafood seasoning (such as Old Bay)
 - 2 cups 2% milk
 - 1 can (5 ounces) evaporated milk
 - 2 cups corn, thawed if frozen
 - 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
 - 1 avocado, diced, for garnish
- Pico de gallo, for garnish

1. Roast the poblano over an open flame until all skin is charred black. Place charred pepper in a plastic bag until it cools. Rinse the pepper under running water to remove charred skin.
2. Cook bacon until crisp. Drain and set aside.
3. Melt butter in a stockpot over medium heat. Add poblano, onion, garlic, and a pinch of salt and pepper and sauté until onion is translucent, about 3 minutes.
4. Add potatoes and broth and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and sim-

mer until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.

5. While potatoes are cooking, heat a pot of water to boiling. Add shrimp and seafood seasoning, reduce heat to a simmer and cook 2–3 minutes. Remove shrimp from water, set aside and keep warm.

6. When potatoes are done, slightly mash some of the potatoes in the pot, leaving some chunks. Whisk ¼ cup of broth from the pot into milk, then add milk and evaporated milk to stockpot.

7. Stir in corn and oregano, and add salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce heat and simmer until corn is heated through, about 15 minutes.

8. To serve, place 6 shrimp in each bowl. Add chowder, and garnish with crumbled bacon, avocado and pico de gallo. ▶ Serves 4-6.

COOK'S TIP You can substitute 1 can (4 ounces) roasted hatch peppers for the poblano.

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SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and snatched it up for our *Sedona Turquoise Collection*. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique,

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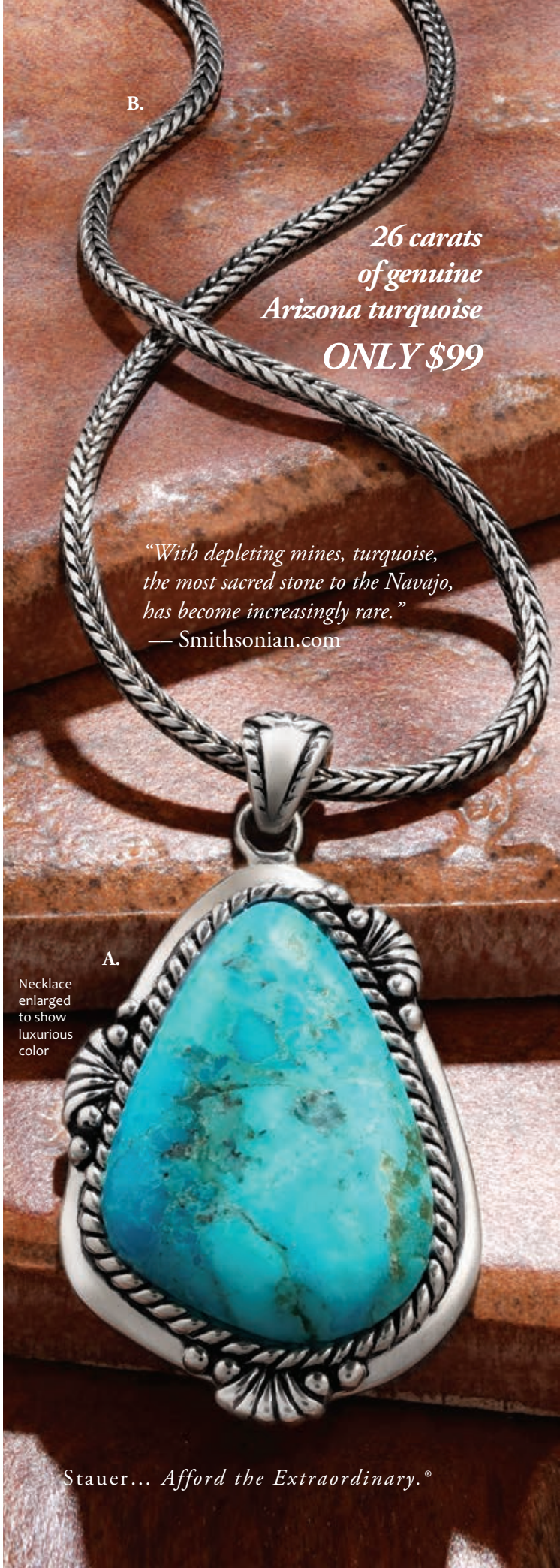
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WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



▲ **JENNIFER RIECK**, Medina EC: Billy Rieck Sr., Rieck's husband, in his soap box derby car in 1948.

▼ **JOSE GARZA**, Magic Valley EC: "Twenty-one-month-old Jordan takes his first pony ride and loves it."



▲ **LYNN LEISTER**, Guadalupe Valley EC: "Harper's first mutton bustin' ride at Yorktown Western Days."

▶ **PAUL GARCIA**, Medina EC: Garcia's granddaughter got to take control momentarily during a youth program flight at the Castroville airport.



▲ **JUDY TRUESDELL**, Farmers EC: Kids race old-time pedal cars down Wylie's Ballard Avenue.



UPCOMING CONTESTS

JULY	EXPLORATION	DUE MARCH 10
AUGUST	ON THE WATER	DUE APRIL 10
SEPTEMBER	SHAPES	DUE MAY 10

Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/Contests](https://www.texascooppower.com/Contests).

Pick of the Month
RISE for Families
Chili Cook-Off

Leander March 28
 (512) 736-8887, riseforfamilies.org

RISE for Families offers families of children with special needs free assistance in learning about the resources available to them. This event features a cook-off judged by Leander firefighters, children's activities, a silent auction, live music and vendors.



BOY: LENA MAY | STOCK.ADOBE.COM. CAR: LEEKRIS | STOCK.ADOBE.COM. UFO: JAMES THEW | STOCK.ADOBE.COM

March

7
Lake Jackson Youth Fishing Day at Sea Center Texas, (979) 292-0100, visitbrazosport.com

Rosanky Rosanky Christian Academy Annual BBQ Dinner Fundraiser, (512) 360-3109, rosankychristianacademy.com

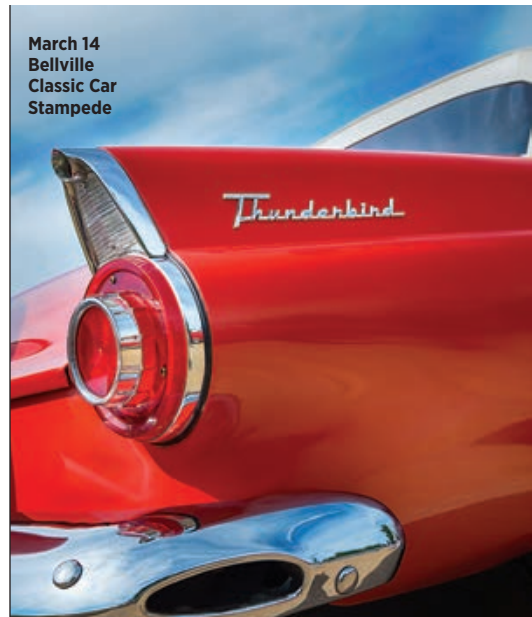
Clarendon [7-8] Whistle-Stop Trade Days, (806) 206-6815, facebook.com/whistop

9
Fredericksburg [9-14] Spring Break at the Pioneer Museum, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.net

12
New Braunfels T.G. Sheppard & Kelly Lang, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

13
Dallas [13-15] Dallas Quilt Show, (214) 766-2212, quiltersguildofdallas.org

March 14
Bellville
 Classic Car Stampede



Ingram [13-29] No Body Like Jimmy, (830) 367-5121, hcac.com

14
Bellville Classic Car Stampede, (979) 865-3187, austincountycruisers.com

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Seguin Eastern Star Stew Dinner & Country Store, (720) 394-8514

Fort Worth [14-15] Funky Finds Spring Fling, (903) 665-7954, funkyfinds.com

20

Round Top [20-21] Herb Society of America: Pioneer Unit Herbal Forum Plant and Gift Sale, (979) 421-9980, herbsocietypioneer.org

West [20-21] West, Central Texas Ceramic Expo & Handcrafted Items, (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

21

George West Patsy Torres as Patsy Cline, (361) 436-1098, dobie-westtheatre.com

Kerrville Camerata San Antonio: *Blueprint*, (210) 492-9519, cameratasa.org

Lakehills Lakehills UMC Annual Fish Fry and Auction, (830) 751-2404, lakehillsumc.org/fishfry

Woodville [21-22] Festival of the Arts and Dinner on the Grounds, (409) 283-2272, heritage-village.org

27

Tyler [27-28] Quilters' Guild of East Texas Annual Quilt Show, (903) 747-7072, qgetx.org/quilt-show.html

Sabinal [27-29] Wild Hog Festival and Craft Fair, (830) 486-8549, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

28

Huntsville Herb Festival at the Wynne Home, (936) 891-5024, texasthymeunit.org



April 2-4
Edinburg
UFO Festival

30

Canton [30-April 4] Van Zandt County Fair, (903) 292-6250, vzfair.org

April

2

Brenham Texas A&M Singing Cadets, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Edinburg [2-4] UFO Festival, (956) 383-6246, edinburgarts.com

3

Cuero [3-4] Heirloom Stitchers Quilt Show, (361) 550-9388, cuero.org

4

Port Arthur [4] Cajun Heritage Fest, (409) 835-2787, cajunheritagefest.com

Quintana [4-May 6] Spring Fling, (979) 480-0999, gcbo.org/spring-fling

Submit Your Event!

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for May by March 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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Sharpening My Knowledge

Poking around the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean

TEXAS IS KNOWN FOR WIDE-OPEN SPACES. On the 19th-century range, cowboys could ride from dawn to dusk without seeing a sign of civilization. Then came the invention of barbed wire, creating fences that made it near impossible to drive cattle. On a recent trip to the Panhandle, I found myself entangled in the history of the so-called devil's rope.

On Route 66, about 75 miles east of Amarillo, I discovered the perfect place to stop and stretch my legs while simultaneously pondering the weird and wonderful: the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.

While cruising McLean's red brick streets and beyond, I noticed a beige building with two large orbs adorning its entrance. As I got closer, I realized these were actually rusted bundles of barbed wire, rolled up like yarn.

"How could any museum covering something as strange and specific as barbed wire be interesting?" I thought. I quickly realized how wrong I was. The museum was cavernous, with every inch of wall and countless educational panels filled with information, artifacts and stories. I decided to poke around and begin my education.

Barbed wire was invented after the Civil War, and hundreds of types received patents as inventors looked to outdo one another and create the next best thing. There's single twist, double twist, ribbon wire, diamond wire, sawtooth wire and one called the Dodge Star that can fetch upward of \$500 a foot from the right collector. Joseph Glidden of DeKalb, Illinois, came up with the design, which used two strands of wire twisted together to hold the barb spurs in place, that became the most popular in the country.

The museum in McLean displays 2,000



Chet gets right to the point at the Devil's Rope Museum in McLean.

to the sort of metal cockleburs that ripped through so many pairs of my childhood jeans.

In addition to barbed wire, the museum boasts other really cool exhibits. There's a full-size cowboy wagon set against a painted diorama of the Texas sky. There are countless tools used for tasks from digging fence posts to mending busted barbs. There's even a number of barbed wire sculptures that include a scorpion, armadillo and cowboy hat. I can only imagine how many pairs of gloves the artists must have gone through. Also set in a corner is a sobering exhibit about how humans have used barbed wire against one another in times of war.

When it was first introduced, almost everyone in Texas hated barbed wire. It sectioned off the prairie, cutting cowboys off from grazing and watering their cattle wherever they pleased. At night, renegade groups would go on fence-cutting sprees


types of wire. The number blew my mind because, in truth, I had never paid any attention

that resulted in bloodshed, and not just from pricking their fingers. It got so serious in the 1880s that Gov. John Ireland and the Texas Rangers had to step in and quash the violence.

Soon, Texans began to accept fencing as a way of life. Barbed wire was cheaper than wooden fencing. It helped ranchers control the breeding of their cattle, and it helped farmers grow crops without the threat of wandering herds mowing everything down.

As I learned, barbed wire truly changed the Texas frontier, and very few Texans understand its impact—something this small museum hopes to change, one visitor at a time. I also learned that sometimes the strangest roadside stops lead to the best road trip education.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of *The Daytripper* on PBS.

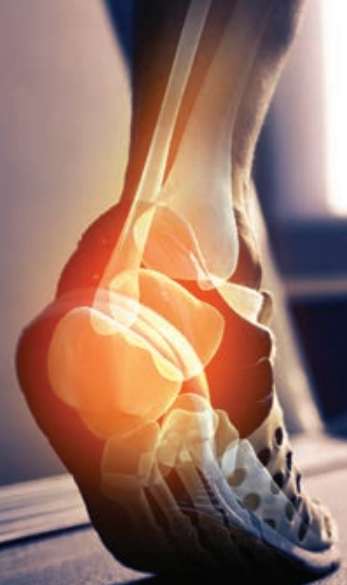
 **WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see Chet's video from the Devil's Rope Museum. To learn more about the fence-cutting wars, read *Barbed Wire, Barbaric Backlash* in our January 2014 issue.

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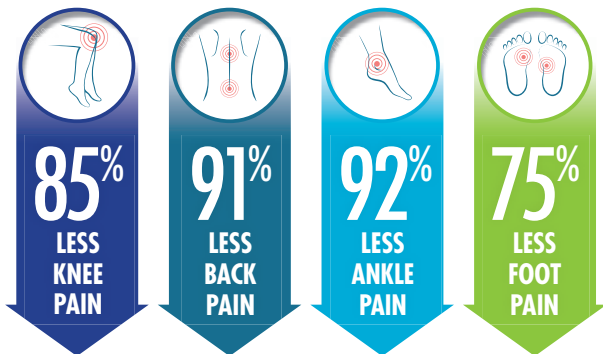
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