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DRIVE-INS

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BLUEBONNET NEWS
SEE PAGE 18





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Medina EC lineman Taylor Stacy cuts an 8-foot pizza with an old plow disc.

FAVORITES

- 5 Letters
- 6 Currents
- 18 **Local Co-op News**
Get the latest information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative.
- 29 **Texas History**
The Nylon Campaign
By Ellen Stader
- 31 **Retro Recipes**
Standout Summer Sides
- 35 **Focus on Texas**
Photo Contest: Feedin' Time
- 36 **Around Texas**
List of Local Events
- 38 **Hit the Road**
Lowly Activities in Arlington
By Chet Garner

ONLINE

TexasCoopPower.com
Find these stories online if they don't appear in your edition of the magazine.

Observations

Bad Moon Waning
By Clay Coppedge

Texas USA

D-Day's Texas Legend
By Gene Fowler

FEATURES

8 Drive In, Chill Out Drive-in theaters persist as beacons of nostalgia that offer cinema under a boundless sky.
Story by Travis P. Hill | Photos by Dave Shafer

12 Make It a Large Sometimes your eyes—like the oversized food on Texas menus—are bigger than your stomach.
Story by Jeff Siegel | Photos by Tom Hussey

NEXT MONTH

Grown Locally Texas Tech program puts students on a farm-to-table career path.



ON THE COVER Sam and Shelbie Gaddy get cozy in a 1960s pickup at Brazos Drive-In Theatre in Granbury. Photo by Dave Shafer

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Another Lone Star Flag

The letter *Texas' First Flag* [April 2019] reminded me of the Lone Star flag flown in 1810 over the Republic of West Florida, the short-lived republic (78 days) with St. Francisville, now a city in Louisiana, as its capital.

The single, large white or yellow star in the center of a sky blue field was a symbol of rebellion after the settlers in West Florida rebelled against Spain to set up their own nation before being absorbed into Louisiana and the United States. History is interesting and does repeat, at least occasionally.

JOE WEBB | MARBLE FALLS
PEDERNALES EC

Safety Gear Evolution

Thank you for the article *Gearing Up* [March 2019]. Our grandson Mason Harper especially enjoyed seeing these pictures. He is employed by Primoris and wears lots of safety equipment.

LOREAN PULLEY | RIESEL
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

Blues History

I met Lightnin' Hopkins in 1957 at the age of 15 [*Texas: A Blues State*, March 2019]. We would sit on the porch, and by watching his hands, I learned the three chords he used all the time. I was more of a novelty then, but I did play solo at times with the drummer, Joseph Kilpatrick, better known as the Black Spider. Luke "Long Gone" Miles played with us once, and Cleveland Chenier, Clifton's brother, played a washboard with us several times.

Those days are sadly gone,

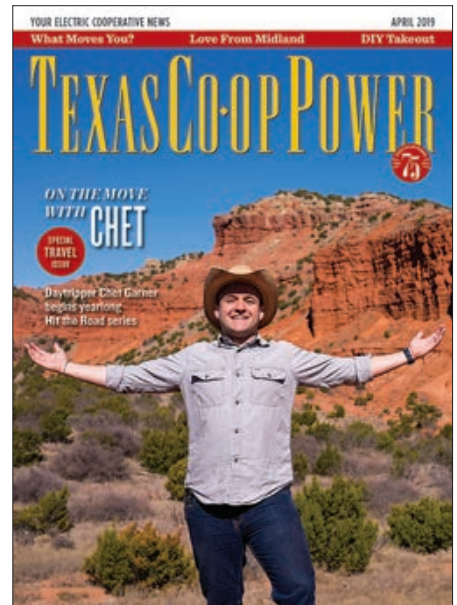
Chet Garner Hits the Road

Seen other Texas travel shows, but *Daytripper's* the best one. Chet's awesome. ... There's still so much to discover in the greatest state in the country.

JAIME GARZA | VIA FACEBOOK

You have been on the road for years, uncovering gems ... and having fun across our great state—and you do it all with fun and knowledge!

MARTHA HOLLOWAY LANDRY | VIA FACEBOOK



but back then, playing blues with Lightnin' was everything to me.

ROBERT R. COOK | NEW ULM

Back in 1966, a friend of mine found Lightnin' Hopkins playing at a backwoods bar outside Navasota. Later in the year, he was in Austin. He had a gig at a coffeehouse in an alley off 24th Street. He played the blues, quite often fretting with a whiskey bottle. I got to meet him that evening, and the next day I went out and bought an album with his music.

HAROLD LIECK | DEL VALLE
BLUEBONNET EC



As much as we in Bowie County, particularly De Kalb, would love to claim the blues and folk singer and writer Lead Belly as our own, he was actually born in Mooringsport, Louisiana. Lead Belly did reside in our area for a few years in the 1920s.

Lead Belly wrote many songs during his lifetime. Some are quite familiar, such as *Good Night, Irene; Cotton Fields Back Home; and Midnight Special*. One that was not so well-known was called *De Kalb Blues*, and that may well have depicted his life in our area.

CAROLYN MCCRARY | DE KALB
BOWIE-CASS EC

A Hispanic Hero

I am a fifth-generation Mexican American. I was very encouraged and inspired by the Marcelino Serna story and made to feel

proud of my Hispanic heritage [*A Hero in Any Language*, March 2019]. This story is one that will go into my scrapbook of many Hispanic heroes that have influenced me in my life.

ANTHONY BARRON | TERRELL
TRINITY VALLEY EC

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Texas Co-op Power

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HAPPENINGS

A Day of Czech Treats

Join folks in **EAST BERNARD** on **JUNE 8** as they embrace their Czech heritage with the annual **KOLACHE-KLOBASE FESTIVAL**. *Kolache* are traditional Czech pastries—you might remember our feature story, *The Kolach Trail*, from January 2014—and *klobase* is the Czech word for sausage.

Obviously, food is the central theme of the festival, which includes a kolache-eating contest, but so is music—especially polka—and dancing. Part of the festival is indoors, at Riverside Hall, one of Texas' historic dance halls, which were featured in February's cover story, *Hail the Halls*.

INFO ▶ (979) 335-7907, kkfest.com



WEB EXTRAS
▶ Find more happenings online.

BY THE NUMBERS



Texline, in the far northwest corner of the Texas Panhandle, is 899 miles from Brownsville, in the southern tip of the Rio Grande Valley.

The folks in Texline, members of Rita Blanca EC, are closer to residents in 21 other states—Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah and Wyoming—than they are to fellow Texans in Brownsville.

◀ LOOKING BACK AT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY THIS MONTH



SINCE 1944, the year *Texas Co-op Power* debuted, Americans have taken Polaroids, walked on the moon and come to rely on Velcro. These are just a few of the science and technology milestones we remember this month.



1940s

1945 Grand Rapids, Michigan, becomes the first city in the world to fluoridate its drinking water.

1948 The Polaroid Land camera, invented by Edwin Land and the first to produce finished prints instantly, goes on sale.

1948 WBAP in Fort Worth becomes the first TV station in Texas.

1950s

1954 The first pocket transistor radio, the Regency TR-1 from Texas Instruments, goes on sale.

1955 The hook-and-loop fastener, or Velcro, is patented by a Swiss engineer.

1957 The Soviet Union inaugurates the Space Age with its launch of Sputnik 1, the world's first artificial satellite.

1960s

1965 San Antonio native Ed White becomes the first American to walk in space—during the Gemini 4 mission.



1967 Texas Instruments creates the first handheld calculator.

1968 Chemist Spencer Silver of San Antonio invents the low-tack adhesive that changes the world when it's used to create Post-It notes in 1980.

WORTH REPEATING *“Texas is big, and Texans are proud of it. Proudful boasts can be made about the countless facets of our greatness without the slightest sacrifice of honesty.”*

—JAMES EARL RUDDER, Texan and leader during the Allied invasion of France on D-Day, 75 years ago

TECH KNOWLEDGE

Get Over It

IMAGINE HOPPING INTO a personal flying machine and zipping over traffic to your favorite coffee shop. Seems pretty far-fetched, right?

It might not be. A team from Texas A&M University is working on a vehicle that looks a little like a flying egg with rotor blades mounted near the base and is among the final 10 in a competition called GoFly that drew scientists from 95 countries. The winner of the competition will be announced this fall.

GoFly contest rules stipulate that the personal flying device must be safe, quiet, ultracompact and capable of vertical takeoff and landing. It also must be able to carry a single person for a distance of 20 miles without refueling or recharging.

Moble Benedict, a Bryan Texas Utilities customer, is an aerospace engineering assistant professor and A&M’s team captain. “We want a regular person to be able to fly this thing with minimum flight training,” he told *The New York Times*.

Benedict says he can see personal flying machines becoming a reality within the next 10 years. Great! Will they have cup holders?



FLASHBACK

CINE ON THE SEA

While drive-in theaters evoke nostalgia, they’re still around and drawing moviegoers in Texas, as you’ll learn in our cover story, *Drive In, Chill Out*.

The first American drive-in opened 86 years ago this month in Camden, New Jersey. A year later, on July 5, 1934, the Drive-In Short Reel Theater in Galveston became the third U.S. drive-in. The theater was built for \$1,500 right on the beach, with cars facing out to sea over the Gulf of Mexico.

Admission for a car and all its occupants was 25 cents. For 10 cents, an adult walk-in could sit in the bench seats at the front—5 cents for kids.

It operated for 20 days before a hurricane destroyed it and was never rebuilt.

LOOKING BACK AT COMMERCE NEXT MONTH ►

1970s

1972 The first digital electronic watch, a Pulsar LED prototype built by Texas engineer George Thiess, debuts. Thiess is a director at HILCO EC in Itasca.



1974 A universal product code, or bar code, is used for the first time—at a supermarket in Troy, Ohio.

1980s

1983 The Motorola DynaTAC 8000x becomes the first commercial handheld cellphone.

1984 Apple kicks off a media campaign for its Macintosh computer during Super Bowl XVIII with a commercial invoking George Orwell’s *1984*.

1984 Michael Dell starts his computer company, then called PC’s Limited, in his dorm room at the University of Texas.

1990s

1991 Multipurpose internet mail extension allows emails to be sent with attachments.

1997 The first usable-by-anyone portable defibrillator debuts. It instructs the operator on how to use the paddles, automatically applies the correct voltage and sells for \$4,000.



2000s

2007 The iPhone is released, revolutionizing cellphones and popularizing touchscreens.



2018 The University of Texas’ McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis is chosen by NASA as one of three sites nationally to host a facility for its Space Geodesy Project, which aims to help scientists counter the effects of earthquakes, volcanoes, sea level changes and landslides.



DRIVE IN, CHILL OUT

Drive-in theaters, long past their heyday, remain as beacons of nostalgia that offer cinema under a boundless sky

PERHAPS ANY MOVIE could have marked the watershed moment of Ryan Smith's young adulthood, but on that midsummer evening in 2002, it was M. Night Shyamalan's *Signs* that colored the mood at the Sky-Vue Drive-In Theatre on the dusty outskirts of Lamesa.

Smith, in his early 20s and fresh out of his first year of law school at SMU, was in West Texas to learn from his grandfather about the family businesses—bits about farming, real estate, oil and gas, and, most notably, the movie theater business. Smith's grandparents, R.A. "Skeet" and Sarah Noret, opened the Sky-Vue in 1948, and he grew up hearing stories about the iconic drive-in, like the time a then-unknown Buddy Holly played atop the projection room or when Albert Noret, Smith's great-grandfather, invented the now-legendary Chihuahua Sandwich, a quintessentially Tex-Mex concoction of homemade chili meat and pimento cheese, shredded cabbage and diced onions between two tostada shells with a side of jalapeño. Yet, despite his family's long history with the theater, Smith had never seen a movie at the drive-in before that evening 17 years ago.

He had just finished helping out with a rush on the concession stand when he grabbed some food for himself and went outside to catch a bit of the movie. Sitting in his car and crunching away on a Chihuahua Sandwich, he felt enchanted by the whole scenario—the collective energy of the moviegoers that surrounded him in lawn chairs and truck beds, the sound of their laughter at the film's tension breakers—and thought, "Man, this has to be preserved and shared."

He gazed through his open sunroof at the stars glowing over the Llano Estacado and waited for the aliens to invade Mel Gibson's on-screen world.

"It was a communal experience, and yet, I was sitting in the privacy of my own vehicle, enjoying dinner," he says today. "It was an experience that I had never had before but had heard about. And I now understood why the experience was so beloved."

Smith never made it back to law

school. He instead felt a calling to deliver the drive-in experience to others. Just over a year after that night at the Sky-Vue, aided by investments from his family, he opened his first theater, Stars & Stripes Drive-In Theatre in Lubbock.

"So that began the journey," he says, "to try to draw inspiration from what my granddad did and share it with [more] people."

Smith, who also owns land in Lyntegar Electric Cooperative's service territory, has since expanded the Stars & Stripes brand with a second location, in New Braunfels, south of Austin, and today his operation accounts for two of fewer than 20 drive-ins open for business in the Lone Star State. Some of these theaters stand as paint-chipped remnants of a bygone era, when the outdoor double feature dominated the cinema experience and some 400 drive-ins dotted the Texas landscape. Others, like Fort



Lala Watkins prepares for hungry moviegoers at Coyote Drive-In in Fort Worth.

Worth's Coyote Drive-In, inject a twist of modernity into that paradigmatic pastime of the mid-20th century. But all of Texas' surviving

drive-in theaters share at least one quality: the promise of a singular form of entertainment served with a healthy dose of nostalgia—bolstered by the dedication of theater owners to preserving the pastime.

THE FIRST DRIVE-IN theater in the United States opened in Camden, New Jersey, in 1933, and by the late 1950s, there were more than 4,000 drive-ins throughout the country. They were so widespread and popular that to some degree, says D. Vogel, administrative secretary of the United Drive-In Theatre Owners Association, "drive-in movie theaters built Hollywood."

But by 1980, the number of drive-ins had dropped to about 2,400, and a steady decline continued over the ensuing decade,

Whether it's a night out for the whole family or a romantic evening for two under the stars, there's still a drive-in theater in Texas to meet the occasion.



Coyote Drive-In's big screen set against the vast Texas sky at twilight.

operators, retirements of aging owners and increased competition from entertainment options like home video and multiplexes.

Hollywood's digital revolution—a shift from 35 mm film prints to digital projection that began in the early 2000s—put the nail in the coffin for some drive-ins. A digital projector with a bulb strong enough to project across a field can cost upward of \$70,000, a prohibitive expense for the mom and pop operations these theaters tend to be. But drive-ins that didn't make the switch would be left without new movies to show.

TODAY, THERE ARE FEWER than 400 drive-ins in the U.S. Though their numbers are small, these theaters continue to offer an engrossing experience wholly distinct from their indoor counterparts. A ticket to the drive-in typically provides double-feature entertainment for a lower price than one movie at an indoor theater. The food, also at a reasonable price point, tends to go beyond the standard fare of popcorn, soda and candy. And then there's the freedom granted by the outdoor environment.

"Your options are wide open," Vogel says. "You could just get up and look at the night sky. Or you could just take a quiet stroll around the field and watch families laughing and having a good time together. Or, you could get through the movie simply by taking a little nap until the next one came on."

It's the privilege of providing that experience that keeps many drive-in owners in the game. The defining trait of those who remain,

the result of a combination of factors, including land value increases that made it financially attractive for owners to sell their properties to devel-

WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see a map of drive-ins operating in Texas and additional photos.

Vogel says, is "a genuine love for this business. That's what it takes."

And that's a love that Jennifer Miller knows well. She's the owner of Brazos Drive-In Theatre in Granbury, one of the oldest drive-ins in Texas. First opened in 1952, Brazos has welcomed moviegoers every year since, closing only for the winter

offseason. Miller is responsible for more than half of that track record.

She's poured her heart and wallet into the theater since she bought it in 1985. She runs the single-screen operation with just a handful of employees and works the concession stand every night it's open. She shelled out the money for the expensive equipment when digital conversion became necessary and set up a minimuseum featuring the drive-in's old film projector and other memorabilia in the vintage snack bar. The 67-year-old has even donned a bunny suit to entertain kids around Easter.

For Miller, the theater isn't about making money. It's about preserving a piece of history and providing family-friendly fun for her patrons. "I just want to be able to make enough money to keep improving it, so everyone can enjoy it. I guess that's my passion, my focus," she says. "If all I do is save the drive-in, then it's been very, very rewarding for me."

The sense of nostalgia is intrinsic to the historic grounds of the Brazos theater. Newer drive-ins, like the Blue Starlite Mini Urban Drive-In in Austin, must work to evoke the feeling. For Blue Starlite owner Josh Frank, that requires more than showing a movie outdoors. "The movie is a part of the experience, but it's maybe 30%," he says.

Nestled in a partially paved clearing behind a Moose Lodge, the Blue Starlite consists of two mobile screens and a scattering of vintage and aging trailers—some of which can be rented for parties—and signage fonts that scream midcentury diner.

“I love nostalgia,” says Frank, who likens his theater more to an interactive show than a simple venue to catch a flick. “It’s about the classic culture, the nostalgia, the ’50s mentality. I would probably open a malt shop before I opened an indoor movie theater.”

The quest to revive a fading era is also what got Sam Kirkland, South Plains Electric Cooperative member, into the theater business. Kirkland grew up working for the Norets at the Sky-Vue in Lamesa, starting in 1957 and into the 1960s. In those years, he says, the theater was “the pride and joy of the town.”

Things had changed, though, by the late ’70s, when Kirkland was driving by the theater one day to find it closed and overgrown with weeds. He decided to clean it up and help the Norets reopen. Within a year, he bought the theater, which he and his wife kept alive until a fire destroyed the snack bar in 2015.

The demise of the Sky-Vue meant

Right: Cowboy Fred works the box office at Brazos Drive-In. Below: The expansive concession stand at New Braunfels’ Stars & Stripes Drive-In is a main attraction.

more than the loss of an entertainment attraction for the Lamesa community. It also represented the passing of a place where generations of memories were made, Kirkland says.

“It was a big deal,” he says. “We had a wonderful playground. I kept all of the original toys repaired. Parents would bring their kids to the Sky-Vue and say, ‘These are the same toys I played on when I was your age.’”



Though the Sky-Vue is no more, Kirkland and others are keeping the tradition alive. Hungry theatergoers can still find the famous Chihuahua Sandwich at Midland’s Big Sky Drive-In, where Kirkland is part owner, as well as at the Stars & Stripes in Lubbock. For those who favor libations with their movies, the Coyote Drive-In in Fort Worth serves up beer and wine, often paired with live music before the show, at its canteen—the sort of appurtenances audiences have come to expect from modern theaters.

Whether it’s a night out for the whole family or a romantic evening for two under the stars, there’s still a drive-in theater in Texas to meet the occasion. And it’s sure to outshine a stuffy night at the mall multiplex.

“The drive-in can give you something that the indoors can’t,” Kirkland says, “and that’s freedom.”

Travis P. Hill is a TEC communications specialist. He lives in Austin.





**MAKE
IT A**

LARGE

**SOMETIMES YOUR EYES—LIKE THE
OVERSIZED FOOD ON TEXAS MENUS—
ARE BIGGER THAN YOUR STOMACH**

BY JEFF SIEGEL | PHOTOS BY TOM HUSSEY

On a stage in front of the open kitchen at the Big Texan Steak Ranch and Brewery in Amarillo, an empty table looms above restaurant patrons enjoying warm meals on a rainy fall afternoon. At any moment, the table could become the center of attention—if only someone were to approach the kitchen and announce, “I want to eat the 72-ounce steak.” Once the steak is served, the digital clock on the wall behind the stage will start a 60-minute countdown. Spotlights

will click on. Webcams will broadcast the challenge around the world. And diners in the 500-seat restaurant will look up from their beef and beer to watch and shout encouragement.

At the Big Texan, visitors from around the world attempt to eat the restaurant’s legendary steak dinner—4½ pounds of beef plus a salad, dinner roll, baked potato, side of beans and shrimp cocktail. If they can devour everything in an hour, it’s free. During an eight-week period that included Labor Day weekend in 2018, 150 travelers from as far away as Ukraine and Australia took the challenge. Just 14 succeeded.

“Disneyland has Mickey Mouse,” says Big Texan’s Bobby Lee,



whose family has owned the Amarillo landmark for almost 60 years. “And we have the 72-ounce steak.”

Welcome to big food, Texas style. How about a pizza that’s 8 feet across? Or a 3-pound cinnamon roll? Or an eight-decker deli sandwich? Or a hamburger that includes a pound of bacon and a half-pound of cheese? If someone’s going to make such a colossus, you can bet someone will try to eat it.

“It was like, ‘Men of America, all the eyes are upon you,’” says Ed Montana of Amarillo, who finished the Big Texan steak dinner in 38 minutes during filming for the Travel Channel. “I didn’t want to let the side down. I had to finish it because macho men are meat

eaters, right?”

“It’s the wiry little guys you need to worry about when you’re watching someone try to finish the dinner,” Montana says. “The big guys, the 6-8 [tall] ones who look like offensive linemen, they don’t seem to do as well.”

High school and college students seem particularly fond of challenging the specialty of the house. But at Big Texan, more women finish the steak than men, even though more men attempt it.

At Mel’s Country Cafe in Tomball, north of Houston, the Mega

Kurt Oefinger of Hondo’s Dirt Road Cookers prepares an 8-foot pizza, above, then, with help from Medina Electric Cooperative employees, eases the hot pie onto a stand for slicing.



Mel Burger, which starts with 1½ pounds of beef, has been on the menu in one form or another since 1994. “I honestly think that when people see how big it is, they feel a need to try and conquer it,” manager Sherry Pierce says. “And it’s just not the people who try to eat it—it’s the people who get excited about seeing people try to eat it.”

Big food, the larger-than-life dishes like the Big Texan’s steak, is not uniquely Texan. It’s not even uniquely American. A decade ago, a group of Spanish chefs combined 32 tons of rice, sausage and seafood to create a monster version of paella, Spain’s national dish.

But many Americans embrace big food enthusiastically. We watch TV shows about it. We visit restaurants to see it—as well as to eat it. Our enthusiasm for big food is not necessarily about gluttony. Rather, it’s about what Texas Tech sociologist Carol Lindquist calls “our culture of abundance.”

“Big food in particular is part of that,” she says, “the idea that bigger is better, a hypermanifestation of our American-ness.”

Our culture of abundance is unique in world history. We are, with a few notable exceptions, the only culture that has never endured famine, which Europeans have suffered through as recently as the 20th century and still occurs in some parts of the world.

“We think that our abundance—that we always have had enough food to eat—is normal,” Lindquist says. “But it’s not. The early European settlers, when they arrived, couldn’t believe what they found, all the wildlife and the forests and the food. It was remarkable coming from the old country, where that hadn’t been seen in centuries. So that’s one reason how our enthusiasm for ‘bigger is better’ started.”

The Mega Mel Burger is seven times taller than the average



A Dirt Road pizza can feed up to 150 people. Will Schneider, left, a staking technician at Medina EC, digs in.

mouth can open. The Big Texan steak contains almost three times more calories than the federal government’s

recommended daily allowance. The 20-scoop ice cream sundae at Dallas’ Hypnotic Emporium contains significantly more than the recommended daily allowance of fat.

Wallets take a hit just as diets do. The Mega Mel costs \$24.95. The Mt. Hypnotic sundae costs \$38, which can be refunded if you finish it in less than 30 minutes. The Big Texan steak is \$72, and that’s only refunded if you meet the hour deadline.

But none of that seems to matter.

“I honestly think it’s about the spectacle,” says Kurt Oefinger of Hondo’s Dirt Road Cookers, whose specialty is an 8-foot pizza that starts with 25 pounds of flour and takes two hours to mix. Oefinger travels around the state, pizza oven in tow, creating his giant pies that include 3 pounds of pepperoni, 8 pounds of brisket, 6 pounds of sausage and 30 pounds of cheese. They cost \$800–\$1,500 and can feed as many as 150 people.

“As soon as they see that 8-foot pizza, everyone wants to dive in. But no one ever seems to be able to finish it, and there is always a lot left,” says Kassie Cox, Oefinger’s sister-in-law and an accountant for Medina Electric Cooperative in Hondo, west of San Antonio. “I’m not sure anyone knows exactly how big an 8-foot pizza is. It’s not like many people have seen one before.”

Learn more about writer **Jeff Siegel** at winecurmudgeon.com.

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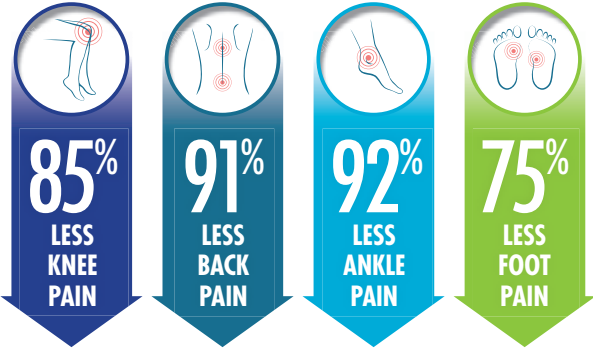
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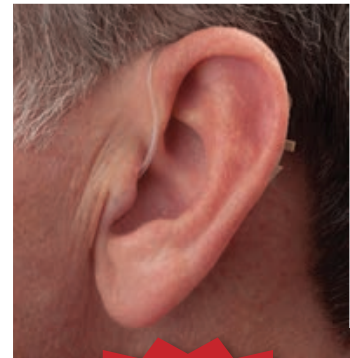
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ALL ABOUT METER

Where did all the **meter readers** go? A lot of them are **still at Bluebonnet** and happy to share their **many stories**

By Mary Ann Roser and Melissa Segrest

Do you remember the friendly person dressed in a tan shirt who walked up your drive to your house every month? He or she peered at your electric meter, decoding its dials, numbers and circling arrows. The person quickly typed numbers into a curious black device and then left, only to return the next month.

They were Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's meter readers, the human point of contact for thousands of co-op members every month. They worked from 1985 until 2007, when the cooperative fully converted to automated electric meters that use power lines to transmit power consumption information directly to Bluebonnet's system.

After the conversion, many meter readers stayed on with Bluebonnet. Several dozen still work at the co-op, holding various jobs, from line workers to crew supervisors, control room operators to line construction planners.

"That was the cool thing about it," said

Kyle Boer, Bluebonnet's superintendent of engineering services. "All of our meter readers were exceptionally loyal, and we didn't want to lay anybody off."

This year, Bluebonnet is celebrating its 80th anniversary. With auspicious timing, in April the cooperative topped the 100,000 meter mark, which establishes it as one of the largest electric co-ops in the nation. Today's electric meters are state of the art, and new versions are replacing older meters. In 2018, 4,000 of them were installed, and this year, crews plan to replace another 3,000 older meters.



At top: one of Bluebonnet's newest meters, a solid state microprocessor. Kyle Boer, above, supervised meter readers in Brenham. Today he is superintendent of engineering services and a 37-year Bluebonnet veteran.

Continued on page 20

RS



Carla Bates when she was a meter reader, at left, and today, above. She became a Bluebonnet employee in 1999 and recalled a few encounters with wasps, bees and spiders, including one black widow spider that gave her a nasty bite. Now she works to design the location of power lines, poles, equipment and meters for members receiving new service.

Sarah Beal photos

Topping 100,000 meters is a milestone for Bluebonnet

By Will Holford

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative celebrated a new milestone in April when it exceeded the 100,000-meter mark for the first time in its 80-year history.

“This is a significant achievement for Bluebonnet and our members,” said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet’s board chairman.

“Exceeding 100,000 meters puts Bluebonnet in elite company and the next tier in terms of size among electric co-ops across the country, something few co-ops have accomplished.”

The number of meters on a utility’s system is an important metric used to measure utilities.

As of 2018, fewer than 35 of the more than 800 electric cooperatives in the United States have more than 100,000 meters. Five of those co-ops, including Bluebonnet, are in Texas.

Bluebonnet’s meter growth has accelerated during the past two years, adding nearly 4,000 meters per year.

“While we have experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, we have and will always remain committed to

Exceeding 100,000 meters puts Bluebonnet in elite company and the next tier in terms of size among electric co-ops across the country.

— Ben Flencher
BOARD CHAIRMAN

providing outstanding, reliable service to our members and being an integral part of the communities we serve,” said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet’s general manager.

Bluebonnet’s growth has been the result of a boom in housing on the western side of its service area and significant industrial growth in its central and eastern regions. Large subdivisions and apartment complexes have been built in Travis, Bastrop, Hays and Caldwell counties. Commercial growth is spread across Bluebonnet’s entire service area, but large-scale oil and gas production, water wells and pipelines are concentrated more in the cooperative’s mostly rural eastern regions. This di-

versity of growth means the cooperative is not overly reliant on one type of member for revenue.

“We have managed the growth that we have experienced so that it not only has paid for itself, but has benefitted our current members,” Bentke said. “We have the financial capacity to build the infrastructure needed to serve our new members without raising rates.”

Three lucky new members who helped push the cooperative over the milestone meter count were welcomed with gift baskets. (See videos of them on facebook.com/BluebonnetElectric, in the videos section.)

As Bluebonnet celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, its legacy of member service, community support and safe, reliable electric power continues to grow.

“This is an exciting time in Bluebonnet’s history,” Bentke said. “Our future is bright due in large part to the members, directors and employees who, during the past 80 years, helped build Bluebonnet into one of the largest cooperatives and best utilities in the nation. Their dedication and legacy pushes us forward.”

Continued from page 18

BACK IN THE DAY

Before meter readers, Bluebonnet members read their own electric meters and wrote down how much electricity they used on cards that were sent to the cooperative.

“It was an honor system,” said James Jordan, who runs the meter distribution shop at the cooperative’s Giddings service center. He has worked at Bluebonnet for 23 years. If a member’s consumption numbers looked a little suspicious, an employee would stop by and check the meter.

In the early 1970s, Bluebonnet had far fewer meters across its 3,800-square-mile service area and almost all of those were residential, said Donnie Graham

of Lockhart, a former supervisor of meter readers who retired in 2005. At that time, the co-op staff was so small that after 5 p.m. and on weekends, Graham said he would just transfer calls about power outages to his home phone.

By the end of the meter-reading era, the cooperative had dozens of meter readers, each trying to read at least 100 meters a day. Although meter readers had radios to communicate with supervisors, they relied on paper maps in large bound volumes, looking for dots that pinpointed meter locations.

Reaching a meter wasn’t just a stroll up a driveway. Sometimes, a meter reader had to drive a mile, go through multiple locked gates and make a long trek on foot just to reach a single meter. They carried heavy rings of 50 or more keys to unlock gates on members’ property to



Marti Wright, superintendent of contractor operations, was a meter reader for about a year. She always made her rounds with a big bag of treats to appease angry dogs but occasionally had to fend off attacks with her heavy hand-held data recorder.

AN ELECTRIC METER TIMELINE



1872

Samuel Gardiner Jr. of New York City takes out first known patent for an electric meter. It uses a clock mechanism to indicate on a dial when the electric current is active.

1879

Thomas Edison develops a meter with two rods of copper submerged in a jar containing a zinc-sulfate electrolyte solution. As electricity flows through the jar, it dissolves zinc off the positive plate and deposits it onto the negative one, which can then be weighed.



1882

Hermann Aron of Germany constructs a meter with two pendulums wrapped in coils. One pendulum accelerates and the other slows in proportion to the current. A gear measures the difference in speed between the two clocks.



1886

Edward Weston develops a moving-coil galvanometer that becomes the standard for amp, volt and watt meters for more than 100 years.

1888

A laboratory accident leads Oliver Shallenberger at Westinghouse to develop the first alternating-current-measuring meter.



1883

Edison Electric Light Co. earns first payment. A dollar from Ansonia Brass Co. to pay part of its \$50.40 electric bill is endorsed with a commemorative note by Edison engineer Charles L. Clarke. In 2014, it sells at auction for \$15,000.



access meters.

Philip Grimm recalled how rain and mud could make roads impassable for their two-wheel drive trucks. Many meter readers carried long lengths of chain for the inevitable stuck-in-a-rut moment. Driving through oil fields and muddy roads with only AM radio and no air conditioning was a challenge. Grimm gets to be pickier about Bluebonnet's vehicles today: He is the cooperative's fleet supervisor.



Philip Grimm

"We were very rough on trucks," said Carla Bates, a former meter reader still working with Bluebonnet.

Bates first read meters for a contractor, then as a Bluebonnet employee starting in 1999. Today she helps plot the locations of poles, lines, equipment and meters for new homes of new cooperative

members. That job is important, but "when we were the meter readers, we were the most important people at Bluebonnet," she said with a grin.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Some Bluebonnet members loved to see the meter readers. Others made it clear they didn't want them on their property.

"Almost all of our members – 99.9 percent – were, and are, really great people," said Boer, who has worked more than three decades.

Doug Schlemmer was a Bluebonnet meter reader for years. Today he is a crew supervisor out of the Giddings service center. He remembers receiving holiday cookies from members and having long conversations with members who rarely had visitors. One older man always of-



Doug Schlemmer

fered a Dr Pepper. Another man refused to pay his monthly bill until someone came to his house, when he would gladly pay a late fee for the chance to chat.

It was no surprise that many Bluebonnet members, especially the seniors, were sad to learn meter readers would no longer be dropping by.

Sometimes meter readers noticed problems: a gate that had been cut, a house that had been broken into, a big water leak. They fixed the occasional flat tire for a member or helped an older couple move furniture.

But the job was not all cookies and compliments. Some ornery members

Continued on page 23

Timeline continued on next page



1890

Future MIT President Elihu Thomson invents the first watt-hour meter to measure and record electric power as it flows through a circuit. A counter displays kilowatt-hours on dials.

1890s

The International Electrical Congress creates standards for measurement of electricity.

1898

Association of Edison Illuminating Co. creates Committee on Meters. The trade association is a leader in the electric energy industry, with a Meter and Service Committee.



1889

Hungarian Otto Titus Bláthy develops a device containing a rotating metallic disk or cylinder, which is acted upon by two magnetic fields displaced in phase from each other. Bláthy's design became the first commonly used electric meter. Many of the kilowatt-hour meters used today operate on the same principle.

1899

General Electric introduces a new concept in electric meters: a prepayment device that allows collection in advance for electricity service.



1918

During World War I, more than 23 percent of American women work, many holding jobs traditionally awarded to men, including these four meter readers for Minneapolis General Electric Co. in Minnesota.

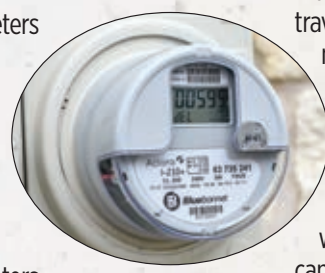
1920s

Electric meters get redesign to maintain accuracy in a range of temperatures. Seasonal fluctuations no longer throw off meter precision, a glitch that had required meter readjustments.



In with the new: Bluebonnet meters

There are two types of meters on Bluebonnet's system, older electromechanical meters and new solid state microprocessor meters.



THE MODERN METER

The newest residential meters, right, are made by Landis+Gyr or GE and feature a digital display and no visible moving parts.

STILL WORKING

Older meters still on the system have dials and a rotating dial. The flow of electricity through the meter turns the dial and registers consumption. They are no longer manufactured and are being phased out.

DATA ON POWER LINES

Both types of meters send data through a powerline communication system to a Bluebonnet substation, and from there data travels through microwave or fiber optic networks to Bluebonnet's control center.

TRANSITIONS

Thousands of the older meters on Bluebonnet's system, like the one at far left, have been or will be replaced with the solid state digital meters, which can provide information about the quality of power being served. With these 'smart' meters, members can see their own energy use and costs online.

SAFE DEVICES

Bluebonnet's meters do not communicate via a radio frequency and they have a small electromagnetic field. A microwave or hair dryer in use has a stronger field than a meter.

AN ELECTRIC METER TIMELINE

Continued from previous page



1930s

New design in meters allows electric utilities to move meters outdoors so they can be read without entering customer premises.

1934
Meter makers improve designs to prevent outdoor meters in rural areas from running too fast after power surges from lightning storms. At right, employees of the meter manufacturer Sangamo Electric Co. of Springfield, Ill., in 1932.



1934

Landis & Gyr develops the Trivector meter, which can be configured to measure various types of energy.

1939

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is created (originally as Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative). An honor system lets members read their own electric meters and submit cards showing their electric use for the month.



1920-1950

Uniformed meter readers are a regular part of the American landscape for decades as they visit homes and businesses to look at meters to determine the previous month's consumption for billing purposes. Meter readers from Potomac Electric in Washington, D.C., above.

1960s

Meter readers in Cincinnati — following a tradition that began in the 1800s — carry up to 10 rings of house keys on their belts to enter homes to read meters. By 1970, more than 60,000 customers entrust house keys to Cincinnati Gas & Electric (CG&E).





Continued from page 21

locked out the meter readers or refused to provide gate lock combinations. No one recalls being hurt by an annoyed member, despite the occasional threat and drawn gun.

A few members went to great lengths attempting to tamper with their meters to try and avoid paying bills – which was, and still is, illegal.

LIONS, TIGERS AND DOGS

Animals and insects posed the biggest problems for meter readers. Most agreed their scariest encounters were with dogs. Even with dog treats, distraction tactics, sprays, “bad dog” warnings, requests for help from dog owners and the occasional stick as a defensive weapon, there were a few dog bites but mostly near misses.

Marti Wright, now superintendent of contractor operations, kept a large bag of dog treats in her truck and always had some handy in her pocket. She said that if a dog was chasing her, one of her strategies was to toss a few treats as a distraction to allow her to jump back into the truck.

Bees, wasps and spiders caused problems, too. Bates once reached over a fence and was bitten by a black widow spider. Occasionally, meter readers were chased by surly geese and turkeys, too.

And yes, there really was a lion, a tiger and a panther, according to Schlemmer. They lived on property near Birch Creek. Schlemmer will never forget one big cat that tried to sneak up on him. He heard the unmistakable hiss of a cougar hot on his heels and barely escaped an attack, even though the big cat was chained.

On that day, the promise of high-tech automated meters never seemed so good. ■

James Jordan, a 23-year employee at Bluebonnet, today runs the ‘meter shop’ at the co-op’s Giddings service center. There, he distributes and track hundreds of meters that move through that department.

1973

U.S. Marine officer Jim Sovaiko finds old electric meters in a scrapyards while home on leave. After pizza and handshakes, he and two friends invest in the future Arcman Corp. in Throop, Penn. The company makes unique lamps from 1920s residential electric meters that still work.



2001

Hand-held Kill A Watt device is offered by P3 International of New York to allow consumers to measure amount of electricity used by home appliances. Plug an appliance into today’s model of the meter to see how much electricity an appliance uses. Some public libraries loan out Kill A Watts.



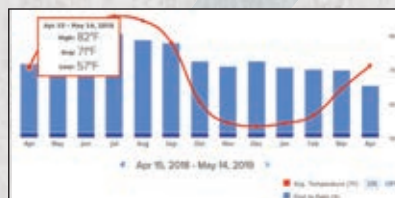
2017

Almost half of U.S. electricity customers have smart meters. The meters measure and record electricity use at least every hour and provide data to residents and utilities at least once a day. Some meters show real-time electric use.



1980s-2000s

Bluebonnet meter readers, including Marti Wright, above, shown in 2005, drive routes by relying on volumes of maps with hand-drawn dots designating the location of each electric meter.



2010

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative introduces its Energy Tracker, a digital portal where members can see information about their electric bill and energy use, tracked by week, month or year.



2018

Texas residents pay average of 11.69 cents per kilowatt-hour for electricity, compared with 32.46 cents in Hawaii (highest in U.S.) and 9.11 cents in Louisiana (lowest in U.S.).

Timeline researched and written by Denise Gamino and Gretchen Heber; designed by Joe Stafford and Gretchen Heber.

For photo credits, see this story on bluebonnet.coop, under the News tab.

2019 SCHOLARSHIPS OF EXCELLENCE

Scholarships awarded to Bluebonnet-area students

Each recipient gets \$2,500 for college, trade & tech studies

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative awarded \$150,000 in scholarships to graduating high school seniors from across the cooperative's service area. Each scholarship was \$2,500.

In April, the cooperative awarded 30 academic scholarships to students who are pursuing bachelor's degrees. Bluebonnet also awarded 30 scholarships to students pursuing a trade or technical certificate or associate degree in a vocational field.

Among those students' areas of interest were electrical power and control, dental hygiene, welding, pilot training and sonography. Texas A&M University, the University of Texas, Baylor University and Trinity University are among the colleges that academic scholarship recipients said they plan to attend. Among their areas of study are animal science, agricultural business, nursing and biomedicine.

The cooperative has given out more than \$600,000 in scholarships in the past five years. Look for applications for 2020 scholarships on bluebonnet.coop by Nov. 1.



2019 Trade and Technical scholarship recipients, from left, front row: Dakari Saldana, Sierra Ramsey, Arron Whisenhunt, Kylie Goertz, Quinn McGee, Simone Marroquin, Tomas Garza, Katy Nava, Blane Ashorn, Wendy Zuniga, Faith Stork and Karli Shupak; back row: Bishal Sapkota, Khaliah Butler, Alex Kwiatkowski, Brenda Flores Martinez, Zachary Muth, Annallely Nino Palacios, Colin Reue, Joe Kwiatkowski, Kaleb Roberson, Christopher Tores, Wesley Zumwalt, Shyler Mayfield, Isaac Colter and Paul Shaffer; not pictured: Alexia Brite, Jesus Otero and Kolton Swonke.



2019 Academic scholarship recipients, from left, front row: Bodie Furry, Rebecca Frazier, Qynton De Los Santos, Claire Seidel, Sierra Tyson, Sarah Ghormley, Jackson Wettstein, Yamilet Quezada, Madilyn Terrazas, Kallie Bartsch, Johnathan Ellard, Jenna Orsak, Savannah Knippa and Thomas Bates; back row: Caroline Heller, Cheyenne Byrer, Yoshira Guerrero, Emma Anton, Taylor Klatte, Megan Rogers, Katie Murski, Lilliana Gonzales, Katelyn Iselt, Aurora Berry, Amanda Branecky and Maria Perez Suarez; not pictured: Isaac Davila, Jacob Neidig, Brandon Watley and Aunnika Wittner. Sarah Beal photos

Bluebonnet
80th
ANNIVERSARY

WHAT ARE THE 80 THINGS YOU LOVE?

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year. We'll be having celebrations in August — which is our birthday month — so we are asking you to tell us the things that you love about our service area.

Nothing is too small or too big. Do you have a favorite eatery, hiking trail, historic site, park,

lake, store, civic event, grocery, coach, school, church or just a wonderful place to sit and watch the sunset? We want to know about it all. We'll pick a mix of 80 things.

Send your suggestions, tips or photos to Lisa Ogle at lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop and we'll publish 80 of them on Bluebonnet's pages in the August issue of Texas Co-op Power magazine.

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TURN 'EM OFF

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WISE UP

Upgrade to a programmable or smart thermostat to better control your temperature settings. A smart thermostat lets you remotely adjust the temperature and some can even learn and adapt to your habits.

TRACK YOUR USE

Log in to your online account at bluebonnet.coop or on our mobile app and see how much electricity you're using. Try the tips and see how much your power use drops.

KILL THE VAMPIRES

Gadgets silently eat electricity, even in standby mode. Plug them into an advanced power strip and turn them off when not in use.

LEAVE THE HOUSE

Can't stand 78°? Go someplace cool during the hottest part of the day: the library, grocery store, mall, gym, coffee shop.



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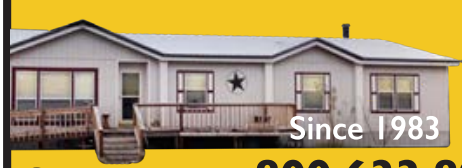
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The Nylon Campaign

Texas Co-op Power has defended electric cooperatives against gossip and graft since 1944

BY ELLEN STADER

A NEFARIOUS FIGURE STROLLED INTO Washington, D.C., toting a suspicious satchel filled to overflowing with contraband. In black top hat and tails, he swaggered toward the U.S. Capitol, a stogie clenched in his teeth. At least, that's how a cartoon, titled *A New March on Washington*, portrayed him in the May 1946 issue of *Texas Co-op Power*.

And when this cad arrived in the Capitol, what happened?

He doled out nylon stockings to lawmakers' wives.

The cad was Ham Moses, president of Arkansas Power and Light, an investor-owned utility. He offered the contraband to the wives of congressmen who would vote for an amendment—one prohibiting the Rural Electrification Administration from making loans to help generation and transmission cooperatives.

The scene was depicted as a cartoon, but it actually happened. Why was this payoff made of nylon? At the time, nylon stockings made a better bribe than a briefcase full of gold. In 1942, manufacturer DuPont had diverted its production to support the war effort. World War II robbed women of their cherished nylons, and the moment they began to sell again in 1946, stores were overwhelmed in nationwide riots. The payola was well-received, but the amendment failed.

"It's almost unbelievable what the power companies will stoop to in their effort to kill us off," responded Clyde Ellis, executive manager of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

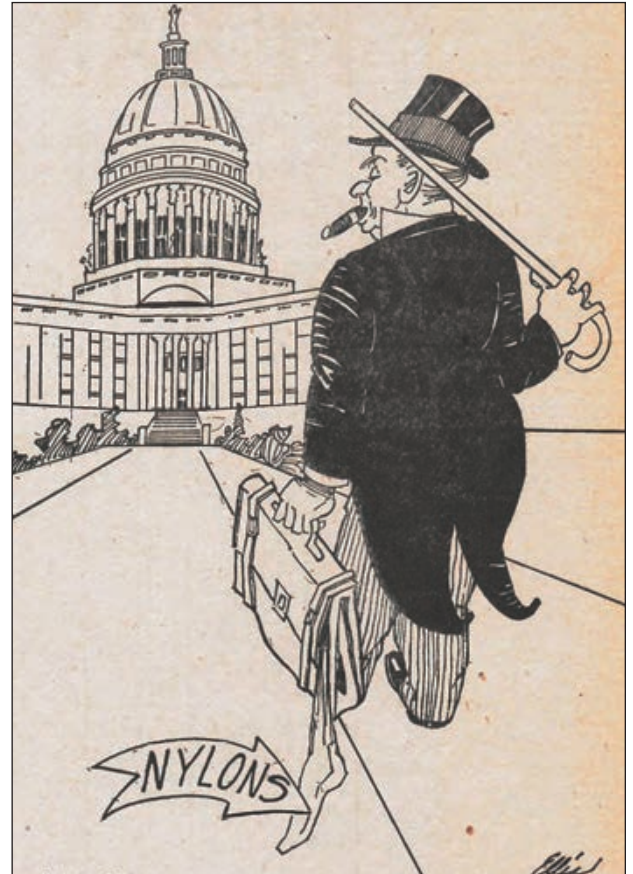
Long before this nylon campaign, the investor-owned utilities lobby already had thrown propaganda, bribery and legislative attacks at electric co-ops, with land grabs

and lawsuits to come. *Texas Co-op Power* articles from 1951 to 1991 document attacks from investor-owned utilities, lobbyists, legislators and even journalists from *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Associated Press*. After realizing its mistake in refusing to electrify rural America in the 1930s, private power spent decades taking swings at the co-ops that met the challenge instead. The resulting David-and-Goliath scenario has played out repeatedly, making for strange stories.

Take, for example, the brief and brutal feud between U.S. Sen. W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel of Texas and George W. Haggard, the first editor of *Texas Co-op Power* and then manager of the statewide electric cooperative association.

O'Daniel was something of a Goliath, himself. Years of radio popularity, a stint as governor of Texas and six years in the Senate had accustomed him to saying whatever he wanted—and in 1947 he called the co-op system "communistic."

Haggard fired back an indignant stone from his sling that flew to newspapers around the country via an Associated Press story: "This false and vicious charge ... is a studied insult to the 160,000 patriotic, substantial tax-paying farm and ranch families of this state who receive electricity through the REA cooperatives."



He attributed O'Daniel's smear to three motives: "profound and abysmal ignorance" of the way co-ops operated; the tendency of O'Daniel's congressional allies "to denounce everything that is for the general welfare of the American people as 'communistic'"; and O'Daniel's impending reelection bid.

Haggard then dealt the final blow, saying, "This looks like an effort to persuade the private utility interests, which hate the rural electrification program, to make a sizeable contribution to his campaign chest."

And though O'Daniel would later level the communist charge at other targets, including many of his own Senate colleagues, Texas electric co-ops never heard from him again.

Ellen Stader, a former *Texas Co-op Power* communications specialist, is a writer in Austin.

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Share your best original recipes!

Show us how you add your personal touch to every part of a meal – from savory beginnings to sweet endings – for fun and festive holiday gatherings.

Send us your best ORIGINAL holiday recipes—ones you've developed, not copied from a friend or found in a book or magazine. Winners will be featured in our November 2019 issue. Enter by June 10 at TexasCoopPower.com.

Go to TexasCoopPower.com for details and official rules.

TEXAS COOP POWER

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com. Each entry MUST include your name, address and phone number, plus the name of your Texas electric cooperative, or it will be disqualified. Specify which category you are entering, Sweet or Savory, on each recipe. Mail entries to: *Texas Co-op Power/Holiday Recipe Contest*, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You can also fax entries to (512) 763-3401. Up to three total entries are allowed per co-op membership. Each should be submitted on a separate piece of paper if mailed or faxed. Mailed entries all can be sent in one envelope. No email entries will be accepted. For official rules, visit TexasCoopPower.com. **Entry deadline: June 10, 2019.**



2018 GRAND PRIZEWINNER
Sherry's Shrimp Clemenceau
Sherry Zawadzki | Heart of Texas EC
Get the recipe at TexasCoopPower.com.

Standout Summer Sides

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A POTLUCK, backyard barbecue or any summer cookout without a big roasting pan of baked beans. This recipe, which appeared in this magazine in July 1955, shows that the old-world combination of sweet add-ins (molasses, brown sugar and ketchup), salty pork fat and beans is pretty timeless. Feel free to double this recipe (you'll need a large roasting pan) if you're feeding a team or want leftovers. Regardless, consider the contributor's suggestion for a quick lunch: Spread leftover beans on buttered bread, top with a slice of cheese, and broil until warm and bubbly.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Old-World Baked Beans

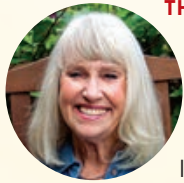
- 2½ cups navy beans
- 1 quart water
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- ¼ pound salt pork or bacon (cut into ½-inch slices)
- 2 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ⅓ cup molasses
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons light brown sugar
- ¼ cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons Dijon mustard (or 1 teaspoon ground dry mustard)
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce
- 1 tablespoon salt
- ½ tablespoon ground ginger

- 1.** Rinse beans and place them in a large roasting pan or Dutch oven. Cover with water and soak overnight.
- 2.** Drain beans, add 1 quart water and simmer over medium-low heat, covered, until skins are easily pierced (do not boil). Bury the onion, salt pork or bacon, and garlic in beans.
- 3.** Stir together the molasses, brown sugar, ketchup, mustard, hot sauce, salt and ginger, then stir the mixture into the beans. Continue

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Retro Recipes

Standout Summer Sides



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

SHARON BROWN | PENTEX ENERGY

"This is my signature dish, and I never serve it without multiple recipe requests," Brown says. She makes it a day early to allow flavors to blend. It keeps in the refrigerator a week. Feel free to adjust the lime juice and cilantro to taste. "For large groups, I triple the recipe and serve it in a big bowl," she says. "People flip out!"

Southwest Couscous Salad

- 1½ cups water
- 1 cup uncooked couscous
- 2 cups canned corn with red and green peppers, drained
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, drained
- ¼ cup chopped tomato (or 6-8 cherry tomatoes, halved)
- 2 tablespoons thinly sliced green onions
- ½ bunch cilantro, chopped
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ¾ cup fresh lime juice
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ⅓ teaspoon cayenne
- Salt, to taste
- Lettuce leaves, for serving (optional)
- Cilantro sprigs and lime slices, for garnish (optional)

1. Bring water to boil in a medium saucepan, remove from heat and stir in the couscous. Let the couscous stand 5 minutes, then fluff with fork and let cool.

2. In a large bowl, combine the corn, black beans, tomato, green onions and cilantro. Use a rubber spatula to fold in the couscous.

3. In a small jar with a lid, combine the olive oil, lime juice, garlic powder, cumin, cayenne and salt, and shake well to combine. Pour the dressing over the couscous and toss to coat.

4. Cover and refrigerate 1 hour or longer to allow flavors to blend. Line serving platter with lettuce leaves, spoon couscous mixture over leaves and garnish with cilantro and lime slices, if desired. ▶ Serves 12.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

to simmer the beans, covered, until they're very tender, about 2–2½ hours, or bake them in a 250-degree oven.

▶ Serves 12–14.

COOK'S TIP For added flavor, add bay leaves (fresh or dried), 1 teaspoon ground coriander or 2 teaspoons fresh chopped thyme or rosemary to the mix. Feel free to substitute Great Northern or cannellini beans for navy beans.

Crazy Stupid Corn

GAIL PATTERSON | PENTEX ENERGY

When you're looking for a warm, creamy comfort side, this mix of fresh vegetables, corn, hominy and bacon is a perfect partner for grilled sausages or burgers, or a fresh salad with grilled bread. Patterson suggests adjusting the seasonings to suit your preferences. For added heat, consider adding fresh chopped jalapeño or serrano peppers, or a pinch of cayenne.

- 6 slices thick-cut bacon, cut crosswise into thin strips
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 yellow bell pepper, chopped
- 1 orange bell pepper, chopped
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 12 ounces cream cheese
- 2 cans (15 ounces each) yellow corn, drained
- 2 cans (14 ounces each) creamed corn
- 2 cans (15 ounces each) white hominy, drained
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- Heavy cream, as needed

1. Cook the bacon in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat until crisp.

2. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate and set aside, reserving bacon fat in the pan.

3. Add the butter to bacon drippings and stir until melted. Add the peppers, onion and garlic and stir until softened. Add the cream cheese, reduce heat and cook until almost melted and smooth. Add the corn, creamed corn and hominy and stir to combine. Season with salt, pepper and



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED,
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\$2,500 Holiday Recipe Contest

November's issue will feature winners of the 15th annual **Holiday Recipe Contest**. Share the dishes that make your holiday gatherings so special. Send us your best ORIGINAL recipes in the Savory Dish or Sweet Dish category, and your recipe could appear in *Texas Co-op Power* and win you a cash prize. The deadline is **June 10**. See complete rules at TexasCoopPower.com.

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.



granulated garlic. Cook, stirring frequently, until cream cheese is fully melted and mixture is smooth. Stir in reserved bacon. Thin the mixture with cream if it seems too thick. Adjust seasonings as desired and serve warm.

► Serves 8.

Pecan Potato Salad

JANE MORGAN | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

Cooking potatoes in broth and combining them with bacon, sautéed onions, sour cream and pecans creates a rich, German-style salad with a Texas flair. This salad (served warm or at room temperature) would be right at home with grilled brats and cold beer.

- 2 pounds small red potatoes (about 2 inches in diameter)
 - 3 cups beef or chicken broth
 - 5 slices bacon, cut crosswise into ¼-inch strips (about ¼ pound)
 - 2 tablespoons butter, divided use
 - 1 medium onion, chopped
 - ½ teaspoon sugar
 - 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves, plus extra for garnish
 - ½ cup chopped pecans
 - ½ cup sour cream
- Salt and pepper, as desired

1. In a large saucepan, combine potatoes with broth and simmer until just tender, about 20 minutes, then drain and cool briefly.
2. While the potatoes are cooking, cook the bacon in a medium-sized heavy skillet over medium heat until crisp. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the bacon to a paper towel-lined plate, reserving bacon drippings in the pan.
3. Add a tablespoon of butter to the bacon fat, then add the onion and cook, stirring, until tender. Transfer onion to a mixing bowl.
4. When the potatoes are cool enough to handle, thinly slice them and combine with onions. Add the sugar, parsley, pecans, sour cream and remaining butter to the warm potatoes and toss gently to combine. Season with salt and pepper, top with reserved bacon, and garnish with parsley or dill. ► Serves 6–8.

COOK'S TIP To perk up the flavor of this salad a bit, add a tablespoon or two of white vinegar to

the potato and onion mixture before tossing it with the dressing. For a nuttier flavor, lightly toast the pecans (and allow them to cool) before adding them to the salad.

Cucumbers and Sour Cream

JANE MORGAN | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

When made with care, this cool, creamy and crunchy combination elevates just about anything (especially lamb burgers). “My mom would make this side dish in the summer to serve with grilled meat,” Morgan says. “It was always a delicious contrast that tasted like summer.” Note that the cucumbers need to drain for an hour, so plan accordingly.

- 4 small, firm cucumbers
 - 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- Salt (about ½ teaspoon for each cucumber)
- ¾ cup sour cream
 - 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
 - 1 teaspoon sugar
 - 3 tablespoons fresh minced dill (or 1 tablespoon dried)

1. Peel the cucumbers, halve lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and cut them into thin slices.

2. Combine the cucumber slices, onion and salt in a large bowl and toss to combine; transfer mixture to a colander and drain 1 hour.

3. In a separate bowl, combine the sour cream, vinegar, sugar and dill.

4. Rinse the cucumber mixture to remove salt, then drain and pat dry with paper towels to remove excess moisture. Fold the cucumbers and onions into the sour cream mixture, taste and adjust seasonings as desired, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes before serving.

► Serves 3–4.

COOK'S TIP Feel free to substitute an equal amount of fresh mint or tarragon for the dill.

WEB EXTRAS

► Read these recipes on our website to see the original Old-World Baked Beans recipe from July 1955.

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

▼ **JENNY BOYD**, Cherokee County EC: "Donkey feedin' time."



▲ **DUB AND JODY MCLAUCHLIN**, Farmers EC: "This filly is enjoying some deer corn, quick to not let any of the pasture calves share."



▲ **CHARLES ASCHENBECK**, Jackson EC: A squirrel hangs from a bird feeder before indulging in a meal of tasty sunflower seeds.



▲ **LORI RUTHERFORD**, Deep East Texas EC: "I took this photo after finding this nest full of babies in our grapefruit tree."



▲ **LINDA WOODS**, Bluebonnet EC: Arwen feeds from Aaronn. Both are gray gypsy vanners.

UPCOMING CONTESTS

| | | |
|----------|--------------|---------------|
| OCTOBER | GIVING BACK | DUE JUNE 10 |
| NOVEMBER | UP THE CREEK | DUE JULY 10 |
| DECEMBER | DESERTS | DUE AUGUST 10 |

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

ONLINE: Submit highest-resolution digital images at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.
MAIL: Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We do not accept entries via email. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.



Pick of the Month Garden Tour

Celina June 8
(214) 957-3655, celinagardenclub.org

The tour offers a showcase of at least eight private gardens, farms and wineries in Celina and Weston in North Texas. Food will be available at most venues, including freshly prepared appetizers, shaved ice, fruit, ice cream and jarred items to take home.

June 7

Jacksonville Tomato Fest Classic 4-Man Scramble, (903) 541-4700, jacksonvilletexas.com/tomato-fest

Abilene [7-8] Stars Over Abilene 25th Annual Quilt Show, (325) 665-2724

Bonham [7-8] Highway 82 Yard Sales, (903) 583-9830, visitbonham.com

Kerrville [7-8] Shakespeare in the Park, (830) 896-9393, playhouse2000.com

San Antonio [7-9] Texas Folklife Festival, (210) 458-2224, texasfolklife festival.org

8

Bandera Bandera Rodeo Club Youth Summer Series Rodeo, (830) 431-1030, banderarodeoclub.com

La Grange Art Stroll, (979) 968-3017, visitlagrangetx.com

14

Boerne [14-16] Berges Fest, (830) 249-7277, bergesfest.com

15

Brenham Summer Sip Wine Walk, (979) 337-7580, downtownbrenham.com

Fredericksburg Meusebach Creek Historic School Open House, (830) 997-7896, historicsschools.org

June 20-22
Stonewall
Annual Peach JAMBoree



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Palestine Dogwood Jamboree:
Star Spangled Country, (903) 729-7080,
dogwoodjamboree.com

20

Stonewall [20-22] Annual Peach JAM-boree, (830) 644-2735, stonewalltexas.com

21

Bremond [21-22] Polish Festival Days, (254) 883-7279, bremondtxas.org

22

Hillsboro Elm Street Rod Run Classic Car Show, (972) 291-2958,
roadsideamericatx.com

25

Seguin Taste of Seguin, (830) 303-6612,
silvercenterseguin.com

29

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

Wylie Bluegrass on Ballard, (972) 516-6016,
wylitexas.gov

Belton [29-July 7] 4th of July Celebration, (254) 939-3551, rodeobelton.com



July 4-6
Fort Davis
Coolest Fourth of July

July

3

Spring Branch Hill Country Fun Fest, (210) 488-8063, springbranchtennis.com

Waxahachie [3-4] Crape Myrtle Festival and Parade, (469) 309-4045,
waxahachiecvb.com

4

Aubrey Freedom Fest, (940) 390-9184,
peaceoftherock.org

Boerne Fourth of July Fireworks, (830) 249-3644, visitboerne.org

Kerrville Robert Earl Keen's Fourth on the River, (830) 257-8233, kerrvilles4th.org

Lakehills American Legion Post 410 Fourth of July Parade, (830) 751-3711, alpost410.com

Stephenville Fourth of July Celebration, (254) 918-1295, recipro.stephenvilletx.gov

Fort Davis [4-6] Coolest Fourth of July, (432) 426-3015, fortDavis.com

6

Tye Independence Day Celebration, (325) 695-8253, cityoftyeedc.org

Submit Your Event!

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

AROUND TEXAS EVENT CALENDAR

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Lowly Activities in Arlington

Top O' Hill Terrace was a tearoom atop an underground gambling hideout

GANGSTERS, GAMBLING, PROSTITUTION and illicit liquor. These things spark images of Chicago or New York in the 1920s. However, right here in the Lone Star State, deeds involving such salacious elements were part of the day-to-day operations of an unassuming tearoom on an unassuming hill halfway between Dallas and Fort Worth. While the location looks different today, visitors can still step back in time to when Top O' Hill Terrace was "Vegas before Vegas."

In 1926, Arlington residents Fred and Mary Browning decided that Fred's plumbing career lacked the excitement they desperately wanted. Amid the growing success of horse racing at Arlington Downs, the Brownings decided to get in on the action.

When they purchased a tearoom along the old Bankhead Highway, authorities had no idea the couple had plans beyond the teacup. The Brownings immediately began renovations, moving the tearoom to construct a network of underground rooms and tunnels. The additions included a casino, restaurant, an office and five doors at which every patron had to use passwords to gain access. There were two-way mirrors, secret staircases and fake doors, all designed to make Top O' Hill raidproof. With the front gate a quarter-mile down the drive, patrons had ample time to hide the evidence and run into the garden to sip tea if police showed up. It was a cover so believable that many folks visited the tea garden without any knowledge of the illegal activities just beneath their feet.

The Brownings' reputation grew as quickly as their bank account. The casino took in \$50,000-\$100,000 every night and attracted countless celebrities, including



"Officer" Chet Garner and associates revisit Top O' Hill Terrace's shady past.

Bonnie and Clyde and John Wayne. The couple invested their cash

into a swimming pool and air conditioning, two luxuries that were extremely rare at the time. Fred's newfound connections led him into horse racing, most notably with his horse Royal Ford, whose foal Heelfly beat the legendary thoroughbred Seabiscuit in 1940. He also stepped into professional boxing, employing his facilities to manage and train boxers like Lou Brouillard and "Slapsie Maxie" Rosenbloom. Yet the Brownings' very success would soon become a curse.

Top O' Hill gained an influential enemy in J. Frank Norris, pastor of Fort Worth's First Baptist Church and an ardent supporter of Prohibition. Norris vowed to shut down the establishment and return it to the realm of respectability. His prophecy became a reality in 1947 when Texas Rangers led a successful raid on Top O' Hill. In 1956, Bible Baptist Seminary bought the property and transformed it into a Baptist college.

On my first guided tour, I expected to walk dark hallways and feel the breath of

notorious Texas gangster Benny Binion on my neck. Instead I found the bright and bustling Arlington Baptist University with few remnants of the former days of Top O' Hill. Soon after buying the property, the new owners tore down the tearoom and replaced the casino with a cafeteria. The stable and pool have been incorporated into daily student life, and unless you know the stories, you could miss the stable and pool completely. What does remain is the tea garden and one 50-foot escape tunnel, where creative visitors can imagine men in pinstriped suits and women in flapper dresses stuffing gambling chips into their pockets to the muted sounds of a jazz band.

While visitors can no longer throw \$20 down on the roulette table, the cost of a tour is well worth the money. And while almost every Texas town has its stories of forbidden back alleys or underground operations, no Prohibition-era story is as Texas-sized as that of Top O' Hill Terrace.

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 of his visit to Top O' Hill Terrace.



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