

Explore the Hill Country Win a Fredericksburg Getaway

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

SPECIAL  
TRAVEL  
ISSUE

## HILL COUNTRY Ramble

Finding the sweet spot  
in Central Texas



BLUEBONNET NEWS  
SEE PAGE 18



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Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park near Bend.

**SPECIAL TRAVEL ISSUE**

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**More Than Electricity** Electric cooperatives prove "they are the fabric of the community."



FALLS: JULIA ROBINSON. DONATION: SPEEDKINGZ | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



**ON THE COVER** *Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store in Medina is famous for its apple pies, strudels and ice cream.* Photo by Julia Robinson

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## Nurturing Wildflowers

I empathize with the reader's letter [*Habitat Destruction*, July 2018]. I, too, have noticed that untimely mowing has caused many wildflowers to disappear, which means habitat loss for those feeding on them.

My neighborhood subdivision has lovely homes with beautifully maintained yards and cultivated plants. I maintain my front yard to conform. I have a corner lot that has a county road on one side. I reserve a strip of property along the right-of-way for wildflowers, and I delay mowing there.

SARAH MILNER | FLINT  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

## He Gets His Kicks

You so are right that Route 66 [*Rendezvous on Route 66*, July 2018] is celebrated in so many ways. I have been a ham radio operator since 1960, and each September, the Citrus Belt Amateur Radio Club in San Bernardino, California, sponsors Route 66 on the Air. I get to talk to my friends on the radio who are on the air up and down the old highway from Los Angeles to Amarillo to Chicago. I even have a T-shirt with the



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## Head of the Pack

I enjoyed reading about Hunter Beaton's Eagle Scout project [*Carrying Through, Currents*, July 2018]. What a fine young man to take on this very worthwhile project that will be a gift to so many children in need for years to come. The article did not mention where Hunter will be attending college, but since my allegiance is to Baylor University, I was hoping that was his plan. He would be a great fit.

JUDY SCHMELTEKOPF | CHINA SPRING | HEART OF TEXAS EC



Route 66 logo on it that I wear during the event.

LEE E. KINARD | BURNET  
PEDERNALES EC

## Give Us Credit

The By the Numbers item in *Currents* in July could be misleading. It's possible that because there are so many people in Texas who are not in debt, that is what causes the state to rank 46th among all states in

average credit score. The longer a person goes without paying anything on time, the lower his or her score goes. So, it is possible that our low average just might mean that we have more people who are not in debt.

RUTH LAMPE | QUITMAN  
WOOD COUNTY EC

## New Favorite Author

*East Texas Mojo* [May 2018], about Joe R. Lansdale, introduced me to a writer with whom I was unfamiliar. Right away, I ordered three of his books and before I was half through the second one, I ordered four more.

FRAN LOMAS | SAN ANGELO

## New London Explosion

In 1939, we were living in Atlanta, Texas, and one Saturday morning, I heard a loud explosion [*The New London*

*School Explosion*, January 2017].

I rode my bike uptown and found the Safeway store was only a pile of rubble. There had been a gas leak under the store.

CARROLL JOHNSON  
BOWIE-CASS EC

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

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## HAPPENINGS

# Hill Country Goes Cajun

**THE MEDINA LAKE CAJUN FESTIVAL** started in 1981 as the Great Gumbo Cookoff to help keep the Medina Lake Betterment Association, a nonprofit civic organization, afloat. The event's name was changed in 1990 but still features a gumbo cook-off in addition to Cajun food and music.

It's always the fourth Saturday of September—rain or shine—in **LAKEHILLS**, which is in Bandera Electric Cooperative's service territory, northwest of San Antonio. Wayne & Same Ol' Two Step is among the featured performers this year.

**INFO** ▶ (830) 751-2727, [cajunfestival-medinalake.com](http://cajunfestival-medinalake.com)

**WEB EXTRAS**  
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## ALMANAC

### 100 Years Ago

**ELIZABETH HOWARD WEST** was named state librarian in 1918—the first woman to head a Texas state agency. She started the county library system and initiated services to minorities and the blind.

## SPORTS SECTION

### Wonder Arm Gives Out



**Pitching star** Nolan Ryan's career ended 25 years ago when he suffered a torn ulnar collateral ligament in a game at the Kingdome in Seattle. Bob Sherwin of the *Seattle Times* described that September 22, 1993, moment so eloquently: "A right-elbow ligament, 46 years, seven months and 24 days old, punished by more than 80,000 big-league pitches, had enough."

With that, just 11 days short of finishing his record 27th and final major-league season, Ryan, a Texas Ranger, left the game and took with him dozens of pitching records, including 5,714 strikeouts and seven no-hitters.

Ryan, who grew up in Alvin, entered the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1999 and is an executive adviser for the Houston Astros, one of his former teams.

CAJUN FESTIVAL: TIM CARROLL; RYAN: JONATHAN DANIEL | GETTY IMAGES

# Fit To Print

**JOHN GRAHAM'S** newspaper career began with a delivery route of 100 subscribers. Decades later, the third-generation newspaperman is owner and publisher of the *Lovington Leader*, a small paper in eastern New Mexico, and the *Denver City Press*, across the border in West Texas. For his work upgrading presses and keeping community-oriented papers going, Graham, president of the Lea County Electric Cooperative board of trustees, was inducted into the New Mexico Press Association Hall of Fame in 2017.



**ON SEPTEMBER 4**, National Newspaper Carrier Day, consider the role of small-town presses in Texas. Graham believes people should actively participate in their communities and that newspapers reflect the communities they serve. He applies this philosophy to his management of the *Leader* and to his life.



## ... AND READ A BOOK



To commemorate **National Read a Book Day**, September 6, the writers and editors at *Texas Co-op Power* tell about the latest books they read:

**Chris Burrows:** *The Night of the Gun* by David Carr. Journalist Carr turns his reporting chops on himself to uncover his own dark past in this memoir published not long before his sudden death in *The New York Times* newsroom.

**Travis Hill:** *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* by George Saunders. Infused with equal parts humor and horror, these seven stories present a dystopian world in which theme parks are oases for the rich while the rest of humanity battles for scarce resources in a toxic wasteland.

**Charles Lohrmann:** *The World We Used To Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* by Vine Deloria Jr. A renowned Native American legal and religious scholar reviews the history of traditional spirituality.

**Jessica Ridge:** *Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett. A layered, decadeslong meditation on the ways that love, loyalty and compassion converge as two families fracture and meld—chaotically, painfully and sometimes beautifully.

**Tom Widlowski:** *Bluebird, Bluebird* by Attica Locke. The Texas author's dark, heart-breaking murder mystery lays bare racial tensions in a fictional East Texas town.

## TRAVEL: BY THE NUMBERS

**American drivers in cars, trucks, minivans and SUVs logged 3,213,516,000,000 miles on the nation's roads in a 12-month period ending March 1, 2018, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Consider giving your car a break September 22, World Carfree Day.**



# TRILLION



# Hill Country — Ramble

Culture and fun in this scenic swath of Central Texas



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## I intended to try only the apple turnover.

Five minutes later, I stand at the counter, balancing a jar of apple butter, a jar of jelly, a strudel, a slice of pie and the turnover. That's when another visitor mentions the apple ice cream. "Why hasn't Blue Bell caught on to that flavor?" he asks the cashier.

I turn back to find the ice cream.

Outside Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store in Medina, I spread my bounty on a bright red picnic table and sample the pastries. I savor the pie's flawless golden crust. The ice cream is light, not too sweet, and goes down way too easy.

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY JULIA ROBINSON



**Opposite:** A travertine formation at Gorman Falls in Colorado Bend State Park. **Above:** Living history re-enactors at Fort Martin Scott in Fredericksburg. **Right:** Apple turnover at Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store in Medina.



Such are the pleasures you'll find in the Texas Hill Country, which is adorned with gems like this shop. Visually, the region offers a rolling landscape of limestone-and-granite hills, clear rivers, cedar and cypress trees, and regional haunts that delight weekend visitors and seasoned travelers.

More than 150 years ago, German immigrants were lured to Central Texas by tales of fertile soil and freedom from oppression. Instead, they found rocky fields that had to be cleared by hand and the threat of contentious and fast-moving Comanche. The early settlers persevered and built towns of precise and tidy stone structures, each a day's wagon ride—about 20 miles—from its neighbor. Today, we know some of those settlements as Fredericksburg, Kerrville, New Braunfels, Medina, Mason, Llano and Camp Verde.



Starting in the southwest corner of the Hill Country, FM 337 between Camp Wood and Medina is one of the most scenic drives in Texas. Along a curvaceous stretch popular with motorcyclists, signs warn of “Falling Rocks” going east and “Fallen Rocks” going west, a curious temporal twist. The rise of the Edwards Plateau reveals itself along this 60-mile route, displaying limestone cliffs and following the meandering Medina River.

Along the way, I read about community history. Vanderpool grew out of a Republic of Texas land grant in 1849. Originally called Bugscuffle, the town was abandoned following Comanche raids but re-established in the 1880s. Camp Verde was established to service the region’s military outposts.

East of Medina, freethinkers, including doctors, scholars, philosophers and aristocrats who fled the German Revolution of 1848, sought to establish intellectual, secular and democratic societies advocating scientific reason and religious freedom. They built the towns of Boerne, Comfort, Luckenbach and Sisterdale. Residents met to discuss politics, philosophy and literature; in such meetings, they spoke in the intellectual’s language of Latin, so the towns were dubbed the “Latin Colonies” of Texas.

Boerne was founded in 1849 and originally named Tuscu-



#### WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see a map of the Hill Country road trip.

Some of the largest calcite formations in the nation can be found here.



lum, after the home of Roman writer and orator Cicero. In 1852, it was renamed for Jewish-German journalist and satirist Karl Ludwig Börne. The town was known as a health resort in the late 1800s because of its proximity to Cibolo Creek and the Guadalupe River.

**I** drive north along FM 474 to find the Cave Without a Name. Mike Burrell, tour guide and cave manager, leads me down 80 feet of staircases through layers of geologic and human history. At the first landing, a pile of bones is evidence that eons of unlucky animals fell to their deaths through the small entrance above. Down another level, we find a ledge where a whiskey still dripped rebelliously during Prohibition.

In 1935, a group of youngsters shimmied down the sinkhole entrance with a kerosene lantern and crawled through a series of tight turns before finding cathedral-like rooms.

Burrell lights up the rooms as we walk through, one side formed by the subterranean streams of the Guadalupe River, the other by the slow drip of mineral-rich water onto the cave floor. Some of the largest calcite formations in the nation can be found here, and 3½ miles of the cave have been mapped, making it the

seventh-longest in Texas.

We pass a small platform where the owners host concerts. Burrell replays a few previous performances on his

**Opposite page, top: Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store. Opposite page, bottom: FM 337 between Camp Wood and Medina.**



**Above: Cave Without a Name, near Boerne. Left: Whiskey pecan and Key lime pie slices at Tootie Pie Co. in Boerne.**

phone and offers me a chance to sing. I manage a few lines of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and marvel at the resonance.

Back at ground level, I rush to Tootie's. Ruby

Lorraine "Tootie" Feagan moved her 20-year-old pie company from Medina to Boerne in 2005. The new building, situated in a business park, serves as a bustling outpost for Tootie Pie Co.

To reach the unlikely address, I zoom past a wrecker service and RV repair shop to find the modest storefront, where cubicle walls support a chalkboard listing a dozen offerings and seasonal specials. It's not a homey setting, but the pies are delicious. I sample the heavenly chocolate, lemon icebox and pecan, rolling my eyes in delight.

Another day's wagon ride up Interstate 10 takes me to Comfort, where there are more than 100 historic buildings constructed before 1910. Seven of them, including the old Inguenhuett General Store, were designed by British architect Alfred Giles.

High's Cafe & Store drew in coffee lovers when it opened on

# Fort Martin Scott was the first U.S. Army post on the Texas frontier.



High Street in 2005 and has become a reliable staple for chef-inspired café fare. Proprietors Denise Rabalais and Brent Ault attract a dedicated following, including a steady stream of locals who catch up and share a bite on the covered patio.

Comfort was another of the Latin Colonies, proud of independent thought and human rights for all. In 1862, eight years after the town's founding, the Confederate Army called upon the locals to join their side in the Civil War. Thirty-six men and boys who refused were killed.

I walk a half-mile down the street from the café to see the Treue der Union, or “Loyal to the Union,” Monument. Etched into the surface of the 20-foot-tall limestone obelisk are the 36 names. The 1866 dedication ceremony was front-page news even in *Harper's Weekly*.

**E**ast of Comfort, RM 473 turns onto Old Number 9 Highway and twists past fields of livestock penned by hand-stacked rock walls. Old Tunnel State Park was originally a railroad tunnel built in 1917 to link Fredericksburg to the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad. After falling into disuse in the 1940s, the area was turned into a state park; summering Mexican free-tailed bats took roost in the old tunnel.

I arrive around 7 p.m. and make my way to the viewing area just in time for the evening show. Three million bats stream out of the cave entrance in a counterclockwise wave of mammalian fluttering. “The bats circle around a few times to get elevation to get above the trees, and it looks like a tornado of bats,” says park superintendent Nyta Brown. “I never get tired of it.” Each bat eats its weight in insects each night.

Fredericksburg was first settled in 1846, the second colony founded under the direction of the Adelsverein, the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas. Unlike the freethinkers, the settlers of Fredericksburg were religious—evangelical Protestants, Lutherans, Methodists and Catholics. Each was given a parcel of farmland and a lot in town where many built “Sunday houses” near their house of worship.

Fort Martin Scott on the southeast edge of Fredericksburg was the first U.S. Army post on the Texas frontier, built in 1848. The town had negotiated a treaty with the Comanche by 1847, and soldiers at the fort were the first line of defense.

**Above: Doug Baum poses with two of his camels during Fort Martin Scott Days. Below: Ray Hernandez, known as Chief Broken Eagle, speaks with students at Fort Martin Scott.**



I wander among well-preserved remnants of the fort on a “living history” weekend. The tents of re-enactors and educators line the circle track, and classes of fourth- and seventh-grade Texas history students visit the encampments of Native Americans, soldiers and other period actors.

In one corner, Ray Hernandez, aka Chief Broken Eagle of the Tonkawa tribe, has set up a teepee and shows family heirlooms to wide-eyed children. Rita Rice, the living history coordinator, appears in the officer’s quarters in 1890s period dress. She walks students and adults through the two-room structure, pointing out features of frontier living. “I love seeing the kids in awe when I describe what people lived like back then,” she says.

On the lawn just outside the fort, Doug Baum is tending his camels, Richard and Jadid. Curious groups gather to take

way. Just east of the dam and Inks Bridge, the park has become a civic art project of rock stacking.

Resident Belinda Morgan started the Llano Earth Art Fest to bring attention to Llano’s natural resources. The 2015 fest created the first World Rock Stacking Championship. The spring-time festival leaves stacks of rocks, called cairns, along the riverfront, inspiring others to contribute their own stack.

An ornate sandcastle grabs my attention as I pull into the parking lot. Then an 8-foot-tall dirt armadillo with a saddle on its back emerges from the bridge abutment. I pick my way down the granite boulders toward the water as rock cairns take over the landscape. Arches of rock defy gravity and rival the steel bridge over the river. On hot days, people create their stacks along the shoreline while standing in the cool water. This weekday, I see few visitors, and the park feels like an archaeological mystery created just for me.

Before I head back to the car, I try my hand at creating a stack, collecting medium-sized stones around my feet. Daily stress melts away, and my whole world joyously focuses on the fulcrum between rocks. Delightful.



**N**orth of Llano, I turn off Highway 16 at Cherokee and follow country roads to Colorado Bend State Park for a glimpse of Gorman Falls, a treasure of the Hill Country. The day is sunny but cool, and I head straight to the trailhead. Signs remind hikers to bring water and sunscreen, even though it’s only 1.4 miles to the falls. A few minutes on the trail helps me imagine an ill-prepared summertime hike.

The trail is easy but rocky, and it takes my full attention to keep my ankles true. After more than a mile, I come to a steep vertical descent down

pictures and ask why in the world there are camels in Texas.

Baum explains that in 1857, U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis directed the importation of 34 camels from Egypt to establish a camel corps based in Camp Verde. The animals quickly proved their worth by carrying twice the usual load of survey teams and mail-carrying ventures.

The Civil War interrupted and ultimately doomed the camel experiment, but Baum keeps the curious story alive with this Texas Camel Corps. “I fell in love with the camels and had to get a few of my own.” He now leads camel tours through West Texas.

**Leonard Grenwelge Park in Llano features towers of rocks called cairns lining the shore of the Llano River.**

slick rock (thank goodness for handrails) to the hidden fairy pools of the travertine falls. Verdant green mosses drip water into clear cascading basins. The temperature here is 10–15 degrees cooler than the bright, open flats above, and I bask in wafts of misty breeze coming off the face of the cliff. A few feet from the falls, the titular bend in the Colorado River provides a place to cool yourself and your dog before heading back up the trail.

Now the incline of the trail feels more pronounced. I stop to catch my breath and admire the blooming cactus and try to listen for birdcalls coming from nearby trees. As I head for the parking lot, I pass hikers on their way down, watching their steps, raising their hands against the midday sun and reaching for their water bottles. I smile the secret smile of having seen the hidden splendor, knowing it was worth the struggle.

Learn more about **Julia Robinson** at [juliarobinsonphoto.com](http://juliarobinsonphoto.com).

**T**urn north on State Highway 16 toward Llano, a frontier trading center that grew to prominence in the 1880s when iron deposits, granite quarries and brick-making sparked a boom period in anticipation of the town becoming the “Pittsburgh of the West.” Today, the city still is known for granite but also embraces its connection to Highland Lakes tourism.

Llano’s Leonard Grenwelge Park, along the south side of the Llano River, honors the city’s heritage in a new and charming

# Frontier Texas

Where the West—and the Texas Forts Trail—begins



BY CHARLES LOHRMANN

**This herd of eight 1,000-pound steel buffaloes turns in the wind above Abilene's Frontier Texas.**

Frontier Texas recreates a historic fort. Architect Larry Good explained that when he and architect Bryce Weigand started on the project, they drew inspiration from the historic sites. “We visited Fort Richardson, Fort Belknap, Fort Phantom Hill, Fort Griffin, Fort Chadbourne and Fort McKavett.

“The sculptural chimneys that lead you up to the front door of Frontier Texas

are based on the chimneys at Fort Phantom Hill,” Good says. “The chimneys are the only things left there.”

Fort Phantom Hill sits about 15 miles north of Frontier Texas, so it can be the first stop on your Forts Trail adventure.

**WEB EXTRAS**  
 ▶ Read this story on our website to see a slideshow of Frontier Texas.

Fort Griffin is about 50 miles northeast of Fort Phantom Hill, and that drive offers the combination of the partially restored fort and a recreation of the historic town of Fort Griffin. This notoriously rough village included the Beehive Saloon, where Pat Garrett once tended bar. One of the holographic “spirit guides” in Frontier Texas plays the part of Garrett and retells the story of the night he shot Billy the Kid. Between the restored fort and the town, you’ll find a historic marker designating the site where Gen. Robert E. Lee met with Comanche leaders.

The historic sites, now mostly in ruins, can create a ghostly sense of the frontier experience. Some personal accounts say that contemporary visitors hear mysterious voices, the sounds of horses’ hooves or the jingle of spurs. Usually, the sounds more closely resemble the whisper of wind in the trees.

Back at Frontier Texas, museum director Jeff Salmon says that most visitors are those traveling from east to west, and the Abilene area is where they first see iconic Texas sights. “We try to remain true to the story and still provide entertainment—make an emotional connection,” he says. “We honor the past as best we can.”

Charles Lohrmann is the *Texas Co-op Power* editor.

Among the most popular Hill Country destinations are towns defined by an ethnic history, such as the German heritage of Fredericksburg, Boerne and other picturesque destinations (see Page 8). Another option for exploring the Hill Country is to embark on a tour at the northern reach of the region, at Abilene’s Frontier Texas, and follow a stretch of the Texas Forts Trail. You don’t need to visit all nine historic sites to gain a sense of the intertwined narratives of 19th century settlers, Native Americans, buffalo hunters and adventurers.

On my own foray to Frontier Texas, the last thing I expected was a herd of flying buffalo. But that is what I found when I stopped at this starting point of the 650-mile heritage trail that wanders through 29 counties. These eight steel bison weigh about 1,000 pounds each (400 pounds fewer than the flesh-and-blood version), run in place at the top of their 35-foot posts and turn so that their noses are always into the wind. “It’s the world’s largest wind vane,” says H.C. Zachry, the Abilene artist and advertising executive who designed the flying creatures, “265 feet from one end to the other.”

He enthusiastically describes the engineering marvels nosing into the wind then explains that a tour of the museum inside features stories delivered by holographic characters developed to capture historic personalities and interconnected narratives. “We focused on the period between 1780 to 1880,” Zachary says, “because after 1880, the railroad came through Abilene, and that changed the frontier completely.”

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By Will Holford

Photos by Sarah Beal

**S**olar power is booming in Texas. The Lone Star State ranked seventh in the nation in 2017, with 1,973 megawatts of installed solar energy capacity. That's up from 10th in 2015, when the state was producing a mere 540 megawatts.

Much of the state's solar power capacity is being captured by utility-scale solar farms that can produce more than 100 megawatts of power. On a smaller scale, large companies are installing solar arrays on their rooftops or property. Some of those businesses' systems can produce more than 2 megawatts, enough to power about 400 homes during peak demand hours.

Residential installations also are increasing, including in Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area. As of July, Bluebonnet had 521 members with solar arrays; 66 were added in 2016 and 138 in 2017. The cooperative estimates it will have about 650 installations by the end of 2018, nearly all on homes.

Travis County resident Jerry Douglas recently upgraded the solar array on his home between Elgin and Manor. In 2016, he installed solar panels capable of producing up to 3 kilowatts. He and his wife were so pleased that in June they added enough panels to produce another 5 kilowatts. Douglas, who has worked for more than 30 years in the electric utility industry, estimates the system will reduce his electric bills by \$220 per month during the summer.

"We like it cool," Douglas said from his air-conditioned living room as he used a mobile app to monitor how much power his panels were generating at 4 p.m. on a triple-digit day in July.

"I looked at the cost of wind compared to solar and just couldn't justify the wind turbine," he said. "Also, there's a lot of maintenance with a wind turbine. There is little or none with solar panels, and (the system) is covered by a warranty. If something goes wrong, I call and they come out to fix it."

In July, Texans set several records for hourly peak demand for energy. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), which manages the electric grid for most of

Continued on page 20

# LET THE Solar SHINE IN

## Solar installations are on the rise across the Bluebonnet region



Jerry and Donna Douglas recently added more solar panels to their home in Travis County, increasing their production capacity to 8 kilowatts. The couple's solar array is connected to Bluebonnet's grid through a dual-metering system.



The cost of installing solar panels has steadily fallen in the past decade, and by the end of 2017, investment in solar arrays in Texas exceeded \$3.2 billion, according to the Solar Energy Industries Association. Bluebonnet does not provide or install solar panels, but information about the process is available on our website, bluebonnet.coop. Click on the Energy Solutions tab, then on Home Renewables & Green Rates.

Sunlight falls on solar panels, which convert the sun's energy to Direct Current (DC) electricity.

# HOW Solar WORKS

Excess power is returned to the Bluebonnet grid.

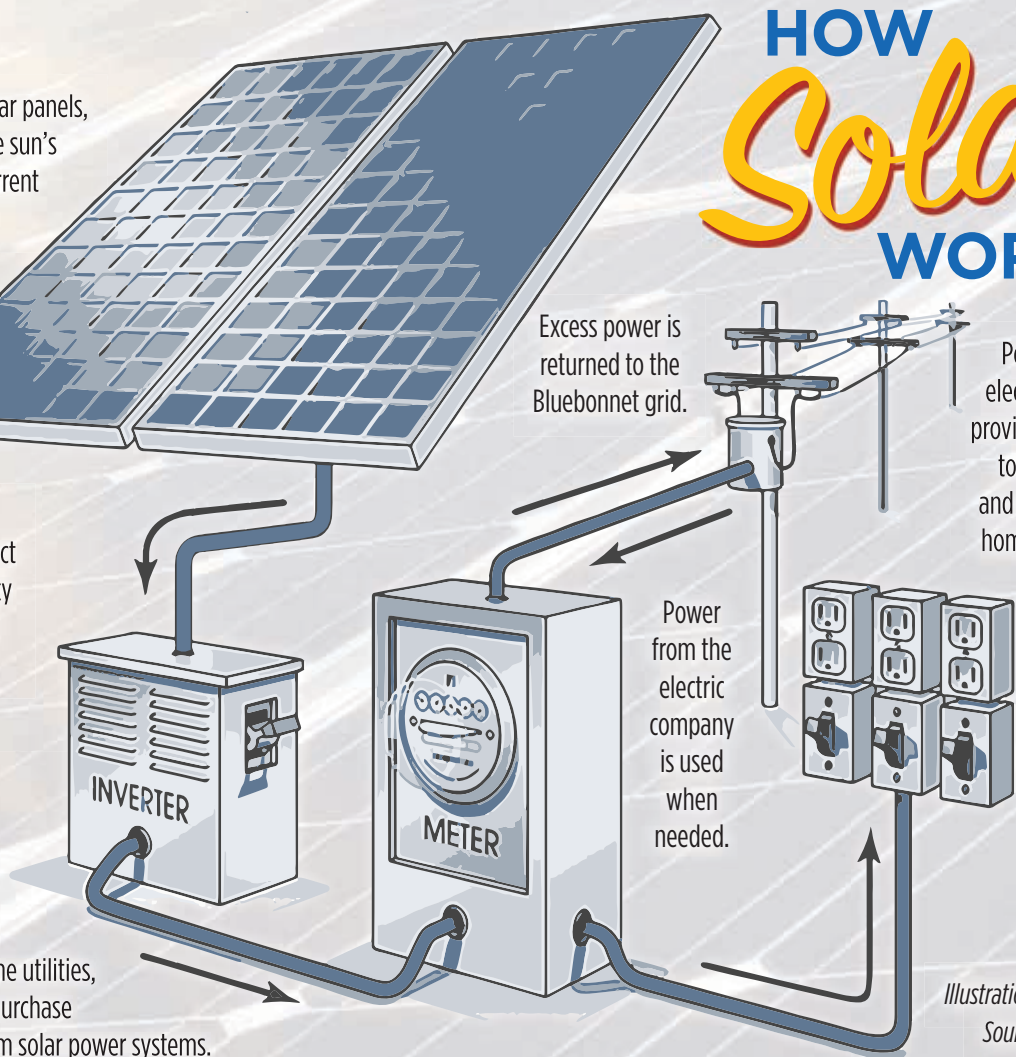
Power from the electric company is provided continuously to all the outlets and switches in your home, both at night and during the day — any time demand exceeds solar production.

An inverter changes the Direct Current electricity into Alternating Current (AC).

When the solar system produces more power than is needed, excess electricity flows to the electric grid. Some utilities, like Bluebonnet, purchase excess power from solar power systems.

Power from the electric company is used when needed.

Illustration by Joe Stafford  
Source: solarcraft.com



Continued from page 18

the state, recorded power demand on July 19 topping 73,000 megawatts for the first time.

Solar power producers are big fans of the summer sun. When energy demand peaks in the afternoons because of soaring temperatures, solar arrays are generating power, offsetting the need for electricity from traditional power plants that rely on coal or natural gas.

Residential solar projects usually generate between 5 and 10 kilowatts. A 5-kilowatt system has about 15 photovoltaic solar panels, covering about 500 square feet. The average residential solar installation on Bluebonnet's electric grid can generate 7.5 kilowatts. The photovoltaic solar panels can go on roofs or on ground-mounted steel supports. They have a 20- to 25-year lifespan and are owned by the property or business owner.

John Gardner, a retired electrical engineer, who lives near Brenham in Washington County, has installed solar on his last three homes. His current system has 25 290-watt panels capable of producing up to 7.25 kilowatts of electricity. That is more than enough to power his energy-efficient 2,000-square-foot home. "We're basically net zero on our electric bills," Gardner said.

Bluebonnet members with a renewable energy system connected to the co-op's electric grid have dual-register meters that record how much power they take from Bluebonnet and how much power they contribute to the grid.

Bluebonnet pays its members for energy they put into its grid at a rate based on costs from the co-op's wholesale power providers and any cost savings from the transmission and distribution of power.

"Bluebonnet has been solar friendly for sure," Gardner said. "The process is easy, and it's always good to have friendly people."

The cost of installing a residential solar array is dropping. Cost varies from one city to another and from one utility to another. It depends on many factors. Like many electric cooperatives, Bluebonnet does not offer rebates to members who install renewable generation systems. That is because Bluebonnet's revenue comes from its members when they pay their electric bills. Any rebate the co-op might offer would have to benefit or provide value to all co-op members, rather than just those who have wind turbines or solar arrays.

However, Bluebonnet members who install solar panels benefit from a 30 percent federal tax credit that Congress



John Gardner, with his horse Alex, has 25 290-watt panels on his barn that can handle most of the energy he needs to run his adjacent 2,000-square-foot home.

## WILL SOLAR WORK ON MY ROOF?

Before placing solar panels on your roof, ask yourself these questions from the Smart Electric Power Alliance:

- What is the condition of the roof? How old is it, and what repairs does it need?
- Do building codes allow solar panels? There may be roof setback requirements and fire safety considerations.
- What direction does the roof face, and what kind of slope does it have? Most solar panels should face south or southwest.
- If your house is in a historic district or another area with building or homeowner association restrictions, are solar panels allowed where you want them?
- Does your roof get too much shade? If so, a rooftop system likely won't provide much power.

## COMMUNITY SOLAR: A NEIGHBORLY OPTION

Community solar projects allow people whose homes are not suitable for solar panels, or who live in condominiums, townhomes or apartments, to share the costs and benefits of a neighborhood solar installation. Community solar agreements vary, but typically the energy that the panels produce is distributed among participating residents. Likewise, participants share proceeds from the sale of excess energy returned to the electric grid.

— Will Holford

extended through 2019. The credit drops to 26 percent in 2020 and 22 percent in 2021, the last year it will be available for residential solar under current federal plans.

With the experience of having had multiple solar installations, Gardner and Douglas have learned what to look for when considering solar power companies and the

do's and don'ts of installing panels. They advise would-be buyers to find a reputable company to design their solar power system, and to get two or three quotes from installers. Check their references, too.

Communication is also important. "Do you understand what they're telling you?" Gardner said. "If not, find someone else." ■

Are you thinking



# Solar?

If you're considering solar power for your home or office, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, in conjunction with Texas Solar Energy Society and Solar Austin, is ready to provide information and help you take a self-guided tour of solar installations in the Manor area. Join us for the **Bluebonnet Solar Tour** starting at 9 a.m. Sept. 29, 2018, at Lagos Elementary School, 11817 Murchison St. in Manor.

## TOUR DETAILS

Start the day at Lagos Elementary School in Manor, where you'll learn more about solar energy and how to connect to Bluebonnet's grid. Texas Solar Energy Society is hosting an installer fair, and the kids can build a solar car, courtesy of Solar Austin. Enjoy free breakfast tacos, coffee and juice and be entered to win prizes.

Then, grab a map and take a self-guided tour of nearby homes with different types of solar setups. Homeowners, installers and Bluebonnet employees will be on hand at each home to talk about the installation process and answer questions.

This free event is open to Bluebonnet members and the public. Learn more in the Events section of our Facebook page or contact member services at 800-842-7708 or [memberservices@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:memberservices@bluebonnet.coop).

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# SHOCK!!!

## Snakes spell trouble for electric equipment

By Melissa Segrest

**W**hy did the snake cross the multiwire electrified barrier? Probably to grab a bird or lizard.

Why didn't matter much to several thousand Bluebonnet members this summer, when snakes caused three large outages. It's what the trio of snakes did after they got past the barriers — a masterful feat in itself — that mattered.

They damaged electrical equipment and caused big power outages.

It may stretch credulity that a single serpent can create so much trouble. But in the first seven months of 2018, Bluebonnet had more than its share of animal-related power outages. From Jan. 1 through the end of July, snakes caused 60 outages, sometimes impacting a single home, and in a few circumstances, causing thousands of members to lose power.

Birds caused another 123 outages, including several in March that left more than 3,000 members temporarily without power. Squirrels caused 55 outages in the first seven months of 2018.

During the same seven-month period in 2017, Bluebonnet had 36 outages caused by snakes. That's 24 fewer than that same time period this year.

Most of the outages are small: A single snake scales a power pole, stretches out and touches two pieces of energized equipment or touches an energized item and a piece of something grounded. The resulting snake circuit damages equipment and can cause an outage.

Bluebonnet's 44 substations, mostly in rural areas, often provide power to thousands of members. Substation equipment is designed with pronged devices to discourage birds from nesting. Some energized equipment is covered to keep climbing animals at bay.

Bluebonnet stepped up its preventative measures in July and the number of snake-related outages dropped dramatically by August. But despite the best defenses, some critters still manage to get in

and make that final fatal mistake.

"The cooperative strengthened its snake-barrier fence to include three electrified wires between PVC pipes that lie flat on the ground and surround substation equipment," said Eric Kocian, Bluebonnet's chief engineer and system operations officer. "Also, operators in Bluebonnet's control center get an alarm every time something comes into contact with a snake fence's electrified wires."

Make no mistake — the snake fences work nearly every time. Each week Bluebonnet staff patrol inside substations' perimeter fencing to remove what remains of many snakes that tried and failed to cross the lines. But birds can drop snakes from above. Once in a while, a big snake manages to slither through the shock,





A chicken snake, above left, met its untimely death when it slithered into the box behind a meter in The Colony just outside of Cedar Creek. (Mike Theurer photo) Snakes can cause significant damage to equipment, above right. (Kyle Kieschnick photo)



If a snake manages to get past the barriers outside a substation, it still has to contend with electrified wires between PVC pipes that surround equipment. (Sarah Beal photo)



## DESPITE THE BEST DEFENSES, SOME CRITTERS STILL MANAGE TO GET IN AND MAKE THAT FINAL FATAL MISTAKE.

sometimes zapped enough to become airborne and land inside the danger zone, alive.

The activity has not been limited to specific regions of the cooperative's 3,800-square-mile service area, Kocian said. Snakes have been equal opportunity offenders this year. After the early summer snake activity, Bluebonnet's increased defenses greatly reduced the number of large outages.

Despite the problems they sometimes cause, Bluebonnet respects snakes' role in the ecosystem. We asked Paul Crump to elaborate. As the lead herpetologist at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, he offered some theories about this year of the snake. After holing up most of the winter, snakes emerge in spring to eat and possibly breed, he said.

"A couple of wet years means there was probably more food for them ... and the snake population could have been higher," he said. The hot, dry summer of 2018 may have prompted snakes to be "out and about longer, looking for better hiding places and more food. The hotter they are, the quicker they need to eat again," Crump added.

With 35 species of snakes in Texas, Crump urges Bluebonnet

## IT'S NOT ALL CREEPY CRITTERS



Our line workers also encounter cute and cuddly creatures while on the job. Apprentice lineman Connor Sanderson helped rescue a kitten from a green electrical box in the eastern Travis County backyard of a Bluebonnet member in August. (Kyle Kasper photo)

members to be kind to the reptiles. "They provide many services for humans, such as controlling rodent populations. Snakebites are uncommon, and deaths from snakebite are even rarer in the U.S.," he said. For more information about how to recognize venomous snakes, visit the Texas Parks and Wildlife website at <https://bit.ly/1XtJap8>. ■

# BRAVING *the* HEAT

Bluebonnet

Bluebonnet's linemen showcase their skills and safety

By Jen Schattle

Photos by Sarah Beal

**E**ach July, competitors in the Texas Lineman's Rodeo know it's going to be hot. This year, it was hotter than hot. The National Weather Service had issued warnings about excessive heat, predicting temperatures would reach triple digits.

"Lineman work in the elements every day. One month you can be freezing, the next sweating. They know how to prepare for the weather," said Heath Siegmund, Bluebonnet's superintendent of operations in Red Rock. "Hydration and physical fitness are also extremely important. Just like running a marathon, you can't go from the couch to the finish line."

Braving extreme temperatures "is a team effort, every day and night. They watch out not just for themselves but for each other on the job," said Randall Bownds, a Bluebonnet assistant superintendent in Giddings and coordinator of the co-op's rodeo team.

The heat did not deter several hundred electric line workers from across the state from competing in the annual competition at Nolte Island Park outside Seguin on July 21. The events tested their knowledge, skills and commitment to safety. Hosted by the Texas Lineman's Rodeo Association, 49 journeyman teams and 114 apprentice linemen participated. The events are designed to mirror challenges encountered daily by utility crews who work, sometimes in dangerous conditions, to ensure reliable power is provided to Texas' more than 28 million residents.

Three journeymen and seven apprentices competed for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. Apprentice Michael Wagner took second place in the arrester change-out event.



4



"I am really proud of the Bluebonnet rodeo team this year; they gave their all, and it shows," Bownds said. "Every year we strive to practice more, but we prioritize and our members come first. The rodeo just makes us better and more prepared linemen."

A four-member Bluebonnet barbecue team also competed at the rodeo, serving up their best brisket, ribs and dessert (this year it was a cherry and blackberry "dump" cake cooked in a Dutch oven). The Texas association founded the lineman's rodeo in 1996; this year marked the event's 22nd anniversary. ■



1



6





**1)** Bluebonnet's journeyman team of Danny Bolding, Jeffrey Bolding and Chris Rivera (pictured in photo **6**), below) compete in a 'mystery' event, in which they are not told the nature of their task until moments before the clock starts.

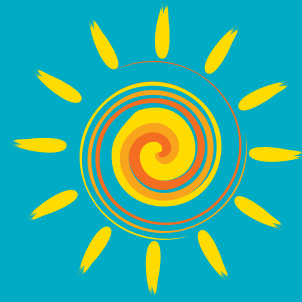
**2)** Apprentice Ty Kasper lowers the dummy during the simulated hurt-man rescue event.

**3)** Apprentice Michael Guajardo carries his equipment off the field. Of 114 apprentices competing, Guajardo placed 5th overall and 6th on the written test.

**4)** Apprentice Drew Brownwood collapses an insulated pole, called a 'hot stick.'

**5)** Apprentice Michael Wagner yells a warning 'Headache!' before dropping a piece of equipment. Wagner won a 2nd place trophy in the arrester change-out event.

**7)** Apprentice Auston Shipley prepares to climb. He placed 4th out of 114 apprentices in the pole climb event.



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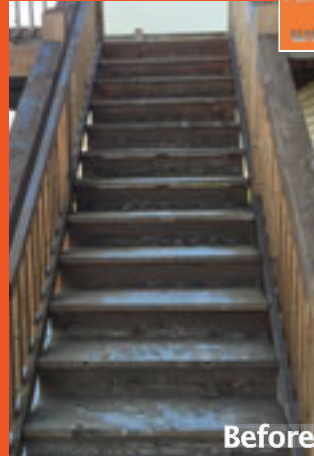
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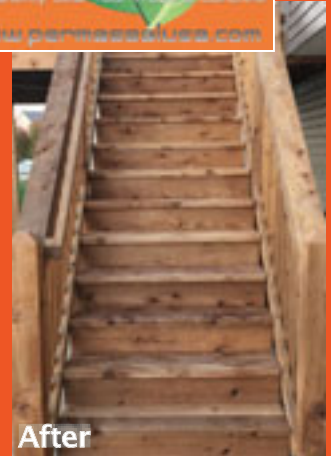
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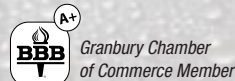


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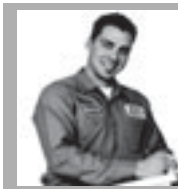
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## A D V E R T I S E M E N T

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

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



Dear  
Darryl

My wife is on my back to make the bathroom stop smelling and as you can imagine, my neighbors are having a field day, kidding me about the mud pit and sewage stench in my yard. It's humiliating. I called a plumber buddy of mine, who recommended pumping (and maybe even replacing) my septic system. But at the potential cost of thousands of dollars, I hate to explore that option.

I tried the store bought, so called, Septic treatments out there, and they did Nothing to clear up my problem. Is there anything on the market I can pour or flush into my system that will restore it to normal, and keep it maintained?

*Clogged and Smelly – Corpus Christi, TX*

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

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# Marvels of Horsepower

Blanco's Buggy Barn Museum takes a turn into the 19th century

BY MARTHA DEERING

THE MUFFLED CADENCE OF TROTTING horses drifts in the Hill Country breeze when I arrive at the Buggy Barn Museum to enjoy a version of Old West atmosphere. Proprietor Dennis Moore, in his battered hat and dusty boots, could have stepped straight out of a classic Western. In fact, on the day I visit the museum, Moore had just returned from working on a film set in Austin.

The 10-acre site on the northern edge of Blanco, on U.S. 281, features nary a nod to modern times. The museum's office, just inside the red gates, recalls the 19th century. It occupies a rustic cabin with a wooden porch and an inviting rocking chair. Longhorn cattle contentedly ruminate in the shade of trees near the highway, and a line of buggies and wagons is visible outside the museum's red door.

The 140-plus horse-drawn vehicles in the museum provide a hands-on history of travel from the early 1860s to about 1900. Each buggy, carriage, hearse and wagon embodies its own story, and Moore demonstrates knowledge of every nuance.

Moore's fixation began in childhood when his father bought a pony and cart for him and his brother. Serious collecting over the past 18 years has filled the large museum and expanded onto the surrounding grounds. From a massive Conestoga wagon to a light and classy Studebaker surrey with red fringe on top, the vehicles served the needs of a range of 19th-century travelers.

Moore is a fifth-generation Blanco resident who has encouraged his wife, children and extended family members to take an interest in the collection. His wife's



lifelong love of horses made her easy to convince. "It wouldn't be nearly as much fun without the family involved," Moore says. "My grandchildren, ages 7 and 11, love to give tours."

The Buggy Barn Museum provides an educational opportunity to step back into the days of horse-drawn travel. Expansion of the collection and preservation of the history of horse-drawn transportation are the museum's primary goals. Moore uses the vehicles in parades and re-enactments, but along the way, word spread to film companies that horse-drawn vehicles could be rented from the Buggy Barn along with horses to pull them and drivers to handle the reins. In recent years, the movie business has kept Moore busy. Between 30 and 40 of his vehicles were used in the 2010 remake of *True Grit*.

Along with buggies and wagons, the museum houses a collection of vintage saddles, boots, guns and other memorabilia important for dressing a film set. Many of the museum's artifacts graced the screen in the recent Western series *The Son*. Moore also furnished horses and wagons for *There Will Be Blood*, filmed in Marfa with actor Daniel Day-Lewis.

Trailers with raised ceilings haul the horses, vehicles and equipment to a film's location. Moore has 20 horses, two donkeys and a black German shepherd named Kira who also is a movie star. With his grizzled beard and mustache, Moore looks right at home driving a team in a Western movie. In his most recent movie venture, *Support the Girls* (not a Western), he held the title of transportation coordinator, working all week in Austin and returning to Blanco on weekends.

With his encyclopedic knowledge of the Old West, Moore explains exactly how metal foot warmers burned coal to keep passengers from arriving at their destinations with frozen feet. He can point out the differences between a phaeton and a brougham and show visitors the tube that made it possible for those inside to talk to the driver. This is a man who lives and breathes the Old West—although he has been known to put a set of small wheels under a bright red sleigh and drive Santa in the Blanco Christmas Parade.

**Martha Deering**, a member of Heart of Texas EC, lives near McGregor. Her recent book, *Elephant Dreams*, is available at Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

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## All Hail the Cookie Jar

WHILE I'VE NEVER MET A COOKIE I didn't like, I like oatmeal cookies more than most. The best kinds are a comforting and welcome treat after school or midafternoon, when you need a boost. Whole grains and dried fruit even make them feel somewhat virtuous—no shame in eating one for breakfast, right? A few details give this recipe (slightly adapted from Food 52's website) extraordinary flavor and texture. First, the butter is browned before mixing, which gives the cookies a rich, nutty flavor. Second, the raisins are puréed before they're incorporated into the dough, creating a moist, chewy texture. Rolling the cookies in sugar before baking gives a delightfully crunchy coating.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

### Brown Butter Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

- 2 cups dark raisins
- 2 cups flour, divided use
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 cup dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1¼ teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon espresso powder
- Sugar or turbinado sugar, for rolling (optional)

**1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.

**2.** Toss the raisins with ¼ cup flour. Place them in a food processor and pulse 20–30 seconds, until the raisins form a very thick paste and come together in a ball.

**3.** Heat the butter in a skillet over medium heat, watching it closely. When you see the bottom of the pan

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

# Recipes

## All Hail the Cookie Jar



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

HEATHER BRADFORD | PEDERNALES EC

The fragrant oil of bergamot, a variety of orange grown in Italy and France, gives Earl Grey tea its distinctive aroma. That same flavor (and a generous amount of lemon zest) perfumes these delicate sugar cookies.

To increase the citrus flavor, drizzle the cooled cookies with lemon glaze.

### Earl Grey Lemon Cookies

#### DOUGH

- 4½ cups flour
  - 2 teaspoons baking powder
  - ½ teaspoon kosher salt
  - 2 individual bags Earl Grey tea (or 2 tablespoons loose leaf tea), ground
  - 1 cup sugar
  - Finely grated zest of 2 lemons
  - ¼ cups (2½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
  - 1 egg
  - 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
  - ½ cup buttermilk, divided use
- Powdered sugar, for rolling dough

#### LEMON GLAZE

- 2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- ⅓ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

- 1. DOUGH:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.
- In a medium bowl, whisk together

the flour, baking powder, salt and loose tea leaves until combined.

**3.** Combine the sugar and lemon zest in a standing mixer bowl fitted with a paddle attachment. Mix the sugar and zest on low speed until the mixture is very aromatic and resembles wet sand. Add the butter and beat on medium-high speed for 3 minutes or until light and fluffy. Add the egg, vanilla and ¼ cup buttermilk, and mix on low speed until combined.

**4.** Add 2½ cups of the flour mixture to the bowl and mix slowly, until just combined. Stir in remaining buttermilk, then add the remaining flour mixture and process just until the dry ingredients are absorbed. The dough should be smooth and supple (if too sticky, add an additional ¼ cup flour).

**5.** Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 days in advance (if you chill the dough for an extended time, remove it from the fridge 30 minutes before rolling out the cookies, to soften).

**6.** Dust a work surface with powdered sugar, then roll out the dough ¼ inch thick. Cut the cookies into rounds (or any shape desired) and use a thin spatula to transfer them to the prepared baking sheet.

**7.** Bake the cookies 10–12 minutes, until the edges start to turn golden. Transfer cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

**8. LEMON GLAZE:** Whisk together ingredients until the mixture is smooth. Use a spoon, fork or pastry bag with a small tip to glaze the cookies. Store in an airtight container up to 1 week. ▶ Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

**COOK'S TIP** To grind the tea, place it in a sealable plastic bag and use a rolling pin to break down the leaves.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

becoming browned, remove from heat and set aside.

**4.** Combine the sugars, vanilla and browned butter in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and mix on medium speed about 5 minutes. Add the eggs one at a time and continue to mix on medium speed. When the mixture pulls together into an even texture, add the raisin paste and mix until thoroughly combined.

**5.** In a separate bowl, combine the remaining flour, oats, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and espresso powder. Mix the dry ingredients into the wet mixture in two additions, until there is no flour visible.

**6.** Using a soup spoon and your hands, roll the dough into rounds about the size of a Ping-Pong ball. Roll the balls of dough in a dish of sugar and place them on the prepared baking sheet, about 2 inches apart. Using the flat part of your palm, flatten each dough ball slightly to allow for even baking.

**7.** Bake 12–15 minutes, until cookies just begin to turn golden brown and are crinkly on top. Another good way of testing is to lift a corner of the cookie—if it bends slightly and re-forms when let go, they are ready. Allow to cool 5 minutes on the baking sheet before transferring cookies to a wire rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container up to 10 days. ▶ Makes about 40 cookies.

### Pecan Thin Crisps

GAYLYN HERRO | BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

These wonderful “make ahead and bake later” cookies have been a treasured family recipe since 1959, when Herro’s parents, Emma Jean and Keith Jaeger, were married. Traditionally, the cookies were prepared and frozen the week after Thanksgiving (pecan season) then baked in mid-December for Christmas gifts for family members, friends and the community. This recipe also can be cut in half to make fewer cookies if preferred.

- 2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED,  
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### \$100 Recipe Contest

February’s recipe contest theme is **Cozy Casseroles**, comforting, one-pan meals that are baked until bubbly and feed the entire family. The deadline is **September 10**.

ENTER ONLINE at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://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 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 cups finely chopped pecans

1. Place the butter in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and beat until smooth. Gradually add the sugars and beat on medium-high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy. Add the eggs and vanilla; mix well.

2. Sift together the flour, baking soda and salt, then gradually add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture, beating well after each addition. Add the pecans and stir until just combined. Do not overmix the dough.

3. Transfer the cookie dough to a work surface and divide into six equal portions then refrigerate them on a plate 5–10 minutes (chilling makes the dough easier to work with). Prepare six 6- to 8-inch rectangles of waxed paper or aluminum foil, then place a chilled dough portion in the center of each wrapper sheet and shape it into a roll approxi-

mately 1¾ inches in diameter, wrapping tightly, then freeze until firm (usually overnight). The cookie rolls will maintain freshness in the freezer for more than 6 months.

4. When you're ready to bake, preheat oven to 375 degrees. Slice the frozen dough with a sharp knife in approximately ¼-inch sections then place on lightly greased baking sheet. Bake 10–12 minutes until lightly browned. Remove cookies to cooling rack. ▶ Makes about 18 dozen cookies.

**COOK'S TIP** For the best results, slice and bake these cookies when the dough is still frozen. A food processor makes quick work of chopping the pecans. Simply pulse them into a coarse mixture. If you plan on freezing the cookies for longer than a week, wrap them in plastic wrap or waxed paper and an additional layer of aluminum foil.

**WEB EXTRAS** ▶ Read this story on our website to see a recipe for Mexican Pepper Cookies from a Central Texas EC member.

## Bake Better Cookies

**LINE BAKING SHEETS** with parchment paper or a Silpat baking liner for easier cleanup.

**SOFTENED BUTTER** should be at room temperature or slightly cool to the touch—but not melted. (That will yield an entirely different texture in the baked cookie.)

**CREAMING BUTTER** and sugar until “light and fluffy” typically takes 3–5 minutes; it's ready when it no longer feels grainy between your fingertips. The process creates tiny air bubbles that give the dough structure and help the cookies rise in the oven.

**USING A HEAVY HAND** with flour will create tougher cookies. To measure it accurately, spoon it lightly into a dry measuring cup and then level the cup off with a knife. Resist scooping the cup into the flour or tapping the measuring cup with a knife, this will make the measure too dense and heavy.

**NUTS AND DRIED FRUIT** are interchangeable; feel free to swap in your favorite flavors. —PD

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# Wedding Funnies



▲ **MELISSA STEELE**, Fayette EC: Houston firefighter Justin Steele weds Houston nurse Courtney with Courtney's son, Gavin, by their side. "Gavin was all smiles until the kiss!"

CHURCH WEDDIN'S OR SOMETHIN' A LITTLE LESS FORMAL, Texans love to get hitched. Who would'a thought they were such emotional occasions? Even the cake is in tiers. We're just hats over heels for these bridal shots. Now, it's time for the bouquet toss, so all y'all single ladies c'mon up front!

**GRACE ARSIAGA**

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

▼ **EUNICE BAETHGE**, Central Texas EC: "The middle groomsman, James, was genuinely helping my daughter-in-law, Caroline, with her dress when Ryan, who is always an opportunist, helped James."



◀ **JENNIFER LITTLETON**, Pedernales EC: "I should have seen it coming, but I didn't! How about a nice bit of chocolate cake to go with your bright white wedding dress and perfect manicure?"

▶ **LISA GLENN**, Pedernales EC: "Jacob and his friends recreated a photo from their senior year in high school at his wedding."



## UPCOMING CONTESTS

JANUARY HARVEST DUE SEPTEMBER 10

FEBRUARY TWO OF A KIND DUE OCTOBER 10

MARCH TREES DUE NOVEMBER 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](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests). We do not accept entries via email. **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 regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.

◀ **TIFFANY STALNAKER**, Bluebonnet EC: As the minister begins, one of the bridesmaids shushes a younger one.



## Pick of the Month Founder's Day

**McGregor** September 14-15

(254) 495-0041, mcgregorfoundersday.com

Founder's Day is a long-standing tradition in McGregor, home of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, featuring live music and entertainment all day Saturday. Festivities kick off with a barbecue cook-off and concert Friday night and continue the next day with a 5K run, parade, cute baby contest, car show, washer tournament, kids zone, food trucks, and local craft and artisan vendors.

## September

7

**Montalba** [7-8] McKenzie Creek Trail Ride and Campout, (832) 427-9584

**Stafford** [7-8] A Decade in Stitches: Coastal Prairie Quilt Guild Quilt Showcase, (281) 491-5144, cpqgtx.org

8

**Harker Heights** Food, Wine & Brew Fest, (254) 699-4999, hhfoodandwine.com

**San Antonio** San Antonio Walk for PKD, (210) 414-6614, walkforpkd.org/sanantonio

**San Saba** Bellamy Brothers at Pecan Capital Street Dance XIX, (325) 372-5200, visitsansabatexas.com

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**Austin** Boys & Girls Clubs of the Austin Area Club Classic at Topgolf, (512) 444-7199, bgcaustin.org/events/golfclassic

**Alvarado** [12-15] Johnson County Pioneer and Old Settlers Reunion, (817) 614-6574, alvaradopubliclibrary.org

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**Grapevine** [13-16] GrapeFest, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com/grapefest

**Rockport** [13-16] HummerBird Celebration, (361) 729-6445, rockport-fulton.org/hb

14

**Sulphur Springs** [14-15] Lone Star Heritage Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (903) 994-2570, sulphurspringstxquilts.com



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**Brenham** [14-22] Washington County Fair, (979) 836-4112, visitbrenhamtexas.com

**15**

**Pontotoc** VFD Annual BBQ & Cake Auction, (325) 251-6670

**Huntsville** [15-16] Huntsville Antique Show, (936) 661-2545

**Gainesville** [15-23] True to the Colors Fall Art Exhibition, (940) 613-6939, gainesvilleareavisualarts.org

**22**

**Blanco** Raise the Roof Cook-Off & Festival, (830) 833-5773, twinsistersdancehall.com

**Ennis** Walk to End Alzheimer's, (214) 540-2415, act.alz.org

**23**

**Serbin** Wendish Fest, (979) 366-2441, texaswendish.org

**28**

**Lewisville** [28-29] Western Days Festival, (972) 219-3401, cityoflewisville.com

**29**

**Honey Grove** Davy Crockett Day, (903) 378-3112, honeygrovechamber.com



**Paradise Main Street Festival**, (940) 389-2654, paradisehistoricalsociety.org

**Ingram** [29-30] Texas Arts & Crafts Fair, (830) 367-5120, hcac.com

**October**

**4**

**Whitney** [4-6] Pioneer Days, (254) 694-2540, texasgetawayvacation.com

**5**

**Dublin** [5-6] Threads of Texas Quilt Show, (254) 646-2396, taqq.org

**Graford** [5-6] Possum Fest BBQ & Chili Cook-Off, (940) 779-2424, possumkingdomlake.com

**6**

**Johnson City Blanco County** Wild Game Dinner, (830) 833-5335, facebook.com/wildgamedinner

**Rosanky Community Center** Fall Fling, (512) 217-5360

**Pearland** [6-7] Art & Crafts on the Pavilion, (281) 997-5972, visitpearland.com

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



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# Houston, We Have a Road Trip

Bay Area Houston offers a glimpse at Mars and a historic battleground

BY MELISSA GASKILL

A CLUSTER OF COMMUNITIES ON THE southeast side of Houston has played a major role in space exploration, from missions to the moon almost 50 years ago to space shuttle flights and research aboard the International Space Station. **Space Center Houston**, the official visitor center of NASA's **Johnson Space Center**, chronicles the out-of-this-world feats in interactive exhibits, full-scale displays, spacecraft and more than 400 artifacts.

My favorites include one of the actual Boeing 747s that ferried space shuttles across Earth and a full-size replica of the shuttle *Independence*, along with the chance to touch Mars and the moon in one morning—a meteorite from the former and one of 840 pounds of rocks brought back from the latter. I also geek out on exhibits on the current weather on Mars (spoiler alert: It's cold!), how astronauts sleep on the space station, and the hole that a speck traveling at 15,200 mph would make in a spaceship.

Two theaters show films, including *Human Destiny*, a history of NASA missions with plenty of archival footage. *Mission Mars* uses interactive exhibits, films, and scale models of spacecraft and rockets to detail the planned journey to this far-away planet. Fridays and Saturdays, visitors with reservations can share lunch with an astronaut and have their pictures taken as souvenirs.

Ninety-minute tram tours include historic mission control facilities for Apollo and the shuttles and working buildings in Johnson Space Center. A five-hour Level 9 guided VIP tour includes even more working buildings, plus lunch in the space center cafeteria where multiple astronauts dine



**The Skylab 1-G Trainer at Space Center Houston.**

and next-day admission to Space Center Houston. While many cities boast science museums or even space centers, this one can't be beat for history and authenticity.

Folks in these parts take equal pride in their role in events further back in history, so I drive about 30 minutes to the **San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site**. Here, in 1836, a ragtag band of Texians under Sam Houston defeated Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna's Mexican army to win independence for the Republic of Texas. I take in the view from the 570-foot-tall San Jacinto Monument (taller than the Washington Monument, which is 555 feet tall) and browse historic exhibits and a wealth of artifacts in the museum at its base.

Across the 1,800-foot-long reflecting pond, the spot where Houston's men camped along Buffalo Bayou, rests **Battleship Texas State Historic Site** and its namesake vessel. Commissioned in 1914, it fought in both world wars, including the Atlantic and Pacific theaters in World War II. Visitors can wander the 573-foot-long ship, up onto the foremast, around decks and gun turrets

that move, and through living quarters for a crew of 1,600, a maze of kitchens, doctor and dentist offices, and more.

As I leave the venerable old ship, modern-day craft pass on the waters of Buffalo Bayou, also known as the Houston Ship Channel, as do dolphins and birds, including roseate spoonbills and an osprey.

Experience flights of a different kind at **Saloon Door Brewing**, just off the NASA bypass, where a beer flight offers a nice wind-down from a full day's activities.

Friends who work at Johnson Space Center recommend waterside **Boondoggle's Pizzeria & Pub**. Diners sometimes spot astronauts at the next table, they tell me, and if not, there are plenty of them in photos on the walls. Boondoggle's offers more than 50 craft beers on tap, including the aptly named *Rocket Fuel* and *Space Dust*, plus gourmet pizzas from a wood-burning oven, sandwiches, burgers, salads and more.

Houston, our road trip has landed.

Read more about **Melissa Gaskill's** work at [melissagaskill.blogspot.com](http://melissagaskill.blogspot.com).

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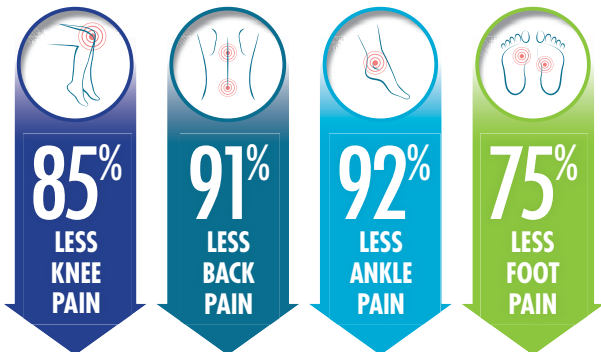
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