

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

HORSE SENSE

Healing through a connection with animals



BLUEBONNET NEWS
SEE PAGE 18





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Andy Kaul works knots out of a horse's mane.

FEATURE

8 The Healing Power of Horses Relief from ailments and disabilities can be found astride therapy horses.

Story and photos by Julia Robinson

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TexasCoopPower.com

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Texas USA

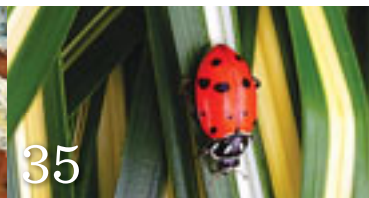
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NEXT MONTH

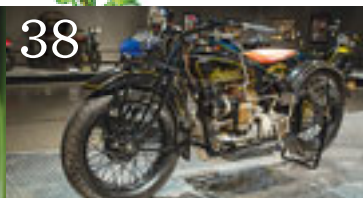
A Hidden Man's Gem Eccentric Elmer Kleb helped turn his family homestead into a woodland preserve.



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ON THE COVER Brooklyn caresses Neut after a riding lesson at REACH Therapeutic Riding Center in McGregor. Photo by Julia Robinson

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Thoughts on Cookies

Normally, the recipes I have tried are very good. However, the Brown Butter Oatmeal Raisin Cookies [*All Hail the Cookie Jar*, September 2018] not only were a lot of trouble to make, but they also tasted horrible. Even my grandsons who eat anything would not finish the cookie.

DONNA HENDRICK | PALO PINTO

Editor's note: Cookie opinions run the gamut. Some found those cookies too salty, while others (including our photo shoot crew) claim they're fabulous. They're a favorite of Paula Disbrowe, our food editor, who suggests using less salt and regular butter (instead of browned) for a milder flavor.

I have a magnet on my icebox that says, "A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand." I so agree.

KAY PRYOR | VIA FACEBOOK

About Bears and Dogs

I want to point out one error in *Bear Dogs of El Paso* [June 2018]. The second sentence says the ancient mammals were "ancestral to both bears and dogs," but it should have said



they were "closely related to the common ancestor of bears and dogs." The important point is that the relationship among bear dogs, dogs and bears is like that of cousins and not ancestors-descendants.

SUSUMU TOMIYA

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Wait a Minute!

I enjoy Focus on Texas each month. Love the clocks [October 2018] but have to point out that thing about a clock being right twice a day only works if the clock is stopped.

DONNA ELLIOTT | AUSTIN

Keep Your Eye on the Ball

The first high-five by Dusty Baker [*Up for Discussion*, Currents, October 2018] brings back a great old memory. A few weeks prior, the Dodgers played the Astros in the

Still a Winning Pastry

During the Christmas seasons of my youth in the 1960s, neighbors on our country road brought us delicious home-baked cakes, cookies and candies. My home economics teacher, Helen, was one of our neighbors, and every year we looked forward to her slightly sweetened yeast dough baked around a brown sugar and pecan filling that she called Danish Kringle [*Holiday Recipe Contest*, November 2018].

Although we loved seeing her, we waited in keen anticipation for her to leave. Her car would have barely left the driveway before we tore into the melt-in-your-mouth tenderness of the still-warm pastry.

LINDA RUSH | OAKHURST | SAM HOUSTON EC



Astrodome. We had great seats, about 10 rows up and directly behind first base.

Baker hit a line drive foul ball right at my wife's head. The good thing was she wasn't hurt. The bad thing was my red left palm and the ball in someone else's hand.

VARDY VINCENT | KINGSBURY

BLUEBONNET EC

Reeves' Legacy

The idea that Bass Reeves [*Bass Reeves, Lawman Extra-ordinaire*, October 2018] was the inspiration for the Lone Ranger comes only from Reeves' descendants. The fictional character is much more likely based on the Zane Grey novel *The Lone Star Ranger*, based on the exploits of Texas Rangers Capt. John Hughes.

MIKE FRANKLIN | POTEET

KARNES EC

I enjoyed the article so much I am going to try and buy the book [*Black Gun, Silver Star: The Life and Legend of Frontier Marshal Bass Reeves*].

LILLIAN BEASLEY | COOKS POINT

BLUEBONNET EC

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Santa Claus Is Coming to Town

It's time for the children around **FORT DAVIS** to be on their best behavior because Santa arrives **DECEMBER 8** via firetruck—as he always does—in the parade down State Street that kicks off **FRONTIER CHRISTMAS**.

Santa visits with children and sits for photos at Jeff Davis County Library after the parade. Outside, in Kelly Pavilion, enjoy hot cocoa, live music, crafts and a cookie-baking contest. Elementary schoolchildren serenade revelers with Christmas carols followed by the high school Spanish program's *baile folklórico*.

Fort Davis in far West Texas is a popular destination in part because of nearby attractions such as the Fort Davis National Historic Site, the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute's nature center and botanical gardens, Davis Mountains State Park, and the University of Texas McDonald Observatory.

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ANNIVERSARIES

WE TURN 75!

From time to time, these pages of *Texas Co-op Power* commemorate milestone anniversaries and birthdays as a way to mark history and progress. Starting in January and continuing each month next year, we will celebrate an anniversary near to our hearts: 2019 marks 75 years of this magazine.

Texas Co-op Power started as an eight-page newspaper called *Texas Cooperative Electric Power* in July 1944. Electric cooperatives were still in their infancy, and members needed a way to stay informed about the benefits and innovations electricity delivered to rural living. Perhaps more important, members needed an ally and a soapbox because as co-ops spread across Texas, investor-owned utilities, who for years wanted nothing to do with rural folks, began trying to wrest business away from co-ops. *Texas Cooperative Electric Power* stood with members as co-ops persevered and spread.

Over time, *Texas Co-op Power* grew into the general interest magazine it is today. It is still produced for co-op members and still delivers important co-op messages, reaching 1.56 million members monthly.

Each month in 2019, *Currents* will showcase a timeline that highlight major events and people during our 75-year history. In addition, we'll feature a retro recipe tweaked to accommodate evolving tastes and cooking methods. And each quarter, *Texas History* will shine a spotlight on the magazine.

Where To Find Happiness



The Texas towns of Plano, No. 5, and Grand Prairie, No. 10, are among the happiest cities in the U.S., according to personal finance website WalletHub, which ranked 182 large cities based on emotional and physical well-being, income and employment, and community and environment. No. 1 is Fremont, California.



CO-OP PEOPLE

Bright Light in Shelbyville

CADE FOEHNER, 21, electrified audiences last spring with a thrilling run on *American Idol*, ascending to the final five of 24 contestants culled from tens of thousands who vied for a spot nationwide. He hails from Shelbyville, where his dad, Rick, is a serviceman at Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative.

FOEHNER TRANSFIXED viewers with his smoky vocals and soulful take on classic rock standards *All Along the Watchtower* and *Simple Man*, dedicating the latter to his mom on the show's Mother's Day episode.

THE HOMEGROWN CELEBRITY shared a stage with fellow Texas musician Gary Clark Jr. on the show's season finale. Foehner, Clark and co-contestant Dennis Lorenzo delivered a scorching performance of Clark's *Bright Lights*, with its driving refrain, "You're gonna know my name by the end of the night." We certainly know it now.

TECH KNOWLEDGE

EVERYTHING CLICKS

This month marks 50 years since the debut of the technology-changing oN-Line System. Douglas Engelbart and his team at the Stanford Research Institute essentially kicked off the personal computer revolution with what has come to be described as "the mother of all demos."

On December 9, 1968, in San Francisco, Engelbart demonstrated text and images displayed simultaneously on separate devices, functional video-conferencing and working hypertexts. He also showcased the first model of the common computer mouse.

"That hour and 40 minutes was, in the end, one of the most impactful technological presentations to be delivered since Gutenberg got some people together for cocktails, crudités and a show of how he'd hacked a wine press," Megan Garber wrote in *The Atlantic* in 2013.

ALMANAC

Christmas Past

Silent Night turns 200 years old. *Stille Nacht* was heard for the first time in a village church in Oberndorf, Austria, at midnight Mass in 1818.

A *Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens' classic, debuted 175 years ago in London. Six thousand copies were published December 19, 1843. By Christmas Eve, it was sold out.

THE HEALING



POWER OF

HORSES



RELIEF from ailments and disabilities can be found astride therapy horses

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON



The kids show up for their riding sessions right on time. They strap on their helmets and calmly lead their horses from the cool shade of the barn into the hot, dusty arena at REACH Therapeutic Riding Center in McGregor, 20 miles southwest of Waco.

Twelve-year-old E.J. works on cinching a saddle strap. “Pull, pull, pull,” cheers side-walker Jesse Allen. E.J. grimaces with the effort as his horse, Jessie, a 22-year-old black-and-white paint, stands quiet and calm. With just a little more oomph, E.J. maneuvers the leather strap into the correct hole and breaks into a wide grin. “He couldn’t do that at all five months ago,” Allen says.

Offering health and mobility gains with the aid of horses is the mission of Larry Barnett, a retired U.S. Air Force pilot who became a therapeutic riding instructor in 2004. He founded REACH in 2007 to use equine therapy, or hippotherapy, to improve the physical and mental well-being of children and adults with special needs.

“This was his dream,” says Kristin Bolfing-Volcik, REACH executive director. “He went to a bunch of different riding centers to study what they did, and he had a lot of mentors from around Texas.” The result of that research and dedication is

the REACH Therapeutic Riding Center, opened in 2008 and situated on 30 acres of pastureland donated by Gary and Diane Heavin, the founders of Curves International fitness studios. The REACH barn has stalls for 10 horses, an office, a viewing room, therapy room, tack room, wash

Top and left: Brooklyn, 12, maneuvers 20-year-old quarter horse Newt around the arena at REACH Therapeutic Riding Center in McGregor. Far left: Tina Tillert first came to REACH as part of a veterans outreach program but now volunteers at the facility.





AN INSTRUCTOR gives directions and encouragement, but the kids are in charge of these animals more than 10 times their weight.

stalls and wheelchair-accessible restrooms. The center has recreational use of the rest of the Heavens' 400-acre property, which includes an extensive network of riding trails for therapeutic group rides.

Bolfing-Volcik, a Waco native and Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative member, started volunteering with the nonprofit organization in 2008 and went on to become certified by Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International as a therapeutic riding instructor. She helped the operation grow to its current size, serving 130 kids as young as 3 as well as adults and veterans of all ages. The center helps people with varying needs and disabilities, including those with muscular dystrophy and autism, trauma survivors, and patients in addiction recovery.

Greek physician Hippocrates was the first to write about the "healing rhythm" of riding horses in the fifth century B.C. In modern times, equine therapy was developed to treat soldiers wounded during World War I and came to the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s after a Danish rider disabled by polio won a silver medal for dressage riding in the 1952 Olympics.

Equine therapy is a tool rather than a profession. Licensed therapists—physical therapists, occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists, for example—become certified by PATH International or the American Hippotherapy Association to use equine therapy as part of their practice.

According to PATH International, hippotherapy provides three-dimensional movement that mimics human walking. "You could work out every single day, and you're still sore when you get off that horse because you're moving all those different muscles," Bolfing-Volcik says. The movement of the horse provides stimulation to the parts of the body involved in walking, provides a sense of rhythm and gait, and allows for more repetition per

session than using machines in an office or gym setting. Performing regular barn chores and grooming can be healthy exercise for those building dexterity, balance or strength.

Horses are prey animals and



Top: Christopher, 12, performs a 360-degree turn on Stanley during an obstacle course exercise. Left: E.J., 12, sits tall in the saddle during his riding lesson. Far left: Tina Tillert leads Stanley out of his stall for a trail ride.

“HORSES can feel your energy, so when you calm yourself down and then the horse calms down, it’s like looking at yourself in the mirror.”

are sensitive to the emotions of those in their herd, Bolfig-Volcic explains. This makes them an emotional mirror for humans working through anxiety, trauma, addiction or other emotional disturbances. Because horses don’t hide their emotions, people learn to identify and correct their own behaviors to further their relationship with the animal.

Horses also provide motivation for those who are otherwise bored, daunted or disengaged. “Some of these kids are in clinic a lot and they don’t want to do the work, but then they come out here and they’re riding a horse and they don’t even know they’re working,” Bolfig-Volcic says.

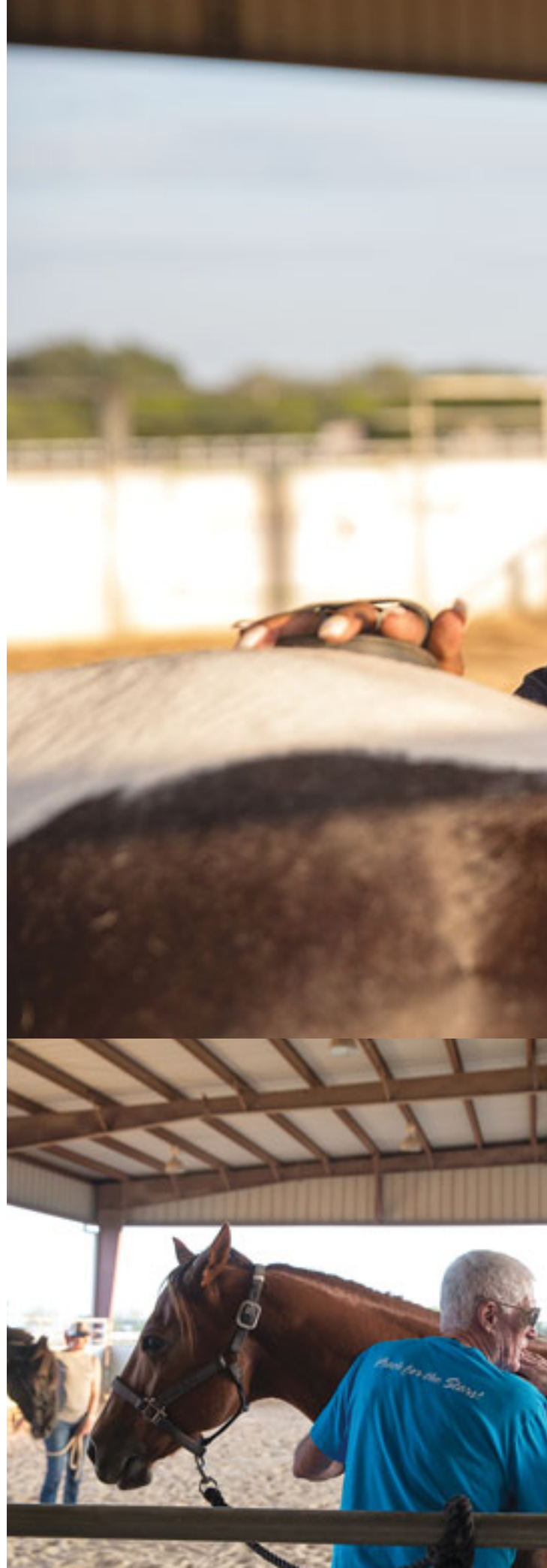
Brooklyn knows that feeling. The 12-year-old was diagnosed with cognitive and speech delays at a young age. “Every day, she went to school, went to her [speech] therapy and then came home. There was no excitement, and she fell into a rut,” explains her mother, LuCretia Denkins. School was a source of depression and struggle for Brooklyn, but she always loved horses. “She’s obsessed and wants me to buy her one,” Denkins says.

An insurance liaison discovered the REACH program and applied for Brooklyn to attend. She was approved for seven lessons last summer. “She has blossomed so much,” Denkins says. “It’s really amazing to see.”

Out in the arena, Brooklyn and the other students check their saddle girth and the length of their stirrups. Unlike E.J., Brooklyn has plenty of strength to tighten the straps. Her struggle is with memory. “If you tell her three things, she can remember one, maybe two,” Denkins says. “But with the horses, she has memorized everything. She knows what it really means to want to learn something.”

The students mount up

Top: “If I have a hard day, I know I have to present to the horses in a calm manner,” says veteran Dalysé Mayo, brushing Jessie. Far right: E.J. trots with the assistance of Jesse Allen, right, and Emily Mosher. Right: Volunteer John Boyd, left, shows new veteran attendee Andy Kaul how to brush a horse.







Christopher, right, leads Stanley from the stable to the arena. REACH students learn to care for horses as well as ride them—grooming the animals and helping with chores around the stable.

from a mobility-assisted platform, the horses patiently waiting for the riders to find their stirrups. They warm up slowly, the side-walkers taking the reins as the kids circle their arms out to the side and make torso twists from the saddle. The movement of the horse adds a level of difficulty for kids who are building muscle and improving mobility.

After a few more exercises, the kids take the reins and lead the horses around cones and barrels and through a short maze made of poles on the ground. Then they perform a 360-degree turn inside a box marked on the dirt. An instructor gives directions and encouragement, but the kids are in charge of these animals more than 10 times their weight.

“There’s no words in the human vocabulary that can explain the emotional and spiritual experience going on between you and that 1,200-pound creature,” says Charity Martin, a barn assistant. “You are trying to trust, and it’s trying to build trust with you.”

Allen agrees. He became involved with REACH as a participant in a post-traumatic stress disorder treatment program through the Waco office of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Allen was a firefighter and paramedic before joining the Army and experienced the effects of PTSD after his service ended.

“I came home from Afghanistan in 2010, and I didn’t care anymore,” Allen says. “Eight years of PTSD therapy, medication, groups, blah, blah, blah. ... You’re never fixed, but this is the one thing that helped me the most.”

Allen was anxious on that first trip to the barn in the summer of 2017. “Horses can feel your energy,” he says, “so when you calm yourself down and then the horse calms down, it’s like looking at yourself in the mirror.” Allen kept coming back and devel-

WEB EXTRAS

► **Read this story on our website to watch a video about veterans in equine therapy.**

oped a special bond with Kit, a paint with a large white blaze down his forehead. When his program ended, Allen asked to continue on as a volunteer, first with veterans, then with kids. Allen began enjoying life again, and other people saw it. “People said they had their old Jesse back,” he says. “My enthusiasm came back, and I’m back to helping people.”

Allen credits the staff but mostly the horses for his transformation. Now he gets to see the same transformation in those he helps. “We have kids in this barn right now who in the last five months have gone from little bratty little kids who are in their shells and shut down or no emotions at all to the sweetest, kindest, hardest-working little people,” Allen says.

Earlier this year, Allen took on a paid position as veteran program director and hosts *Horses for Warriors*, a Monday veterans-only program with unstructured riding time, optional group activities and a catered dinner. “The amount of good and help it does—people don’t realize,” he says. “I’m all about Western medicine as a paramedic. I’m not a naturopathic person, but this is an unused resource that can seriously help people out—kids and veterans.”

Near the end of Brooklyn’s session, the instructor tells the kids it’s time to trot. Brooklyn emits a small yelp and raises her arms with excitement. The students form a line at the end of the arena and one by one get their horses up to speed. The side-walkers jog along with them, and the kids beam as they bounce along in the rising dust.

At the end of class, they dismount, wiping the dust from their jeans and hands. Brooklyn pets the face of Newt, a 10-year-old quarter horse, and gives his cheek a scratch. It’s only been an hour, but the students walk taller and lighter than when they entered the arena. “I haven’t seen her that happy in a long time because school has beaten her down so much,” Denkins says. “She talks all about horses all the way home. She went from not talking at all to nonstop talking, and that’s amazing.”

Learn more about **Julia Robinson** at juliarobinsonphoto.com.

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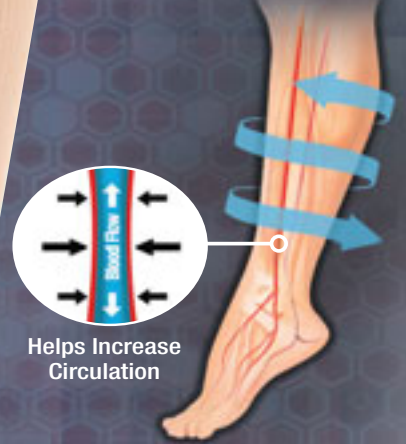
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Scott and Stephanie Little have such a large fleet of innovative vehicles, they could put on an electrifying street parade in their Caldwell County community of Dale.

Scott Little, a physicist and farmer, could drive his Tesla S sedan. Stephanie Little could follow in her Toyota Prius hybrid or their older Nissan Leaf. Other family members could drive the couple's three golf carts, riding mower, dune buggy, small fire wagon with a water tank and itty-bitty go-kart.

Scott converted the mower, buggy, fire wagon and go-kart from gasoline engines to battery power in his tool-filled garage. He keeps all the vehicles charged for work and play on the couple's 90-acre farm.

Vehicles are not the only electric-power items on the farm. Five electrically activated gates provide access to the couple's pastures and fields. Solar panels atop the large carport produce enough power to charge all the vehicles.

Scott Little's show of electrical force is a natural outgrowth of his professional life and his semi-retirement puttering.

"Instead of drilling Alaskan oil fields, we need to be spending our time and energy supporting alternative energy technology," he said. "My solar panels generate as much energy as my Tesla uses, so in effect I'm driving around free,

energy-wise."

He estimates that without the solar power the cost of electricity for his Tesla "fill-up" would be about \$10.

With a physics degree from the University of Texas, Scott Little worked in Austin for several scientific instrumentation firms. Then he turned to exploring new sources of energy and rocket propulsion with Austin-based EarthTech International, a privately funded research organization. He still "dabbles" in some physics experiments for EarthTech on the property the couple bought 10 years ago, he said.

SLOWLY TRENDING

The Littles aren't the only ones sold on electric vehicles in Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area, but they are the vanguard. All-electric vehicles and the necessary public-charging stations to keep them going on lengthy road trips are slowly gaining traction in Bluebonnet's area. However, the numbers are still tiny compared with gasoline- and diesel-powered cars, SUVs, pickups, tractors, mowers and large trucks.

In several counties that Bluebonnet serves

Continued on page 20

An Electrified Life

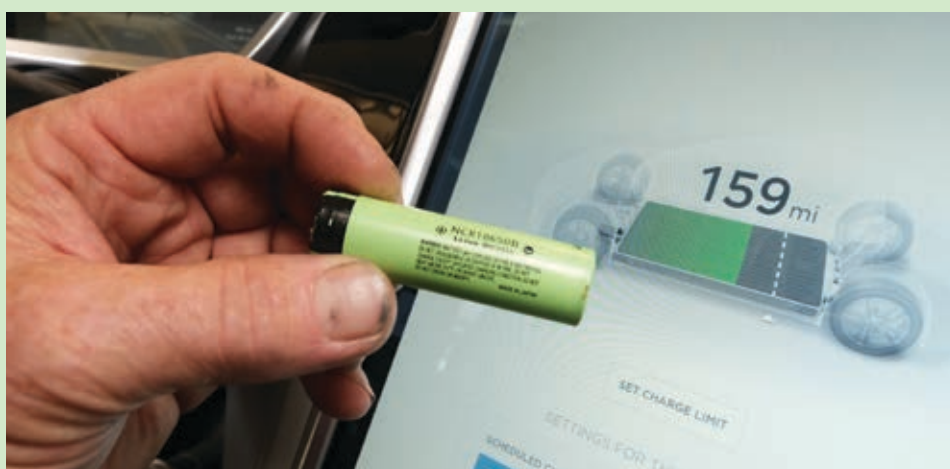
STORY BY ED CROWELL
PHOTOS BY ZACH RYALL



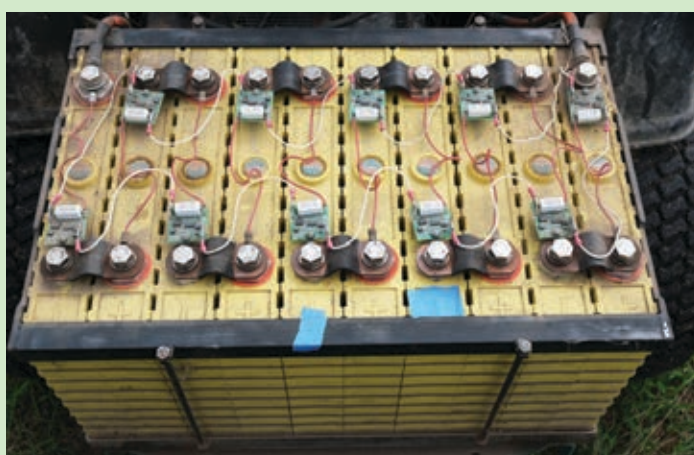
Scott Little has an extensive collection of electric vehicles, some of which he's converted to electric himself. The collection includes a golf cart, dune buggy, go-kart, fire wagon, riding lawn mower, Nissan Leaf and Tesla Model S.



Scott Little's Tesla features a large touch-screen display, background. From an iPhone app, he can start the car, turn on the air conditioner and monitor aspects of the vehicle's health and performance.



Above, Scott Little holds a battery about the size of the 7,000 contained in his Tesla.



Left, the battery array he installed on a riding lawn mower to convert it from gas to electric power.



All work and no play is not Scott Little's style. Though one of his grandchildren is more likely to drive this tiny electric go-kart, Little is able to squeeze his 6-foot-9 frame into it and dash around his acreage.

Continued from page 18

— Bastrop, Caldwell, Burleson, Lee and Washington — only 53 all-electric cars were registered as of early October. Bluebonnet also serves parts of Travis and Williamson counties, which have large urban populations, more commuters and 5,313 registered electric vehicles.

THE RIGHT FIT

The Littles first tried an electric vehicle in 2011 when they bought a Nissan Leaf. Scott then decided to buy a Tesla in 2013 on a visit to Phoenix. "I was at a random mall and I stepped through a random entrance and there right in front of me was a Tesla showroom. It was like a moth to a flame, and a couple of months later I had one delivered to me." Scott, who is 6-foot-9, said, "A game changer for me was when I first sat in the showroom car and I fit."

Some of the Littles' electric vehicles make handy farm equipment. Organic vegetables are grown on the farm, which includes dairy goats, chickens, horses and a donkey. The electric carts carry hay, feed and the picked vegetables as Scott and Stephanie move around their fields, pastures and pens. The

Continued on page 22

Three types of electric car chargers



Any electric car can be charged at home on a standard 120-volt wall outlet for a three-pronged plug that comes with the vehicle. This generally charges a car at a range rate of only 2 to 5 miles per hour of charging, so drivers need to plug in at least overnight for average in-town trips.



The most common level of chargers found at public stations and in homes uses a 240-volt outlet (the same as required for electric ovens and dryers) and special equipment. An electrician can install the outlets in a garage. The chargers that plug into the outlets are called EVSEs (Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment) and cost \$400 to \$800. They offer 10 to 20 miles of range per hour of charging. Some workplaces provide this type of charger for commuting employees.



These chargers are called DC-fast or superchargers and use 480-volt specialized equipment. They generally are found at public stations along interstate and other high-traffic highways and can deliver 60 to 80 miles of range in 20 minutes. Most drivers do not charge their batteries to 100 percent at these stations. The time it takes for a full charge increases considerably once an 80 percent level is reached.



Tesla will soon have 12 electric car charging stations in a parking lot at the San Marcos Premium Outlets. A full charge takes 30-45 minutes.

Places to plug in

In a parking lot at the San Marcos Premium Outlets shopping center, behind the North Face store and across from the pet exercise area, six electric car charging stations stand ready. They are Supercharger stations for Tesla owners needing a fill up of electricity.

With the assistance of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative engineers, the number of stations at the outlet mall along Interstate 35 will double to 12 soon. Sometimes waiting lines of drivers have formed, so Tesla decided to add more charging stations.

Giddings also will soon have Tesla charging stations at the CEFCO convenience store on U.S. 290. The Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort and Spa on Texas 71 between Bastrop and Austin has four chargers in the ChargePoint network that Bluebonnet helped install. The resort charges electric cars about 400 times a year, with each charge taking 3 to 4 hours. A Tesla can use these chargers, but they aren't as fast as its own Supercharger.

Dr. Jose R. Maldonado is happy to have a plug-in stop at the San Marcos outlet mall. The family-practice physician lives in Lakeway, 16 miles west of Austin, but regularly drives his Tesla to his hometown of Laredo to care for patients there. He depends on the charging station in San Marcos that is about 200 miles from Laredo.

"I travel 246 miles door to door," he said. "With the 250-mile range of my batteries, I can't take a chance on not having a recharge."

Maldonado appreciates the break from interstate driving during his 15-minute plug-in stops. If his car's charge was nearly depleted and he wanted a full charge, he would have to spend 30-45 minutes at the mall. But eight Tesla Superchargers are available in Laredo, so he keeps charged there.

Maldonado drives a 2017 Tesla P90 SUV. With four sons, he needs the roominess of the large vehicle. "I had a big Audi Q7, but it was diesel and it was polluting the air. I like being green with the Tesla," he said, noting that he also has solar panels on the roof of his house.

Five EVgo chargers for other electric cars are available several yards



Scott Little installed a charging station in his garage. His Tesla's port blinks green when the charger "nozzle" is plugged into the car.

north of the Tesla chargers in the same San Marcos mall parking lot. Tesla owners can juice up there if they have a plug adapter, but only one of the five EVgo chargers is a fast charger. Tesla Supercharger stations are proprietary and not adaptable for other cars.

EVgo calls itself the largest public, fast-charging network for electric cars in the country, with more than 1,000 fast chargers and 350 lower-speed chargers in 34 states. The company says it provides 100,000 charges a month to electric vehicles.

Pricing at public stations varies from free (site owners or local governments provide the service) to a fee per minute, per kilowatt hour or via a monthly membership. One major station operator in Texas charges 4 to 6 cents per minute.

There are several ways to find charging stations. Chargehub.com offers an interactive map of public charging stations across the country. Click on "pump" icons to see what level of charging is available where, with addresses, type of chargers, pricing and contact information. Plugshare.com has another map site, as does the U.S. Department of Energy through its Alternative Fuels Data Center.

Continued from page 20

Littles donate most of their vegetables to the Bastrop County Emergency Food Pantry.

The couple have five grandchildren who visit often. The electric carts and buggy allow them to roam the property.

Scott's Tesla is sometimes dusty from drives along country roads. He said it is a "marvelous hot rod" that can almost silently accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 4.5 seconds, something he was proud to demonstrate. The four-door sedan has plenty of storage room with a front trunk space under the hood and a trunk in the back. The car is powered by 7,000 batteries, each about 3 inches long. They are spread across the entire floor of the chassis.

Scott remains a fan of the Tesla company and hopes its recent highly publicized management issues won't get in the way of producing new electric vehicles. He's optimistic about Tesla's foray into short-haul trucks with the company's initial order of 40 city delivery



See Scott Little talk about his passion in this video: youtu.be/_Mczshfemlw

trucks for Budweiser in 2019. Development of long-distance electric highway trucks is a bigger hurdle because travel would put a constant draw on the batteries' charge, he said. With start-and-stop city driving, braking produces regenerative power to keep the batteries charged.

Scott's five-year ownership of the Tesla leads him to believe that, "I'll never have to replace the batteries. They still have a wonderful 96 percent of their charging power after 75,000 miles. We didn't fare so well with the Leaf. It has 38,000 miles, but the batteries had to be replaced while still under warranty."

He recharges the cars in his garage on a 240-volt circuit he installed. The Leaf has just a 90-mile range, so it barely can go to Austin and back to Dale on one charge, he said. New models of the Leaf have a range of 151 miles. His Tesla has a 255-mile range that makes longer trips easier. The Littles traveled to Nacogdoches (460 miles round trip) with an overnight charge where they stayed and another charge in Huntsville. "It's pleasant to get out of the car on a long trip for half an hour of charging," Scott Little said.

Electric vehicles worth a look

Here are the best electric vehicles (EVs) sold in the U.S. in 2018, according to Edmunds, the nationwide car pricing and evaluation company. (Starting price includes destination fee.)

AFFORDABLE MODELS



Chevrolet Bolt

Starting price: \$37,495
EV range: 238 miles



Nissan Leaf

Starting price: \$30,875
EV range: 151 miles



Hyundai Ioniq Electric

Starting price: \$30,385
EV range: 124 miles



Kia Soul EV

Starting price: \$34,845
EV range: 111 miles

LUXURY MODELS



BMW i3

Starting price: \$45,445
EV range: 114 miles



Tesla Model S

Starting price: \$75,700
EV range: 249 miles



Tesla Model 3

Starting price: \$50,200
EV range: 310 miles



Tesla Model X (SUV)

Starting price: \$80,700
EV range: 238 miles



Scott Little demonstrates the kind of information that he can view on the large touch-screen display in his Tesla. It includes a web browser and can be split to show maps and vehicle performance.

Electric cars: to buy or not to buy?

It's not the higher price tags that usually hold back potential electric car buyers — state and federal incentives can effectively lower the cost by \$10,000. “Range anxiety” may cause hesitancy. When all-electric cars first hit showrooms several years ago, consumers worried about how far they could drive before the cars have to be recharged.

Now that range-per-charge has increased on most electric models, that anxiety is lessening. Also, the presence of plentiful public charging stations in shopping areas, libraries, workplaces and hotels in larger cities has reduced the worries of traveling afar.

With development of more reliable and more powerful battery packs, nearly every major car manufacturer offers an electric model. Another improvement to electric cars in recent years has been how quickly they accelerate. With better batteries and without the weight of a gasoline motor, some of these cars are zippier than similar

gasoline models on the road.

Hybrids, which get good mileage using an electric-drive motor at slow speeds before a gasoline motor takes over, have continued to sell well.

Educating car buyers about all these points is the mission of Plug-in Texas, an Austin-based advocacy coalition. The group is supported by General Motors, Ford and Toyota, the Environmental Defense Fund and other organizations, and utility companies CenterPoint Energy, Luminant and TXU Energy.

The cost of batteries for carmakers is going down, said Russ Keene, who handles public relations for Plug-In Texas. That brings lower pricing, increased driving range with battery improvements and a widening of production across electric and hybrid lines.

He compares pricing differences within Chevrolet's current lineup of small cars:

The hybrid Volt is priced at \$33,220 while the all-electric Bolt, introduced in 2017, is

\$36,620. The gas-only Cruze, a comparable four-door small car, is \$16,975. But that difference can be somewhat offset by the \$10,000 in federal and state incentive programs available for the Volt and Bolt, Keene said.

Buyers appreciate being able to make longer trips. When the Nissan Leaf, for example, debuted in 2010, it had just under a 100-mile range. The 2018 model can go more than 150 miles between charges. The new Chevrolet Bolt will go 276 miles on a full battery.

The typical Texas driver who commutes from home to work and back travels about 40 miles a day, Keene said.

The Bloomberg NEF (New Energy Finance) research company “predicts that by 2040 half of all cars sold in America will be electric,” Keene said. “Most people keep cars for 10 years, so it will take some time for people to cycle into new cars.”

State and federal incentives for electric car buyers

The state of Texas began offering incentives for all-electric and plug-in hybrid car buyers in 2013. The Legislature passed a revised program effective September 2018.

It offers a \$2,500 after-purchase rebate to buyers who apply for the program administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. The deal ends May 31, 2019, or earlier if the maximum 2,000 rebates are awarded.

New cars purchased or leased from Texas dealers for personal use are eligible, but not fleet vehicles (used cars from rental agencies, govern-

ments, dealerships or other similar owners).

Tesla buyers are not eligible for the program because those cars are not directly sold to customers by dealerships franchised in the state. After Teslas are viewed at the company's “galleries” in Texas, buyers order the cars online and they are shipped to Texas with a California registration.

A federal tax credit of \$2,500 to \$7,500 also is available to purchasers of new electric vehicles in every state. The amount is based on each vehicle's battery capacity and the gross vehicle weight rating. Dealers can help buyers calculate the available tax credit.

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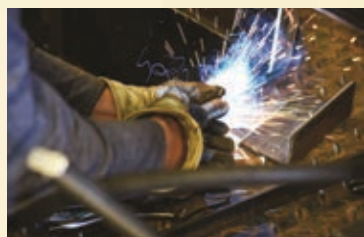
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Planning for a trade or technical career?

Graduating high school seniors aspiring to become welders, diesel mechanics, chefs, nurses and more are encouraged to apply for one of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's trade and technical scholarships.

Co-op board seats up for election in 2019

Bluebonnet members interested in serving on the co-op's Board of Directors can run for one of four seats up for election during Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting for members on May 14, 2019.

Candidates can be nominated either by presenting an application for nomination with at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or by paying a \$250 filing fee in certified funds.

Bluebonnet's Board has 11 directors who serve staggered three-year terms. The four seats up for election in 2019 are from District 1, Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties; District 3, Bastrop County; District 5, Burlinson County; and District 7, Washington County.

To run for the Board, candidates must be at least 21 years old, a co-op member in good standing, agree to a background check and meet other qualifications outlined in Bluebonnet's bylaws, which are available at bluebonnet.coop. Click on the About tab, then Leadership in the drop down bar and then click on the Becoming a Director link.

Application for nomination forms are available at that same link and at the co-op's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

All candidates' petitions, filing fees and application for nomination forms must be submitted at any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 13, 2019. For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.

Bluebonnet is honored to celebrate 80 years

Get ready to take a trip back in time! Starting in January, we'll run a yearlong series of articles to commemorate Bluebonnet's 80th year of service. The first article will take a look at life in 1939. Have a story to share? Send it to lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop or Lisa Ogle, c/o Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 729, Bastrop, TX 78602.



OFFICE CLOSING

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 24-25 in observance of Christmas and Jan. 1 for New Year's Day. Report outages at 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app. Pay your bill any time online, on our mobile app or by calling member services at 800-842-7708.

MAGAZINE QUESTIONS?

Contact Lisa Ogle at 512-332-7968 or email lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.

BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet's Board of Directors will meet at 1 p.m. Dec. 18 at Bluebonnet's Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop.

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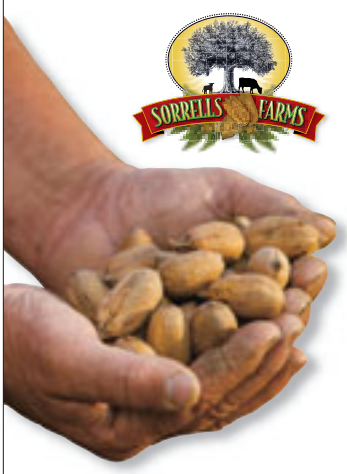
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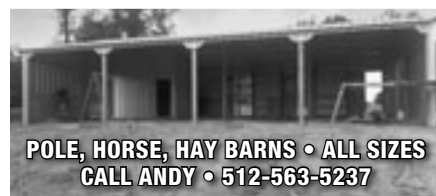
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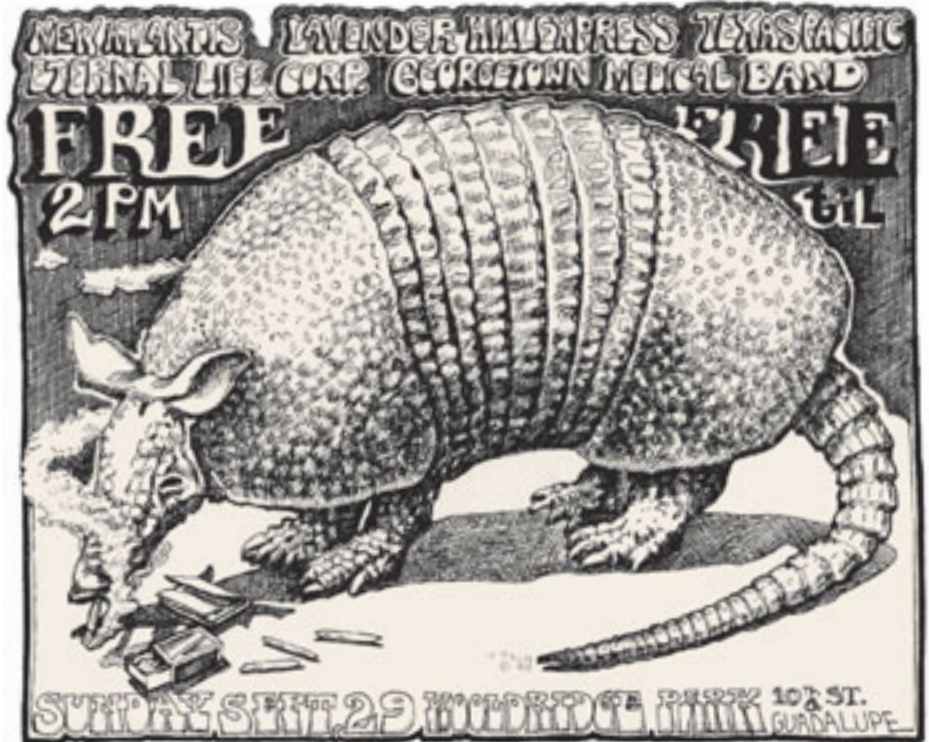
Armadillo World Headquarters: from incubator to Austin music legacy

EXCERPT BY EDDIE WILSON
WITH JESSE SUBLETT

DURING ITS REMARKABLE AND UNLIKELY 10-year run, the Armadillo helped nurture and grow an Austin music scene, spreading its gospel around the world. In the 35 years since, the reputation of Austin as a music city has experienced exponential growth, and no small part of that is due to the work we did at Armadillo World Headquarters. Today, Austin is renowned for having an astounding abundance of resident musicians, venues, studios and other essential organs for a thriving music scene infrastructure, along with music festivals that are the envy of the world.

At the Armadillo, we were heavily involved in video production and had been putting performances on cablevision ever since the place opened. In fact, we produced a show called the *Armadillo Country Music Review* in partnership with KLRU, then KLRN, in July 1973 and were involved in various aspects of developing a music series when the TV station decided to produce its own show. Some of my cohort remained involved for a time, even after that show was produced and picked up in 1975 as a series under the name *Austin City Limits*.

In my opinion, AWHQ was quite simply the best music hall in the country—maybe even the whole world. Thousands of musicians played there: Willie Nelson, Frank Zappa, Bruce Springsteen, Taj Mahal, AC/DC, Charlie Daniels, the Ramones, Roy Buchanan and Bette Midler, to name a random few. The interesting thing is that so many of them kept coming back. They loved the place: the acoustics, the people who worked there, the huge nachos and other scrumptious food we served them, and the way the Armadillo



made them feel a part of something bigger.

Another secret to our tenacity might have been our affinity for the lowly nine-banded armadillo. We named the place Armadillo World Headquarters primarily because the anachronistic armored mammal had already been established by Jim Franklin as the icon of the Texas hippies and, as such, we identified with the armadillo for spiritual as well as artistic reasons.

Artists at the University of Texas humor magazine the *Ranger* first began incorporating armadillo images in satirical pieces in the early sixties. Frank Erwin—the head of the UT Board of Regents who was held in special disdain by our community—reacted as if the snide references to the mammal were evidence of some sort of leftist plot or cult, a reaction that naturally inspired even greater demand for armadillo imagery and *Dasyus novemcinctus* itself.

In the late sixties, artists Gilbert Shelton and Jim Franklin pioneered a new visual style and vocabulary for the under-

One of Jim Franklin's iconic posters.

ground scene. Franklin had taken over from Gilbert at the Vulcan Gas Company. Armadillo images figured prominently in their handbills and other work created to promote the venue. Gilbert departed for San Francisco, and the Vulcan folded in 1970, but Franklin dug in his heels in Austin and brought the emerging visual vocabulary and attitude to the Armadillo on day one.

Music historians have also credited the Armadillo with being the place where two previously clashing groups of people—red-necks and hippies—found themselves under the same roof, enjoying a new blend of country music and rock, along with cold beer and cheap pot. The movement was already underway before Willie Nelson played AWHQ, but once he did, he joined our armored mammalian mascot as another icon of the cultural melting pot.

Excerpted from *Armadillo World Headquarters* by Eddie Wilson with Jesse Sublett. Published in 2017 by TSSI Publishing and distributed by University of Texas Press.

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Quick and Easy Holiday Appetizers

HOLIDAYS ARE A TIME OF ABUNDANCE—too much of just about everything except time. As much as I love a cooking project (like rolling out gingerbread cookies or smoking a ham), I'm grateful for timesaving recipes that create something delicious in a flash. I love to kick off a meal with Creamy Kale Toasts, a recipe from my latest cookbook, *Any Night Grilling*. The kale is charred on the grill and then stirred into a luscious spread. The smoky flavor intensifies overnight, so you can make the spread in advance and serve it with grilled bread, whole-grain crackers or crudité—*and a cup of cheer.*

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Creamy Kale Toasts

- 1 cup Greek yogurt
 - 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
 - 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
 - 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
 - Pinch of red pepper flakes
 - Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
 - ½ cup grated aged goat cheese (such as Cypress Grove Midnight Moon)
 - 1 bunch (12 ounces) lacinato kale
 - 8 thick slices levain or other rustic Italian bread
 - 1 clove garlic, halved lengthwise
- Flaky salt

1. Prepare a charcoal grill for two-zone cooking and build a medium fire, or heat a gas grill to medium-high. Carefully wipe the preheated grill grates with a lightly oiled paper towel. Using a grill brush, scrape the grill grates clean, then carefully wipe with a lightly oiled towel again.
2. In a large bowl, combine the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32



Recipes

Quick and Easy Holiday Appetizers



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

PATTI GRAFF | MEDINA EC

Use a retro pantry staple—cheese spread—to create this savory baked snack. “My mom included this in a recipe book she compiled and gave to me when I got married 37 years ago,” Graff says. “It’s always a favorite, especially at our annual Christmas brunch.” Assemble the puffs in advance and freeze so you can bake as many as you need at a moment’s notice.

Olive Cheese Puffs

- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 1½ cups flour
- 2 jars (5 ounces each) cheese spread
- 50 pitted olives (black olives, manzanillo or a combination)

1. Using a wooden spoon, combine the butter, flour and cheese spread in a mixing bowl (or use cold butter and combine the ingredients in a food processor). When dough is smooth and has a uniform texture, form into 1-inch balls. Flatten each ball and shape the dough around an olive. Place the dough-covered olive on a waxed paper-lined baking sheet. Repeat with remaining dough and olives, then freeze.

Once frozen, place the olives in a sealable plastic bag and store in freezer up to 2 months.

2. To bake, heat oven to 450 degrees. Place the olives on a rimmed baking sheet, spacing them 1 inch apart, and bake 15–20 minutes, until golden and slightly brown on the bottom. Serve the olives warm or at room temperature. ▶ Makes 50 olive cheese puffs.



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED, YOU'LL WIN A TCP APRON!

\$100 Recipe Contest

May’s recipe contest topic is **Layer Cakes**. What’s the special occasion this month—Mom, bridal shower, graduation? Share the cake that gets rave reviews at your celebrations. The deadline is **December 10**.

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.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

yogurt with the olive oil, lemon juice, zest and pepper flakes. Season with kosher salt and pepper, then fold in the cheese.

3. Working in batches, grill the kale leaves perpendicular to the grates so they won’t fall through. Cook over direct heat until lightly charred, 1–2 minutes on each side. Transfer to a cutting board and cool slightly. Use a knife to trim the thick ribs from each leaf, then finely chop the kale leaves. Fold into the yogurt mixture.

4. Grill the bread over direct heat until charred, about a minute on each side. While still warm, rub one side of each toast with the cut side of the garlic. Top each toast with a layer of the creamy kale and arrange the toasts on a platter. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with flaky salt. ▶ Makes 8 toasts, with leftover spread.

Reprinted from *Any Night Grilling* (Ten Speed Press, 2018)

Two-Ingredient Hummus

CHRISTINA LANE | GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

What could be easier than a delicious dip that calls for only two ingredients? Lane’s creamy, satisfying purée pairs beautifully with pita chips, grilled flatbread or crudités. For the best flavor, taste the mixture after blending and add salt or olive oil as desired.

- 1 can (15 ounces) chickpeas, drained and rinsed
 - 1 jar (6 ounces) marinated artichoke hearts, undrained
- Pita chips, for serving

1. Combine the chickpeas and artichoke in food processor and purée until smooth. Serve with pita chips, if desired. Leftovers can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. ▶ Makes about 2½ cups.

COOK’S TIP This speedy dip also can be made using canned white beans instead of chickpeas.

Easy Gougères

KIMBERLY MARX | PEDERNALES EC

Gougères are a classic French appetizer made by combining choux pastry with a strongly flavored grated cheese, such as Gruyère, Emmenthal or aged cheddar. They are delicious on their own, crispy and warm from the oven or at room temperature, and with any number of fillings.

- ½ cup whole milk
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup flour
- 5 eggs, room temperature
- 1½ cups (about 6 ounces) coarsely grated aged cheese (such as Gruyère, Asiago or sharp cheddar)

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line two baking sheets with silicone baking mats or parchment.

2. Combine the milk, water, butter and salt in a heavy-bottomed medium saucepan over high heat. Whisking constantly, bring the mixture to a rapid boil, then add flour. Lower the heat to medium-low and immediately stir vigorously with a wooden spoon or heavy whisk. The dough will come together, and a light crust will form on the bottom of the pan. Continue stirring another 1–2 minutes to dry dough (at this point it should be very smooth).

3. Turn the dough into a stand mixer (or a large bowl if you're using a hand mixer or wooden spoon). Allow the dough to sit 1–2 minutes, then add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition, until the dough is thick and shiny. Make sure each egg is completely mixed in before adding the next. (The dough may separate until the last egg is incorporated.) Beat in the grated cheese, then spoon out immediately.

4. Drop tablespoonfuls of dough onto the prepared baking sheets, leaving a 2-inch space between each. Place baking sheets into oven, immediately reducing temperature to 375 degrees, and bake 12 minutes. Rotate the pans from front to back and top to bottom, and continue baking until the gougères are golden, firm and puffed, another 12–15 minutes. Serve warm or transfer the pans to racks to cool. ▶ Makes about 36 gougères.

COOK'S TIP To prepare them in advance, freeze mounds of the unbaked pastry on a baking sheet. When they're solid, lift off sheet and

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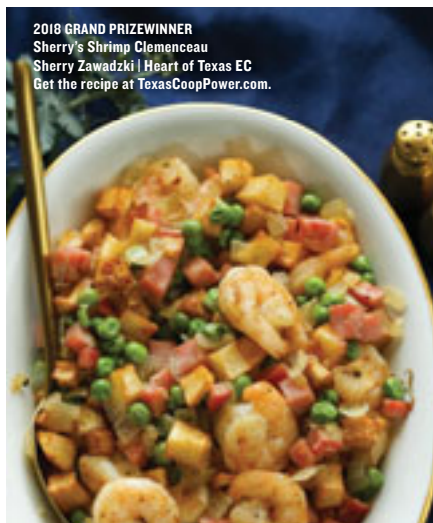
Slather a round of brie with your favorite jelly or jam, wrap with thawed puff pastry and bake at 400 degrees until golden brown.

Top slices of toasted baguette with an herbed cheese spread and cherry tomato halves.

Toss pecans with melted butter, Worcestershire sauce and chopped fresh rosemary, then toast in a 350-degree oven 7–8 minutes, until fragrant.

Drizzle a wedge of blue cheese with honey and serve with toasted walnuts and crackers. —PD

freeze in sealable plastic bags. (Follow the baking instructions, allowing a few more minutes in the oven.) Leftover baked puffs can be stored at room temperature overnight and reheated in a 350-degree oven, or they can be frozen and reheated before serving.



2018 GRAND PRIZEWINNER
Sherry's Shrimp Clemenceau
Sherry Zawadzki | Heart of Texas EC
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▲ **TWILLA MALKERSON**, Farmers EC: Malkerson's calf on a freezing day in Emory.

High Contrast

THIS MONTH, OUR READERS TAKE RISKS with light and shadow and play with every color under the sun to deliver some fantastic shots. **GRACE ARSIAGA**

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

▶ **CHARLES CARLSON**, Bandera EC: Cypress tree trunks and roots reflected on the Frio River at Concan.



▲ **THERESA MCKEE**, Fannin County EC: An old gas station painted in funky colors and abandoned under the hot Texas sun.



▲ **JON HOBSON**, Houston County EC: "My son, Isaac, and his friend Sean playing some basketball after a rain shower in Grapeland."



UPCOMING CONTESTS

APRIL MILES AND MILES OF TEXAS DUE DECEMBER 10

MAY ON THE RANCH DUE JANUARY 10

JUNE FEEDIN' TIME DUE FEBRUARY 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.

◀ **SHAHBANU MALAK**, CoServ: "Spotted in my garden one fine morning."

Pick of the Month Sanger High Craft Show

Sanger December 8
(940) 206-0007

The craft show, which goes all day at Sanger High School, includes more than 140 booths featuring unique gifts, Christmas decor, home-made soaps, candles, jewelry and more. The sale benefits the Sanger FFA, Sanger FFA Alumni & Friends and area food banks. Find out more on the event's Facebook page.



ORNAMENT: TANCHES | DREAMTIME.COM. BIRD: DUCKS1000 | DREAMTIME.COM. WINE: S PHOTO | DREAMTIME.COM

December

7

Edinburg Night of Lights, (956) 383-4974, edinburg.com

Victoria [7-8] Bethlehem Village, (361) 573-2232, gracelutheran-tx.org/bethlehem-village

Burnet [7-9, 14-16] Main Street Bethlehem, (512) 756-4481, fbcburnet.org

Ennis [7-8, 14-16, 21-22] *Where's Santa?*, (972) 878-5126, theatrerocks.com

8

Bastrop Holiday Homes Tour, (512) 303-0057, bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bonham Holiday Open House, (903) 583-5558

Bulverde Living Christmas Drive Though Presentation, (830) 980-2813, redroofchurch.org

Chappell Hill Garden Club Christmas Home Tour, (713) 562-6191, chappellhillgardenclub.com

Garrison Christmas on the Square, (936) 347-2316



December 8
McKinney
Second Saturday
Bird Walk

Johnson City Christmas Through the Years in LBJ Country, (830) 868-7128, nps.gov/lyjo

McGregor Lighted Christmas Parade, (254) 840-2292, mcgregorfoundersday.com

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McKinney Second Saturday Bird Walk, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

Port Arthur Lighted Cultural Holiday Parade, (409) 983-8105, portarthurtx.gov

Weslaco Santa Dash and Lighted Christmas Parade, (956) 968-2102, weslaco.com

Vernon Christmas on the Western Trail, (940) 553-3766

Washington Christmas on the Brazos, (936) 878-2214, wheretexasbecametexas.org

Brenham [8-9] Holiday Crystal Wine Trail, (979) 836-3696, visitbrenhamtexas.com

Tyler [8-9] Interscholastic Equestrian Association Hunt Seat Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

13

Levelland Fa La La Fun for the Ladies, (806) 894-3157, levelland.com

Palo Pinto Frontier Christmas, (940) 659-3573, palopintohistory.com

14

Fredericksburg [14-15] The Christmas Journey, (830) 997-2069, bethanyfredericksburg.com

San Angelo [14-16] *The Nutcracker*, (325) 284-3825, sanangelopac.org

15

Kilgore Jingle All the Way, (903) 988-4117, kilgoremainstreet.com



December 8-9
Brenham
Holiday Crystal
Wine Trail

Livingston A Polk County Christmas Show, (936) 933-5852, polkcountycommercecenter.com

16

Stonewall LBJ Tree Lighting, (830) 644-2252, tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/lyndon-b-johnson

18

Crockett The Texas Tenors, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

January

5

Bonham Sam Rayburn Day, (903) 583-5558, thc.texas.gov/historic-sites

Kerrville The Fabulous 50s: Romance to Rock 'n' Roll, (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

Submit Your Event!

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

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South Texas Riches

Daytrip includes Spanish colonial history, a salt lake and aloe galore

BY EILEEN MATTEI

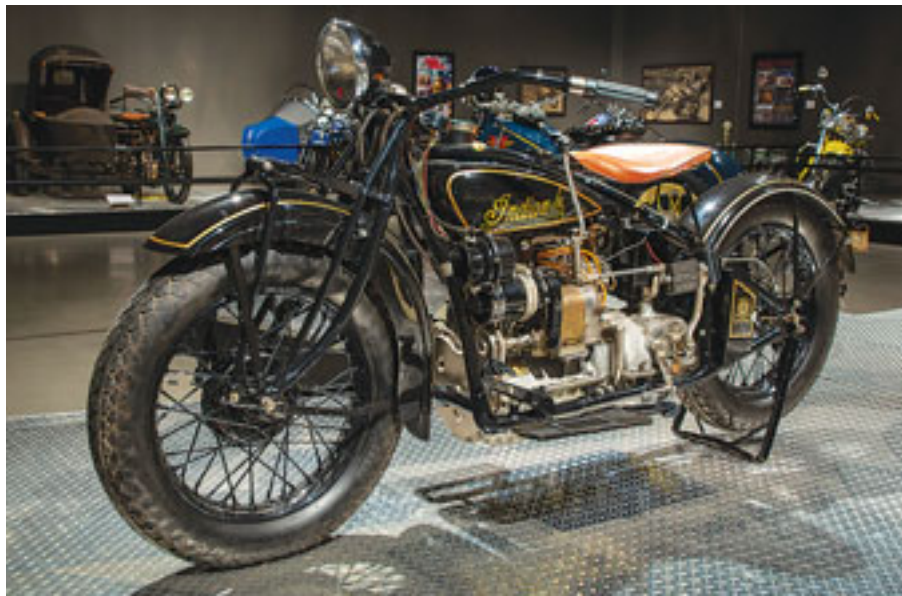
DRIVING FROM EDINBURG, THE HIDALGO County seat in the southern tip of Texas, east to Raymondville, the seat of adjacent Willacy County, requires less than an hour, but the transition covers more than just highway miles. Edinburg bustles with the campus of the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley at its heart, while the agricultural community of Raymondville invites you to savor nature and history.

When I spot Martin Aparicio, 14, in the **Museum of South Texas History** in Edinburg, he is wearing replicas of a Spanish helmet and breastplate from the 1600s. His aunt, Veronica Paz, and her daughters critique his fashion sense as he dons a leather tricorne hat and a long, black leather vest in the Spanish colonial hands-on corner. “A hands-on museum like this has more of an impact,” says Paz, who brought the teenagers from Chicago.

The museum promises a stroll through 500 years of South Texas history. I start in the late 1700s and wander through a colonial town inspecting saddles and a beehive stone oven. A few steps and a few decades later, I climb on board a Rio Grande steamboat to the sound of creaking barrels and the splash of a paddle wheel. Still later, I hear lonesome cowboy songs that herald chuck wagons and vaqueros. With World War II approaching, I peer through a German submarine’s periscope trained on a freighter in the Gulf of Mexico.

I leave one museum and head for the **South Texas Motorcycle Museum**, where highly polished motorcycles with sensuously curved fenders preen in spotlights that reflect off diamond-plate flooring and gleaming chrome. Eighty vintage bikes give the impression of sculptural forms.

The majority of the bikes (and the earliest ones do resemble bicycles) are Indians and Harley-Davidsons. A 1913 Indian



A 1931 Indian Four is one of about 80 vintage motorcycles at the South Texas Motorcycle Museum in Edinburg.

racing motorcycle, made without brakes or a transmission, sits near a gorgeous red 1947 Indian Chief, complete with sidecar. The oldest is a 1903 Harley, and the most recognizable may be a Captain America Chopper, a replica of the customized Harley in *Easy Rider*.

“All of them run,” says caretaker Dave Garcia, who owns the motorcycle shop next door.

I head north on Interstate 69C, then drive 4 miles on Texas Highway 186 to **La Sal del Rey**, the smallest of three hypersaline lakes in the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. A wide gravel path leads a half-mile north to the 530-acre lake, which sparkles like a snowy field.

Since the 1500s, Native Americans, Spanish explorers, ranchers and soldiers have traveled to this deep salt dome for salt to preserve meat and hides. Sandhill cranes and long-billed curlews winter here.

As I walk along the shoreline, dry salt crunches underfoot. Wildlife obviously traipse across the salt-topped mud: Huge nilgai tracks and dainty sharp javelina and bobcat prints are visible. I scoop out a nil-

gai hoofprint and come up with a handful of salt flakes.

At the **Willacy County Historical Museum**, Elva Sayas guides me to Mifflin Kenedy’s La Parra Ranch exhibit. I gawk at the former Rio Grande riverboat captain’s 30-pound bulletproof vest. The 1554 Espiritu Santo shipwreck—the oldest in the U.S., which formed here when the Santo sank along with two Spanish galleons during a storm—resulted in a treasure trove of coins, jewelry and artifacts recovered from county beaches, now displayed here.

I drive on FM 491 to **Hilltop Gardens**, a historical botanical sanctuary where aloe vera has been grown commercially since 1939. Hilltop includes more than 200 species of aloes displayed in climbing, blooming and spiky exuberance. The sensory garden invites you to touch sandpapery anacua leaves, smell jasmine and citronella, and watch butterflies. The healing garden with its reflecting pool, herbs and tropical birds encourages relaxation and reflection on the Valley landscape.

Eileen Mattei, a Nueces EC member, is a Texas master naturalist in Harlingen.

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