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FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

SEPTEMBER 2022

Roots Revival

Rural entrepreneurs
are following in their
families' footsteps

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18





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A new generation of Menard County entrepreneurs discovers their rural roots run deep.

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Photos by Scott Van Osdol*

Going Nowhere Fast

The Big Bend Open Road Race brings drivers together for legal high-speed thrills.

*By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

ON THE COVER

Logan Bell and Geer Gillespie feed goats grass freshly picked from their fields at Low Gear Farmstead.

Photo by Scott Van Osdol

ABOVE

Mike Black of Garland tears through the desert in his 2022 Corvette en route to victory.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

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Guadalupe Mountains Landmark

ONE HUNDRED YEARS after Yellowstone became America’s first national park, the National Park Service established Guadalupe Mountains National Park on September 30, 1972.

The park, on the New Mexico border and about 100 miles east of El Paso, includes Texas’ four highest peaks and El Capitan, a 1,000-foot-high limestone cliff.

Most of the park’s 76,293 acres were used to ranch Angora goats in the production of mohair a century ago.



“That’s the thing about books. They let you travel without moving your feet.”

— JHUMPA LAHIRI

Being Prepared

Your electric cooperative is part of your community and wants you to stay safe during severe weather, which can strike with little notice. This month—National Preparedness Month—build an emergency kit to stay ready. Make sure your kit includes:

Enough food and water to last several days.

Medication, face masks and disinfectant for everyone in your household.

Pet supplies.

To learn more and bolster your family’s preparedness, visit ready.gov/kit.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE RURAL LIFE IS ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our July prompt: **I feel patriotic when ...**

A new American tells me how happy she is to be here.

RYAN REED
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
VAN ALSTYNE

I walk into any VA clinic or hospital. Patriotic and humbled.

TERRI ALLEN
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
PALO PINTO COUNTY

My 91-year-old mom tells how her father kissed the ground as soon as he got off the boat at Ellis Island in 1907.

STELLA JOSEPHINE
BANDERA EC
BANDERA

To see more responses, read Currents online.

September 1

National No Rhyme (Nor Reason) Day

You might ponder these words generally considered unrhymable: month, ninth, orange, silver and woman.



Boomtowns

Texas' rural population grew 2.4% between 2010 and 2020, and the state's urban population grew 18.4% over that period, according to census data compiled by the Pew Research Center. The second-fastest-growing metro area in the country was Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown, which grew by 33% to nearly 2.3 million people. The Villages in Florida was No. 1.



Hold on to Your Hat

WIND GENERATION in the U.S. hit a milestone March 29, when wind turbines produced more electricity than coal and nuclear plants. Natural gas is still the largest source of electricity generation in the country.

Contests and More

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RECOMMENDED READING
September is National Library Card Sign-Up Month, a good time to revisit *Literary Fortunes*, from January 2021, which recounts the early 20th-century proliferation of Carnegie libraries in Texas.



JULIA ROBINSON

Prized Fibers

“Picking cotton was the hardest job I’ve ever done. I did get to ride with my dad to the cotton gin, though—a real treat.”

JUDITH FONTENOT
GUADALUPE VALLEY EC
NEW BRAUNFELS

Bridge Gaps

Please note that some of the information is erroneous [*Colorado’s Texas Bridge*, July 2022]. Mike Bandera has not been the general manager since 2016. Also, the Royal Gorge Bridge & Park has been owned by Cañon City since 1906, when the federal government deeded the land to the city. The city has leased out the management of the bridge and park to a concessionaire, which just so happens to be based in Dallas.

Dona Webb
Cañon City, Colorado

You have such a talent for bringing history alive [*Doctor’s Orders*, June 2022]. Love your amazing ability to find such interesting subjects and your writing.

JO DAY COYLE
VIA FACEBOOK

On Top of the World

Our son and his girlfriend climbed to the top of Guadalupe Peak a couple of years ago [*Can’t Top This*, July 2022]. While at the top, our son dropped to one knee and asked his girlfriend to be his wife. She stated later, “I went up a girlfriend and came down a fiancé.”

Karen Morley
MidSouth EC
Huntsville



COURTESY KAREN MORLEY

Juneteenth Coverage

I look forward to receiving my *Texas Co-op Power* each month. I was particularly anticipating the June issue because I knew there would be wonderfully educational articles about Juneteenth. I was extremely disappointed to see not even one article focused on this important occurrence in our Texas history.

Merelyn Johnson
Navasota Valley EC
Centerville

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

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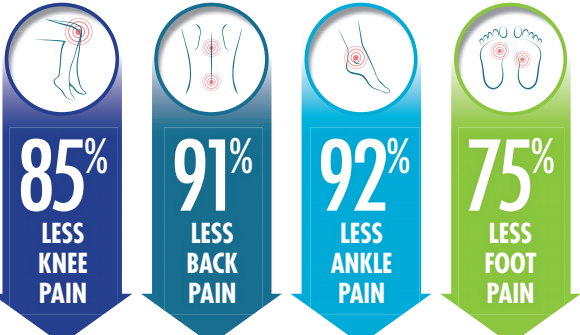
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Connecting With the Land

A new generation
of entrepreneurs
in Menard County
learns their rural
roots run deep



Sarah Johanson's youngest daughter, June, feeds goats at Johanson Farm, which produces seasonal produce, baked goods and roasted coffee.

farmhouse, the couple stopped for a meal at the Lazy Ladle Cafe in downtown Menard, where Sarah Johanson's mom worked. "She told us we had to meet Sarah and Luke," Bell says.

Bell looked up Sarah Johanson on Facebook, and they started chatting, but it wasn't until Johanson started digging through old photo albums that she discovered that she and Bell shared more than a budding friendship.

When Sarah and Luke Johanson inherited her family's homestead outside Menard about five years ago, they had no idea how they were going to fit in.

The couple met in Los Angeles while pursuing acting careers, and they were living in Massachusetts when they started the process of moving to rural Texas.

"We thought, 'We're moving back there, but how are we going to survive there?'" Sarah Johanson says. Menard—a town of about 1,500—is an hour southeast of San Angelo.

Johanson's grandfather had been the football announcer for Menard High School for 30 years, but, she says, "we're not the normal type of folks who live here."

Logan Bell had a similar thought. Bell's family roots go way back in Menard, but the Odessa native lived on farms in Italy and England after college before settling in Fort Worth.

During Bell's childhood, the Bell family would visit Menard a few times a year to shear sheep that roamed the family land. When Bell's mom inherited the property in the mid-2010s, Bell and partner Geer Gillespie decided to turn their dream of becoming homesteaders into a reality.

"Before we moved here, we thought we would be the only people like this out here," Bell says. "We were prepared to be the isolated weirdos."

But Menard is a small town with a long memory. And these transplants and others came to discover their roots are more intertwined than they expected.

Not long after Bell and Gillespie moved into a dilapidated

The subjects in one photo were a group of close-knit friends in Menard who called themselves the Angels. Among them were Zella Williamson and Winnie Lois Wilkerson, Johanson's grandmother and Bell's great-aunt.

"Sarah sent me that photo and said, 'Is that person related to you?' I was like, 'oh, oh, oh,'" Bell says. "We knew we had a connection, but then we realized we were sort of related."

As it turns out, Johanson and Bell aren't the only descendants of the Angels who have returned home to Menard.

Hannah Beall's grandmother, Betto, was also part of the group that lived in Menard when it was a bustling livestock town in the 1940s and '50s.

Beall was born in Austin and moved back to her mother's hometown while she was in elementary school. She made friends but never quite lost that outsider-looking-in perspective. Now she works for an Austin nonprofit and runs her own preserved foods business called Han Can.

Beall makes big batches of the preserves and delivers them to customers in Menard, a place she remembers didn't have much fresh produce when she was a kid.

"I always feel closely connected to my ancestors when I'm in Menard," she says. "But it's more of a longing to have known them more or better."

One of the first products Beall sold was her great-great-grandmother's chowchow, a savory mix of green tomatoes, peppers and cabbage. "Canning is a lost art these days," Beall says. "We don't have a lot of family traditions and passed-down recipes, so Oma's chowchow felt like such gold."

For Beall and others in Menard, it's not about recreating what once was. It's about imagining something new that is connected to what came before.

"Instead of moping that I don't have any culture, I get to start new traditions and fill in these gaps in the history where I can, even if I have to make it up," Beall says.

OPPOSITE From left, Menard farmers Sarah Johanson, Logan Bell and Amie Prest gather in the pecan grove at Bell's Low Gear Farmstead. INSET Close-knit friends who called themselves the Angels have descendants who have returned to Menard and formed friendships of their own.



“You go out into the world and gather seeds of knowledge from all over and then you get to decide where to plant them.”

Menard County’s current generation of food producers used to gather on Saturdays for a small farmers market in Menard, but since the pandemic started, most of the local vendors have been selling at the year-round farmers market in Junction, about 30 minutes south.

One of the biggest hits at the market is Texas Scratch Kitchen, the Prest family’s cottage baking business. Amie and Joe Prest and their five children have lived in Menard for nearly a decade after starting their family in Germany and England, where Joe is from. Amie grew up in Menard—her ancestors were among the founding families—and, like Bell and Johanson, didn’t have plans on returning, but that changed after visiting her grandmother in 2011.

“When a piece of heritage has been in your family for that long, it’s both a blessing and a curse,” says Amie, a member of Southwest Texas Electric Cooperative. “There comes a time when you have to commit: Are you going to come back, or are you going to stay away?”

They settled on a piece of land along the San Saba River, and their passion for European-style baking continued after they moved to Texas. A few years ago, they decided to turn it into a family business, making macarons, tarts and tiramisu to sell at the market.

“You go out into the world and gather seeds of knowledge from all over and then you get to decide where to plant them,” Amie says.

Menard County, with its persistent drought and extreme temperature swings, isn’t ideal for vegetable farming, but each of the not-so-newcomers has found their own way to make it.

At Low Gear Farmstead, Bell and Gillespie have focused on raising goats, chickens, ducks and turkeys, mostly for their own use, but their biggest source of revenue has come from a high-tech solution to a rural issue: Hipcamp, a website that connects landowners with people who want to camp.

Since 2017 the couple has hosted hundreds of campers in the pecan grove along the San Saba River that cuts along the back of their property, taking care to be inclusive of people of color and members of the LGBTQ community.

After five years of hosting visitors on their land, Bell says they realized they offer something that can’t be measured by the pound.

“What we can offer more easily than anything else is a social ecosystem,” Bell says. “Yeah, we’re trying to grow food, but that social ecosystem that we can create is perhaps more important and more readily available.”

What’s happening in Menard reflects similar changes happening across Texas, as farm and ranch land changes hands and a new generation of homesteaders plants roots.

Sarah Johanson, who had a small recurring role on the TV show *Mad Men* years ago, says that as a girl growing up in Menard, she didn’t see anyone who was living a life that she wanted to live—namely, anyone making a living as an artist. “People said, ‘You’re not going to be able to survive at this,’” she says. “A big part of moving back was to show young people here that football isn’t the only thing. Art is absolutely something you can make money in.”

Now that they’ve been back for a few years, Johanson has spent time in the local archives researching the history of the area. One particular detail stood out.

“The Native Americans who lived here called it ‘Summerland,’” she says. “They said that once you taste the waters of the San Saba, you will always come back.” ■

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The Prest kids plant seedlings for Texas Scratch Kitchen, the family’s baking business. Sarah Johanson and daughter Juliet make bread in the family home where Sarah’s grandmother taught her to bake bread. Bell and Geer Gillespie visit their Galiceño horses, a breed that originated in Spain and arrived in the Americas in the 1500s.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Some 160 race cars line up on U.S. Highway 285 before the start in Fort Stockton. Inspector Joe Henderson helps Bob Bowser with his seat belt. Fans check out the cars at James Rooney Memorial Park. Navigator Colt Whetstone, left, and driver Gene Lehman plot their strategy; they won the 150 mph target speed class.

GOING NOWHERE FAST



The BIG BEND OPEN ROAD RACE brings drivers together for legal high-speed thrills

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL



The April edition of the 2022 Big Bend Open Road Race starts with a warning to drivers: Buzzards are perched on a bridge along the twisty course.

The big carrion-eating birds—along with blown tires, overheated engines, assorted roadkill and the occasional wandering wildlife—pose a real threat during the race, which unfolds down a 59-mile stretch of mostly two-lane asphalt that slices through the desert between Fort Stockton and Sanderson in far West Texas.

Old-timers will tell you about the time a buzzard exploded through the windshield of a car (no one was hurt, but the bird didn't fare well) or when wayward javelinas strolled onto the road. There have been blowouts and skid-offs but, so far, no serious wrecks.

The buzzard warning ripples through the line of about 160 vehicles along U.S. Highway 285 awaiting the race start. In a few minutes, the first car screeches away.

The Big Bend Open Road Race is the common man's Indy 500. Anybody with a driver's license and a properly equipped vehicle can pay the entry fee (which ranges from \$650 to \$1,050, depending on class) and compete. Most teams will tell you they come because they like to go fast. Officials shut down the highway for 12 hours, and the rubber burns.

This year's field features a stable of sleek Corvettes, a few Teslas, a herd of Mustangs, some Camaros, Porsches, Miatas and a Mini Cooper—plus a 1962 Chevrolet pickup truck and a 1970 Chevelle. In years past, junkers and rentals have also lined up at the start.

Competitors pick a class based on the speed they think they can average over two runs, a tricky feat to pull off. The fastest car doesn't necessarily win, except in the "unlimited" division, in which the flat-out fastest driver gets the trophy. In other classes, drivers who come closest to their target average speed take top honors. And drivers can't slow more than 30 mph below their target speed on straightaways, which prevents them from racing along and then coasting into the finish. The rule is enforced by radar.


The best teams come within a few hundredths of a second of their goal.

"If I don't giggle and laugh when I drive that fast, something's wrong," says Tracy Alexander, who is zipped into a pink and black fire suit as she leans against her 2015 Corvette Stingray, waiting her turn. Participants are required to wear a fire suit, helmet and gloves.



"I just drive as fast as I can, and I turn off the air conditioning so I can go faster."

Australians John Binns and Kelli-Ann Robinson fly by in their 2010 Dodge Challenger.



The vehicles take off one at a time, and it takes about three hours to launch the whole field. Then they do it again for the return trip. "I've just always been a speedster," Alexander says. "My dad had Corvettes when we were growing up, and when you're behind the wheel of a Corvette, it seems like you should push it a little bit. It's the thrill of it, really, and the adrenaline rush. Some people jump out of airplanes; I drive fast."

She and her husband, Fort Stockton Mayor Joe Chris Alexander, used to help behind the scenes at the race, which began in 1998. But when a friend's partner bowed out a few years ago, she jumped in.

"I always thought it would be fun to race because I like to drive fast, and that would be a legal way to do it," Alexander says.

That first year, she drove the first leg of the race and navigated the second alongside teammate Arno Pitzen of Kingsland. They finished second in their class.

"I'll never forget that first time," Alexander says. "You hold your breath, and I said a prayer—'Lord, let me cross at the right time.' It's the biggest adrenaline rush. You're not racing anyone but yourself. You're racing your own ability."

This year she navigates and Pitzen drives. They finish third in their class, just six-tenths of a second off their target time.

Once an annual spring event, an October race was added last fall (October 15 this year). The race is the only one of its kind in Texas, although similar events are staged in Nebraska and Nevada. Registration typically fills up within 15 minutes, and a waitlist 40 deep forms, said race coordinator Crystal Lopez.

"It's an opportunity for these guys to come out and push close to their limits," says race director Randy Dustin.

In the week leading up to the race, school kids in Fort Stockton fashion race cars out of cardboard boxes, and drivers parade through downtown in their vehicles. This year organizers added a screening of *Cannonball Run*, the 1981 comedy starring Burt Reynolds, Farrah Fawcett and Roger Moore.

That very movie once inspired John Binns to get into the sport. The former Texan who lives in Sydney, Australia, stores several cars in nearby Alpine specifically for the event. He brought Kelli-Ann Robinson with him from Australia

to serve as navigator this year while he drives his purple 2010 Dodge Challenger. He's only here to have fun.

"I just drive as fast as I can, and I turn off the air conditioning so I can go faster," Binns says.

Some drivers scout the course ahead of time, using old-fashioned tools. Others rely on high-tech gadgets and GPS to hit their targets.

"Everybody has their secrets," says Travis McRae of Kerrville, a Central Texas Electric Cooperative member. "I like the technical part of it. I can drive anywhere fast, but out here you have to be spot on."

Charlie Friend, 82, of Pahrump, Nevada, a former U.S. Air Force fighter pilot who has raced in every class and won the unlimited category one year, also does everything manually—punching a stopwatch and scrolling through a paper route chart as he drives the course. "More and more people now use magic stuff, like computer systems," Friend said.

After this year's race, teams gather in Fort Stockton to swap stories. A father-daughter duo from San Antonio dances a jig by their car. Sweaty racers eat barbecue from a food truck. Brothers Mike Smith from Blanco and Mark Smith of Longview crack cans of cold beer and hash over their performance.

"We know we were too fast," Mike Smith says, and race results later confirm they crossed the finish line nearly 22 seconds too soon in the 150-mph class, completing the 118-mile sprint in just over 47 minutes. That doesn't matter much to him. "All the guys out here have a common interest. We all enjoy tinkering with cars, and this is kind of like a reunion."

And those buzzards? Friend, the former pilot driving a Cadillac CTS-V, spots some along the course. They don't cause any problems.

"I just flashed my light and tooted the horn, and they moved," he says. ■



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FRESH OUTTA TEXAS



Grasshoppers were the first problem to hit the crops at Ward and Jill Taylor's farm near Lexington. Then extreme heat and a lack of rain made conditions worse. The couple have been operating their 40-acre farm since 2010, and this is not their first battle with drought.

Heat and drought are straining many Bluebonnet-area small farms and newer farmers. Supply slowdowns, labor shortages and rising prices take a toll, too.

Farmers who keep going have learned to lean on one another.

HARD LESSONS

for small farms

Story by Addie Broyles

Photos by Laura Skelding

THIS YEAR, IT STARTED with grasshoppers.

The insects came in droves a few months ago, stripping the leaves off peach trees at Ward and Jill Taylor's farm outside Lexington in Lee County. "They left the peaches dangling off like a Charlie Brown Christmas tree. Then they came and ate the peaches and left the pits. Now they are eating the bark off the trees," Ward Taylor said.

That was only the beginning. "It's been brutal," Ward, 61, said of the damage that this summer of 2022 has brought to the couple's 40-acre Taylor's Farm. Twelve

years ago, Ward and Jill bought the land because they shared a dream of farming — growing squash and tomatoes during Texas' typically long growing seasons.

The reality, especially in the last few months, has been closer to a nightmare.

On the heels of a two-decade boom, many small farms in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area and across the state — often run by farmers with less than a decade of experience — are facing serious troubles.

Weather-related disasters, from a prolonged freeze to this year's record-breaking heat and drought, have caused severe damage to many small farms. Rising

Continued on page 20





Clockwise from top: Ward Taylor studies the dry pasture of Taylor's Farm. He is feeding his cows and pigs a mix of livestock cubes, alfalfa pellets and hay. The hay is getting harder to find and more expensive, and some farmers are having it shipped from other states, he said; Michael Marchand of Whitehurst Heritage Farm in Brenham keeps his seedlings under cover and watered; Farmshare, in Cedar Creek, offers a 20-week program to teach the essentials of sustainable farming. Casey Frank, at center, education coordinator and operations manager at the teaching farm, cuts amaranth with Dallis Lofton, left, and Noel Gaylor, right.



Ward and Jill Taylor, above, sit on the porch of their house with their dog, Buddy, and cat, Fred. They've been farming in Lee County since 2010, starting just before Texas' last historic drought in 2011.

Continued from page 18

prices, unstable supply chains and labor shortages are adding to farmers' problems. Many of them are doing what they can to keep going. Those with more experience often diversify their operations to maintain their livelihood. Others relatively new to farming have slowed or shut down operations.

This isn't the Taylors' first brush with drought. They've been farming here since 2010, starting just before the state's last historic drought in 2011.

Despite the struggles, the couple do not regret leaving their jobs as Boeing employees in Washington state. Ward worked in programming and design there for nine years, and Jill worked in finance for 20 years. They came to the Bluebonnet area to join the wave of new farmers who were setting up shop in Central Texas during the beginning of the locavore, or "eat local" movement of the 2000s.

"Our first year here, our pastures were blowing dust and dirt, and we couldn't find hay anywhere for the cows," Ward said. "I remember thinking that if this goes on for any longer, we are going to have to sell our cows off."

But that drought lifted, and the Taylors started what became a thriving farm, raising cattle, pigs and lots of vegetables, enough to feed several hundred families. They sold their produce mostly at Central Texas farmers markets and to area wholesalers.

They, like the majority of small, family farms in the region, use sustainable and organic practices in their farming.

Their business peaked after the COVID-19 pandemic started, when the demand for local food was high. Nearly every small farm in Texas had a wait-list for their community supported agriculture program, which lets customers buy a share of a farm's harvest in advance and receive direct delivery of the food. This allowed the Taylors and other area farmers to sell through new channels.

Then the weather started to shift. Again.

"In the 12 years we've been here, we've had four of the top 12 hottest summers since they've been keeping records," Ward said. The Taylors recently sold their bull to save on feed costs. They stopped going to farmers markets earlier this year and, instead, launched a new farmland leasing program, where beginning farmers could grow their own crops, protected under plastic-covered structures.

This summer's harsh conditions drove those beginners away, and only a handful of people are interested in the lease opportunity as of



At right, Brad Stufflebeam stands on the porch of the 1850s Homestead log cabin on his property near Brenham. To expand their income stream, he and his wife, Jenny, have 12 cabins on their property they rent as part of Scenic Hill Retreat.

early August. "It's getting bleak for small farmers, that's what it comes down to," Ward said. "When the weather's bad, field prices (the costs of growing) are bad, supplies are short and prices are high. It's been one thing after the next and all at the same time now."

The Texas breadbasket

A 2017 report by the Texas Department of Agriculture showed that of the nearly 250,000 farms and ranches in Texas, about 77,500 are operated by producers with fewer than 10 years of experience. A quarter of new and beginning farmers are under the age of 35, and the number of female farmers has increased almost 70 percent since 2012. That report found the average farm size at the time in Texas was 411 acres, and the average age of farmers/ranchers was 59.

The swath of Central Texas between Austin and Houston is home to hundreds of miles of rich farmland, but the extreme weather of more than a decade could be the new normal for farmers.

"This was the original breadbasket of Texas," said Brad Stufflebeam, who, along with his wife, Jenny Stufflebeam, started their 12-acre Home Sweet Farm near Brenham 22 years ago. The couple searched the river basins of Central Texas for more than two years before buying their land in 2004. They dove straight into production vegetable farming, growing crops you'd find in the grocery produce section: leafy greens, carrots, melons and squash.

After serving in the U.S. Navy, Brad studied horticulture, started a nursery with Jenny and learned about farming as the head of operations at World Hunger Relief, a farm-based program in Waco. The organization addresses issues of global food insecurity and malnutrition. At its farm, about 6,000 high school students visit each year.

Brad learned that when people first step onto farmland, and see how food is grown, farming can have a powerful allure.

Unlike the Taylors, who built up their customer base through farmers markets, the Stufflebeams formed a partnership with about

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Helpful farming resources

For secure browsing, type <https://> before each of these website URLs.

- farmers.gov/protection-recovery
- farmers.gov/protection-recovery/drought
- farmers.gov/loans and its Farm Loan Discovery Tool linked from that page
- lulingfoundation.org agriculture demonstration farm offers in-person education, varied crop operations, demonstrations
- droughtmonitor.unl.edu to track drought information on the U.S. Drought Monitor
- fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Texas for statewide information and resources
- tsfrco.org/resources from the Texas Small Farmers & Ranchers Community Based Organization
- texashelp.tamu.edu to browse the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service's Disaster Education Network
- agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/browse/program-areas for a variety of departments, programs and units available to farmers and ranchers through the A&M AgriLife Extension Service



Hayley Wood is the director of the Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition, which serves eight counties, including five in the Bluebonnet region: Bastrop, Caldwell, Travis, Hays and Guadalupe. The coalition works to build diverse and collaborative farming communities. The drought led to Wood's layoff from work at a small farm in Manor. She is working at Salt & Time, a butcher shop and restaurant in Austin, until the weather allows her to return to farming. "It's essential for farmers to hear from one another. It's critical that they know they aren't alone," she said.

Continued from page 20A

20 other farmers in the area to build the Home Sweet Farm community-supported agriculture program that served the Houston area for more than a decade. At one point, the program had nearly 400 subscriber families and a two-year waiting list.

But after the 2008 recession and 2011 drought, farmers took a hit. Then grocery stores and delivery services started offering home produce delivery. "After the drought and Hurricane Harvey (in 2017), most of them threw in the towel," Brad, 51, said.

Growing vegetables and producing dairy is what Brad calls "intense farming."

"If it was easy and profitable, everybody would do it. There's a reason our state is best suited for cattle," he said.

According to the state's agriculture department, in 2017 slightly more than half of the state's agricultural market value was in cattle: \$12.3 billion compared to only \$352 million in fruits and vegetables.

The Stufflebeams got creative about their revenue stream. In 2014 they opened Home Sweet Farm Market & Biergarten in downtown Brenham, the seat of Washington County. They sold that business in 2021 to focus on other new projects.

Today the Stufflebeams have a dozen short-term private cabin rentals and give farming workshops, which Brad calls "agritainment." They've added higher grossing, less labor-intensive perennial plants to their lineup, including tea. They are currently testing varieties.

To shield their crops from 2022's weather, they installed tunnel-like covered structures that protect plants from harsh weather. Earlier, they had dug new 480-foot-deep water wells. "That saved us," Brad said, "but even now, we've lost a couple of cows this year." In late July, an older water well on the property went dry for the first time in 50 years.

Farming is a long-term investment, he said, which is why a multi-generational farm has an advantage. "The infrastructure is still there. New farmers have to start from scratch."

Connecting young farmers in Central Texas

Although farmland wasn't cheap 15 years ago, prices for rural real estate in the Bluebonnet region have shot up in the last few years, said Hayley Wood, an aspiring farmer and director of the Central Texas Young Farmers Coalition, an organization aimed at building collaborative, diverse farming communities.

Wood, 27, is among many who struggle to find arable, affordable farmland these days.

Wood grew up in San Antonio but caught the farming bug while working in Latin America. After returning to Texas, she looked for ways to get experience. She apprenticed at Urban Roots and Community First Village, two community organizations in East Austin that use agriculture as a way to bring people together and teach life skills to young people and individuals who have experienced homelessness.

Wood recently worked at Steelbow Farm, a mixed vegetable farm in Manor on land that, for 25 years, was home to the 15-acre Tecolote Farm. That farm's founders, David Pitre and Katie Kraemer Pitre, were among the 1990s wave of new farmers in Central Texas who



AN INCREASE AT AUCTION

An increasing number of cattle are being brought to auction across the state, including these, above, at the Lexington Livestock Commission auction July 23, said co-owner Steven Heller. His family has owned the commission since 1956 and he has worked there since he was a kid. About 1,500 to 1,900 cattle are being brought to auction every week this summer, Heller said, compared to the typical 800 to 1,000. "People are selling because it's so dry," he said.

Feeding cattle has become more difficult and expensive as the drought wears on. Both experienced and newer farmers are being forced to sell more cattle than is typical. "The heat and dry weather, it's one of the worst in the last 50, 60 years," said Victor Yurk, who was selling calves at the auction in July. "We normally don't sell calves under 600 pounds, but we're selling calves that are 450 (lbs.)."

The level of "cow herd liquidation" in Texas and across the nation this summer hasn't been seen since the 2011 drought, according to David Anderson, Texas A&M University professor and extension service economist for livestock and food marketing, in a July interview with the Texas Farm Bureau. The cost of raising calves has also increased, he said, predicting a 4% decrease in America's cattle herds in the next year.

helped create the locavore movement encouraging diners to buy and eat locally produced food.

When the Pitres retired a few years ago, they leased half of their farm to Finegan Ferreboeuf and Jason Gold, who named their business Steelbow Farm.



Youssef Bargach of Andalucian Ranch Texas planted these Blanc du Bois grapevines in March after losing 5,000 olive trees to the freeze of 2021. Next he will try a different variety of grape, called Black Spanish, which is often used to make rosé wine. Bargach also raises cattle with a ‘hands on’ approach and rotational grazing.

INSIDE LOOK

Andalucian Ranch Texas

Where: Bellville, in Austin County

Started: 2018

Size: 200 acres

Owners: Youssef and Giovana Bargach

From: Born in Morocco

What they grow: Grapevines (for wine) and cattle

What they tried to grow: Olive trees. Youssef and Giovana had just finished planting 5,000 olive trees the summer before the 2021 statewide freeze. Every tree died. “I’m stubborn as an ox when it comes to these things, so I purchased 100 (grape)vines for this year and planted them,” Youssef said. “If they take off, then it’ll be a much slower project. It’s a turbulent story. I grew up on a farm in Morocco that was self-sustaining, but once you come over here, things have to be profitable. They can’t just be self-sustaining.”

Advice for the new farmer: “The best thing that I could tell anybody is to start small and build up at a reasonable pace,” Youssef said. “I underestimated how quickly I could burn out.” A new farmer can start with less than 25 acres, he said.

The Tecolote owners sold the other half of their farm, a separate parcel of land on the Colorado River, to longtime employee Lorig Hawkins. That land is now Middle Ground Farm, but this summer’s drought has brought a pause in activity there for the fall season.

The heat and drought claimed Wood’s farm job, so she started working at Salt & Time, an East Austin butcher shop and restaurant. She also hopes to learn about the business of cattle there while waiting out the harsh weather and economic conditions.

Wood still volunteers 10 to 15 hours a week advocating for young and beginning farmers through the coalition.

Every farm is different, she said, but every farmer is just trying to make it to the next season.

Many years ago, it was almost a given that a farmer’s children would take over the farm, but that isn’t the norm today. Nebraska-based Farmers National Company, the country’s largest agricultural landowner services company, predicts that 70 percent of U.S. farmland will transfer ownership in the next 20 years.

“Farming can feel disconnecting in ways that other professions don’t,” Wood said. “It’s essential for farmers to hear from one another. It’s critical that they know they aren’t alone. State resources help, but what is lacking is that peer-to-peer connection.”

The young farmers coalition started in 2013 as a way for new farmers to network through potlucks and educational events. The coalition addresses issues as varied as farm advocacy and mental health. It serves eight counties, including Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Guadalupe, all or parts of which are in the Bluebonnet service area.

Although it targets farmers younger than age 45, Wood said, “it’s not about how old you are; it’s about where you want to go and the path that you’re on.” The Texas Department of Agriculture offers Young Farmer matching grants of \$5,000 to \$20,000 for people ages 18 to 45.

The coalition encourages farmers to look at agriculture through a racially inclusive, community-building lens to make farming careers accessible to everyone. Other organizations such as the National Center for Appropriate Technology and the Bryan-based Texas Small Farmers & Ranchers Community Based Organization reach out to Black, Hispanic, women and military veterans who are beginning farmers and need additional support.

Ryan Farnau is another proponent of farming partnerships.

This year’s drought was hurting his crops, but he had to give up F-Stop Farm, his three-quarter-acre plot in Manor, when the land was sold to developers. Farnau had leased the small corner of a ranch in eastern Travis County for three years, but he started selling produce from his backyard garden in 2013. His involvement with community-supported agriculture followed in 2014 when he sold his okra, onions, tomatoes and other vegetables at farmers markets and to area chefs.

Continued on page 20D



Dallis Lofton, an incoming student at Farmshare's farmer training program, cuts a variety of amaranth called hot biscuit. Growing ornamentals like this, or flowers, helps sustain the part of the business that provides food. Dallis will be in the Farmer Starter immersive training program on the farm in eastern Travis County. Applications for the 2023 program will be accepted through Oct. 2, 2022.

Continued from page 20C

"The last two seasons have been the hardest growing seasons in memory," he said. "It's a bittersweet thing for me to walk away, but I'm committed to being part of the food system."

Farnau, 50, a father of two children, moved to the Austin area in 2010 from Kentucky by way of California, where he worked as a photographer. He plans to continue making and selling products such as pickles and kimchi, the traditional Korean dish of spicy, fermented vegetables.

He is also writing a business plan for a private-public partnership farm with mixed-use development around it.

"Agriculture has always been and will always be a partnership," he said. "No matter what size of farm, you need other people. If it's not your father or your brother or your children, you need other people."

Farnau is working with regional food vendors to prepare foods in their commissary kitchens, which would allow him to sell in area grocery stores and markets. He continues to meet people who want to get into agriculture, particularly millennials disaffected by other careers.

"I don't want to be Chicken Little about it, but the food system is going to break, and if we don't build agriculture centers near urban centers, people aren't going to be able to go to the grocery store and

get what they need. We need to remember that we are organisms in an ecosystem, not consumers in a marketplace," Farnau said.

New ways to keep small farms going

Jill and Ward Taylor aren't interested in fully retiring or leaving their Lexington property, but their three children aren't planning to take over the business. In 2021, when they announced plans to lease some land to small-scale farmers, three people expressed interest within a few days.

One of them was Jane Watiri-Taylor, a Kenya-born former nurse who left her job in early 2022 at the Travis County Jail to commit to full-time farming. In March of this year, she was one of several people profiled in a New York Times story about post-pandemic career changes.

Watiri-Taylor, who is unrelated to the Taylors, had enrolled in Farmshare, a nonprofit that educates new farmers at a farm in Cedar Creek in Bastrop County. More than 75 students have taken Farmshare's beginner's course since 2014, and about a dozen have gone on to start their own farming operations. At Taylor's Farm, Watiri-Taylor leased one of the tall, protective structures and sold her produce at farmers' markets under the brand Green Thumb Farming. She has since given up her lease, though, and now grows at a community gar-

"All the cards are stacked against small farmers. If people can see the synergy of working together, like buying seed potatoes in bulk or helping out with transportation of feed, we can grow that coordination."

— **WARD TAYLOR,**

Co-owner of Taylor's Farm near Lexington



Ward Taylor of Taylor's Farm in Lee County doles out pig feed. The Taylors have been farming on that land since 2010, starting just before Texas' last historic drought in 2011.

INSIDE LOOK

Small Town Farm

Where: Fentress, in Caldwell County

Started: 2019

Size: 1 acre

Owners: Miguel Guerra and Cristen Andrews

From where: Originally from Eagle Pass and Pflugerville, respectively, the former Austinites started looking for land in Fentress along the San Marcos River more than a decade ago.

What they grow: Herbs, native plants, vegetable transplants, which they sell at the San Marcos Farmers Market, along with value-added products like chai-spiced honey and lemongrass tea.

What they tried to grow: Vegetables for the farmers market, which they tried for a year. "There was no way we could keep doing that," Andrews said.

den near her home in Pflugerville. She sells at an area farmers market. "She has a realistic view of what it takes to do this," Ward Taylor said. "But that's farming for you."

Connecting with other farmers has been an invaluable asset to Taylor's Farm in the past decade. "All the cards are stacked against small farmers," Ward Taylor said. "If people can see the synergy of working together, like buying seed potatoes in bulk or helping out with transportation of feed, we can grow that coordination."

The pandemic underscored the importance of cooperation.

Although many farmers markets continued operating under strict COVID protocols, other farmers, including the Taylors, shifted to selling through websites like Farmhouse Delivery, MilkRun and a service called Barn2Door, which allowed them to host e-commerce on their own website, taylorstxfarm.com.

This year the Taylors have faced new challenges, from grasshoppers to drought to supply price hikes. There are other downsides to growing vegetables besides the weather. It can be big business, but a lot of people start and then shut down after a few years. New farmers often "don't realize how much work it is until they get into it," Brad Stufflebeam said. "It's either that, or they find a way to make it sustainable," he added, by using wholesale accounts, farmers markets or direct-to-consumer deliveries.

"Vegetables can bring in \$28,000 per acre," he said, although labor and fertilizer costs eat into that profit. Picking 800 pounds of tomatoes one day and getting them to market the next is an exhausting amount of work.

With this summer's extreme heat, drought and added competition from grocery stores and delivery services, it's even harder for area farmers to compete. "In Austin or Houston, you can sell a \$5 tomato," Stufflebeam said, but a buyer in Brenham might balk at that price.

Contrast that with the much lower cost of raising cattle – several hundred dollars per acre, on average – and growing produce can start to look like too much work for the investment. "I'd look out at these 12 acres every year, and it looked gorgeous, but every three months I had to dig it in and plant it again," Stufflebeam said.

Wood, of the young farmers group, says that the numbers of new farmers ebb and flow every decade, as new people enter the industry and others exit or change their business model.

"There's been a big surge of people saying farming is cool, but it's a complex issue," Wood said. "There's a lot of assumption about how easy it is, or that it's just about growing food and being outside. But the truth is that people want work that is tangible and is meaningful and is shaped around interconnectivity.

"I don't ever discourage people from getting into this field, but I encourage them to think about what they want to get out of farming and to be open-minded about what they might get out of it." ■



Michael Marchand of Whitehurst Heritage Farm in Brenham cools his flock of egg laying ducks in late July with a spray of water. The ducks usually begin to lay eggs some time between late August and mid-September. "There is a market for duck eggs, just like chicken eggs," Marchand says.

INSIDE LOOK

Whitehurst Heritage Farm

Where: Brenham, in Washington County

Started: 2017

Size: 57 acres

Owners: Michael and Leslie Marchand

From: Started in Cypress, northwest of Houston, in 2014

What they grow: Vegetables for community-supported farm-share boxes, eggs, poultry, pork and cold-pressed juice

What they tried to grow: Meat chickens and turkeys; the Marchands are cutting back the number of animals to a manageable level.

Advice for the new farmer: "Go on YouTube and start watching videos," Michael Marchand said. "There is so much that is there for the beginning farmer. But if you're someone who wants to raise a family and do it as your primary business, you need to buy some professional farmers (education) courses for about \$2,000 each. Those can take you from knowing nothing to a decent level of skill in a few months. You can also pay a professional farmer to coach you."

Vivi's journey

Despite a year of surgery, treatment and tests, the 9-year-old from Rosanky keeps bouncing back

By Melissa Segrest

IT'S BEEN A LONG YEAR for 9-year-old Viviann Snow and her mother, Kelsey Snow.

There have been exhilarating ups and depressing downs, a successful surgery and return to Smithville Elementary School, but also medical complications — two serious infections and a second bout with COVID-19. There were seemingly unending days and nights in hospitals, and lots of waiting.

"I feel like it's gone on forever. It's blurred our perception of time," Kelsey said in late July.

Despite all of it, Vivi, as she's known to friends and family, has been stalwart. She bounces back time and again. Actually, she's even gotten a little ornery, her mother said.

Maybe some ornery is just what she needs.

In January 2021, in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic, Vivi was diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a rare form of childhood cancer found in only about 700 children a year in the United States. Most patients are infants. Vivi's severe stomach pain was being caused by a tumor in her abdomen.

Her first round of chemotherapy began in February 2021 at Dell Children's Medical Center in Austin. Since then, there have been many rounds of chemo and radiation.

Folks in Central Texas rallied around the little girl from Rosanky, southwest of Smithville in Bastrop County. That support, which has included a benefit concert last October, other fundraisers and individual donations, has helped pay some of the mounting medical bills, ensuring that Vivi gets the best possible care.

That included a two-week trip last September to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City to have her tumor removed. The center's MSK Kids unit treats more children with neuroblastoma than any other U.S. hospital, according to the hospital's website.

Before surgery, Vivi toured New York City. She loved it all: riding the subway, visiting the 9/11 memorial, seeing the Statue of Liberty, stopping in Times Square and having brunch at Trump Tower. She went to American Girl Place, the flagship world of American Girl dolls, where she got a Truly Me doll — a look-alike she named Lila, who also is missing her hair. When Vivi's hair completely grows back, her doll will be given hair, too.

Dr. J. Ted Gerstle, chief of pediatric surgical service at MSK Kids, led the team that operated on Vivi. After 10 hours of surgery, a surgeon walked out to tell Vivi's mother and father, Matt Martin, that the tumor had been successfully removed.

Next, severe infections hit Vivi, one after surgery in New York and again at Dell Children's. She was on strong IV antibiotics and chemotherapy at the same time.



Viviann and her mother, Kelsey Snow, on their land in Rosanky. In the past year, the fourth-grader has had surgery, treatments, tests and scans in her fight against neuroblastoma, a rare form of



Her longest hospital stay was 20 days in April 2021. Every three to four weeks, she spends a week in the hospital for treatment.

COVID safety restrictions at Dell Children's made visits from others, even Nana — grandmother Wanda Snow — impossible. Vivi missed being with family, friends and her beloved dog, Elvis Pugsley. Even though she spent some of the most difficult times snuggling with Dell Children's therapy dogs, eventually the hospital allowed visitors, including her pug.

"Seeing Elvis always helped," Kelsey said.

Kelsey, who works in administration for Ascension Seton Behavioral Health in Austin, continued to work remotely with a laptop and monitor through the pandemic and during Vivi's hospital stays.

Vivi returned to school in January, getting chemotherapy treatments on weekends. Her last round of treatments was in April. Her lab tests improved but a scan showed a very small spot where the tumor had been. It could be scar tissue, but it raised some concern. More tests, scans and procedures were done, with results expected in early August. If there is cancer, Vivi has treatment options: oral drugs in trial studies or



childhood cancer. *Photo by Sarah Beal.* Below, Vivi, during a stay at Dell Children's Medical Center, gets a snuggle from one of the center's full-time therapy dogs, Reba. *Photo by Kelsey Snow*

Bluebonnet shines a light on Childhood Cancer Awareness Month

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's buildings, employees and even its trucks will be showing some gold in September to support Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

At night, our member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor will be bathed in golden light. If you see any Bluebonnet member service representatives, they'll be wearing gold-colored ribbons and handing them out to members.

Check the cooperative's Facebook and Twitter pages throughout this month for useful information about how you can join the fight against childhood cancer. Visit bluebonnet.coop/childhood-cancer for resources and ways to get involved.

another surgery in New York.

"We planned for this to be over a long time ago. We were really hoping," Kelsey said. "Her hair is finally growing back, and she's counting down the days until it's long again. She always wore it in a ponytail or braided, which she would swing around like a helicopter rotor. "Right now, she has a teeny-tiny ponytail."

Vivi now is more used to the medical routines, but she still gets sad or mad. "We've found ways to cope. And we have our time to be sad, then we suck it up because we have to," Kelsey said. Mother and daughter keep going, rolling with the punches. "We stopped making plans, and now it's more of a go-with-the-flow life," Kelsey said.

Find updates and activities on the [vivisvillage](https://www.facebook.com/vivisvillage) Facebook page. Donations can be made to the Vivi's Villagers fund at First National Bank of Bastrop or via the Venmo money transfer app to @Vivis-Villagers.

"We cannot thank everyone enough for the support we've gotten on this long journey," Kelsey said. ■

SAVE THE DATE



ENERGY EXPO

Saturday, Oct. 22, 2022

9 a.m.-noon
Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's
Maxwell Service Center
10400 Texas 142, Maxwell

- Listen to Solar 101, our introduction to residential solar systems
- Meet homeowners with solar systems
- Get information about electric vehicles
- Find out about solar-power battery storage
- Tour our Maxwell Service Center facility
- Explore the solar installer fair, hosted by Texas Solar Energy Society

Get more details at bluebonnet.coop/energy-expo or on Bluebonnet's Facebook and Twitter pages.

Grant will help radio emergency services group aid Lee County first responders, other support networks

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative and the Lower Colorado River Authority recently awarded community nonprofit groups and projects with grants that are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program. They awarded an \$11,349 grant that will allow the Lee County Amateur Radio Emergency Services group to purchase new equipment. Bluebonnet is one of LCRA's wholesale electric customers and is proud to partner with LCRA to support its members and communities. Applications for the next round of grants will be accepted in January, 2023. More information about this program and the application can be found at lcra.org/cdpp.



Photo courtesy of LCRA

An \$11,349 grant from Bluebonnet and the LCRA will help the Lee County Amateur Radio Emergency Services group, also known as LeeCARES, to purchase new radio communications equipment and strengthen Lee County's response during emergencies. The volunteer organization provided \$3,500 in matching funds. The grant will help the group assist the Lee County Emergency Operation Center to connect first responders with members of the community during an emergency, as well as with state or federal support networks. Pictured above (standing, from left) are Denice Harlan, Giddings Area Chamber of Commerce president; Michael York, Lee County justice of the peace, Precinct 2; Lacey Hannes, Lexington code compliance officer; Tina Biehle, Lexington city administrator; James Lawrence,

LeeCARES member; Matthew L. 'Matt' Arthur, LCRA board member; Margaret D. 'Meg' Voelter, LCRA board member; Alan Turner, Lee County commissioner, Precinct 3; Marida Favia del Core Borrromeo, LeeCARES emergency coordinator; Russell Jurk, Bluebonnet director; Paul E. Fischer, Lee County judge; Mark Matthijetz, Lee County commissioner, Precinct 1; Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet's Giddings area community representative; Steven Knobloch, Lee County commissioner, Precinct 4; Richard Wagner, Lee County commissioner, Precinct 2; and Casey Goetz, Lee County sheriff. Seated, from left, are LeeCARES members Jeff Bullard, Julia Allison, Ruben Fuentes, Tim Lee and Daniel Shirley; and Kate Ramzinski, LCRA regional affairs representative.

Seeing higher bills? We want you to know:

- Bluebonnet's electric rates have not increased
- Many HVAC systems ran 24/7 during summer's record-breaking heat, leading to more electricity use than in previous summers
- Your bill reflects the electricity you used up to six weeks before you get your bill
- Get tips, resources to save electricity at bluebonnet.coop/saving-money

Get the right gear!

Energy Coach Alyssa is sharing tips and videos on Bluebonnet's Facebook page and Twitter feed, with the help of her four-legged cheerleader, **Millie**, to help you cut your costs and conserve energy.

Switch to LEDs

LED lights use 85% less energy and last 25 times longer than traditional bulbs.

Defeat attic heat

Add insulation, both on the attic floor and in the rafters. Replace insulation every 15 to 20 years to maintain effectiveness.

Try advanced power strips

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



Step up your thermostat game

A programmable or smart thermostat like the Nest thermostat, above, can better control your temperature settings. Some of them can learn and adapt to your habits.

Director Bracewell earns credential from NRECA

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board member Bryan Bracewell, center, earned his Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which represents more than 900 of the nation's electric cooperatives.

Bracewell has served as a Bluebonnet director from District 3, Bastrop County, since 2018. To earn this certification, Bracewell completed dozens of hours of classes on topics ranging from board governance to cooperative finances.



Bluebonnet Board member Bryan Bracewell, center, who earned the NRECA director certificate credential, is congratulated by Board Chairman Ben Flencher, left, and Bluebonnet General Manager Matt Bentke, right.

HOLIDAY CLOSING

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Sept. 5 for Labor Day. If you have a power outage, you can report it by texting OUT to 85700, online at bluebonnet.coop, via our mobile app or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay bills anytime online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (press option 2 when prompted).

Bluebonnet line workers compete at 24th Texas Lineman's Rodeo

By Alyssa Dussetschleger

Line workers from across the state gathered to compete at the 24th Texas Lineman's Rodeo at Nolte Island Park near Seguin on July 16. The event returned after a two-year hiatus, and more than 200 line workers showcased their skills and devotion to safety.

Thirteen competitors from Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative participated this year, and apprentice Andrew Murphy was Bluebonnet's most successful team member. He took third place in the pole climb competition and fourth place in the overall apprentice category, out of 96 apprentice line workers.

Murphy will have the opportunity to compete at the International Lineman's Rodeo on Oct. 14-15 in Bonner Springs, Kan. Bluebonnet's journeyman team of Kyle Kasper, Ty Kasper and Brooks Kasper (Ty's younger brother), finished 19th out of 42 journeyman teams.

A three-member Bluebonnet barbecue team competed at the rodeo as well, serving up its best brisket, ribs and chicken.

"I am very proud of all the hard work the rodeo team put in this year," said Daniel Fritsche, coach of Bluebonnet's team and an assistant superintendent of co-op field operations in Bastrop. "The teams did a really good job in some tough events and many apprentices competed for the first time. We have a very good group of up-and-coming linemen. I am proud of all their dedication, not only to enhance their skills, but to serve our members."

Bluebonnet sent two journeyman teams and seven apprentices to the Lineman's Rodeo. The 2022 rodeo team members were Brad Young, Brooks Kasper, Kyle Kasper, Ty Kasper, Jordan Boecker, Nick Baker, Dior



Sarah Beal photos

At left, Ty Kasper, on the left, and Kyle Kasper (not related) compete against the clock in an event to quickly replace a piece of equipment. Apprentice Andrew Murphy, above, took third place in the apprentice pole climb competition and won fourth place in the overall apprentice category.

Smith, Jeffrey Bolding, Troy Moore, Michael Guajardo, Andrew Murphy and coaches Fritsche and Danny Bolding.

Competition began at 6:45 a.m. so line workers, judges, volunteers and guests could beat the heat. By the time strenuous events that required rapid work atop unelectrified poles were finished around noon, temperatures were creeping into the upper 90s. "We had some very long days of practice in the hot weather to prepare," Fritsche said.

Line workers competed in timed events to skillfully climb and work on unelectrified power poles and to practice safely rescuing an injured co-worker from atop a pole (using

a heavy dummy.) Competitors confronted the additional challenge of facing off in several "mystery events" that were kept secret until moments before the timer started.

Founded in 1996 and hosted by the Texas Lineman's Rodeo Association, the rodeo is a labor of love for those in the line-worker trade. The events are designed to mirror challenges encountered daily by utility crews who work, sometimes in dangerous conditions, to ensure reliable power to more than 28 million Texas residents. Participating utilities, the majority of which were cooperatives, also supplied event judges, volunteers and barbecue teams.

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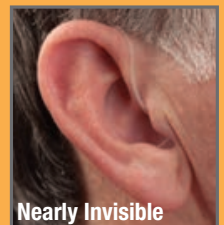
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Sincerely, A. Macon, Williamsburg, VA

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Good on Paper

Fueled by booze and a legendary cocktail napkin, Southwest Airlines took off and never looked back

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH FERONE

THIS LEGENDARY STORY starts off like many good stories do: Two men walked into a bar.

They were in San Antonio, and this was more than 55 years ago. And, OK, it was actually a restaurant with a bar. They ordered drinks and perhaps hors d'oeuvres. As the story goes, one of the men grabbed a cocktail napkin, took out his pen and said to the other, "Here's the plan."

He then drew a simple triangle on the napkin. At the apex of the triangle he wrote "Dallas." The bottom left he labeled "San Antonio." And on the remaining corner: "Houston."

"There—that's the business plan," he said. "Fly between these cities several times a day, every day." And that is the

tale of how Southwest Airlines began, on a simple napkin in a bar in San Antonio in 1966. The two men were Rollin King and Herb Kelleher.

King was a pilot and businessman and Kelleher a lawyer. King would become a managing director of the company that he and Kelleher co-founded in March 1967 and that first took to the sky in June 1971. Kelleher would go on to serve as CEO from 1981 to 2001. At the Southwest headquarters at Dallas Love Field, there's a bronze replica of the original napkin and a plaque with this exchange: "Herb, let's start an airline." "Rollin, you're crazy. Let's do it!"

Beyond the sizzle, there was genuine business genius in Southwest's efficiencies: peanut fares and the 10-minute

TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



turnaround, which had never been achieved before. To date, Southwest has flown more than 2 billion passengers without a crash and now serves more than 100 destinations in the U.S. and 10 countries.

Perhaps the coolest story in Southwest Airlines' history, and relatively unknown, was its fare war with now-defunct Braniff Airlines in early 1973—only a year after a struggling Southwest had just \$143 in its bank account. Braniff offered \$13 fares for its Houston-Dallas route as a means of "breaking" the upstart airline.

Southwest responded by offering passengers a \$13 fare or a \$26 fare that included a free bottle of Chivas scotch, Crown Royal whiskey or Smirnoff vodka. According to airline lore, for the two months before Braniff surrendered, Southwest was Texas' biggest distributor of premium liquor as business travelers expensed the \$26 tickets and kept the booze for themselves.

Not long before he died in June 2014, King confessed that the napkin story wasn't entirely true but that it was a "hell of a good story."

It was too late: The myth had become more powerful than the reality.

As the saying goes, when the legend becomes fact, print the legend. ■

Pizza Night

We hold the anchovies but offer these slices of inspired pies

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

We instituted Friday night pizzas when my kids were small, and it's been a great way to get creative in the kitchen. Whether you are sticking with reliable classics like pepperoni and mushroom or branching out to new toppings, it's hard to resist pizza. This take was inspired by my love of Mexican street corn.

Chorizo Corn Pizza

½ cup sour cream
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
2 tablespoons lime juice, plus more to taste
1 teaspoon chili powder
½ teaspoon salt
1 ball pizza dough or premade crust
Olive oil
1 cup shredded mozzarella
½ pound Mexican chorizo, cooked and drained
¾ cup corn kernels
¼ cup pickled jalapeño peppers
½ cup crumbled cotija cheese
Chopped fresh cilantro, for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
2. In a bowl, mix sour cream, mayonnaise, lime juice, chili powder and salt until well combined. Taste and adjust seasonings, adding more lime juice or water to thin if desired.
3. Lightly grease a pizza pan and roll out pizza dough on top. Brush olive oil on top of dough, then spread sour cream mixture on top. Layer on the mozzarella, chorizo, corn and jalapeños. Sprinkle cotija over the top.
4. Bake pizza 10–15 minutes, until crust is browned and mozzarella is melted. Garnish with fresh cilantro.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Brussels Sprouts Pizza With Bacon and Pear.





Low-Carb Sausage, Mushroom and Jalapeño Pizza

DIANE MUDD
GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

This pizza is a great option for those who are looking for a low-carb alternative. Mudd recommends making your own low-carb pizza sauce. These mini pizzas are also delicious cold the next day.

CRUST

- 1½ cups almond flour
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 eggs
- 3 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 2 tablespoons sour cream
- ⅓ cup (¼ stick) butter

TOPPING

- 1 pound ground pork
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon fennel seed, crushed
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 cup chopped white button mushrooms
- ¼ cup pickled jalapeño peppers, chopped
- ¼ cup chopped olives
- 1 cup low-carb pizza sauce
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

1. CRUST Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line an extra-large baking sheet or two standard baking sheets with parchment. In a medium bowl, combine almond flour, baking powder, garlic powder and eggs. Set aside.

2. In a large microwave-safe bowl, combine mozzarella, sour cream and butter. Microwave 1–2 minutes, stirring every

\$500 WINNER

Williams Family Best Marmalade Bacon Pizza

SHAWN WILLIAMS
LYNTEGAR EC



The Williams family began a weekly cooking challenge during the pandemic while their children lived in different cities. A prompt of marmalade led to the creation of this unique pizza featuring fig, bacon and asparagus.

SERVES 4



- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large red or yellow onion, sliced
- ½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, divided use
- ⅓ cup (¼ stick) butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ¾ cup milk
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 3 tablespoons fig jam or marmalade
- 1 package unbaked pizza dough
- 7 slices bacon, cooked crisp and chopped
- 8 ounces asparagus, cooked and cut into small pieces
- 6 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, shredded

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. In a sauté pan over medium heat, heat olive oil. Add onions and sprinkle with salt. Sauté 10 minutes, then add sugar and continue to sauté until onions begin to caramelize, about 5–10 minutes. Add a tablespoon or two of water as needed during cooking to keep the onions from drying. Stir in 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar and set the onion topping aside.
3. In a small saucepan, to make sauce, melt butter over medium heat. Add flour and garlic and cook, whisking constantly, for 1 minute. While whisking, slowly pour in milk. Bring to a boil, whisking constantly, for about a minute until thickened, then remove from heat. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. In a small bowl, combine fig jam and remaining tablespoon of balsamic vinegar. Heat in microwave 15 seconds and set aside.
5. Roll out pizza dough onto pan and bake 4 minutes. Remove from oven and spread sauce evenly over the top. Layer on toppings and drizzle on warmed balsamic jam. Return pizza to the oven for 7–10 minutes, until crust is golden and cheese is melted.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

CUPCAKES DUE SEPTEMBER 10

Whether you stick with classic flavors or go wild, do you make the best cupcakes around? Show us. Submit your recipes on our website by September 10 for a chance to win \$500.



CONTINUED >

RECIPES CONTINUED

30 seconds, until melted. While the cheese is still hot, add the almond flour mixture and stir or knead with your hands until a uniform dough forms. Form dough into a ball and divide it into 8 equal pieces. Roll each piece into a ball, place on prepared baking sheet and flatten to about 1/4-inch thick. Bake for about 10 minutes, then remove and pop any bubbles with a fork. Return to oven for 2 minutes, until golden-brown.

3. TOPPING Heat a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Season ground pork generously with salt and pepper, fennel seed, and Italian seasoning. Brown the resulting sausage, breaking it into small pieces. Add mushrooms, jalapeños and olives, stirring and continuing to cook until mushrooms are soft.

4. To prepare, divide sauce equally among pizza crusts. Sprinkle on mozzarella, then arrange meat mixture on top (you might have extra remaining). Bake 5–8 minutes, until cheese has melted.

SERVES 8



Jump-Start Breakfast Pizza

DALA BURK
WISE EC

Pizza for breakfast? Why not! Burk takes all your favorite breakfast ingredients and combines them for one fantastic pizza. Watch the crust carefully to prevent it from overbrowning.

- 8 ounces (1 package) refrigerated crescent rolls, separated**
- 2 cups frozen hash browns with peppers and onions (about half a**

- 28-ounce package), slightly thawed**
- 1 pound ground sausage, cooked and drained**
- 4 slices Canadian bacon, diced (optional)**
- 4 ounces diced green chiles, drained**
- 4 ounces sliced mushrooms**
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese**
- 5 eggs, beaten**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Arrange crescent rolls to cover the bottom of an ungreased pizza pan, pressing seams together and pinching edges to form a slight rim.
2. Spread hash browns evenly over crust, then sprinkle on sausage, Canadian bacon, chiles and mushrooms. Evenly top with shredded cheese, then carefully pour eggs over the whole pizza.
3. Bake 30–40 minutes, until crust is browned and cheese is melted.

SERVES 4–6

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Gulf Boast

Port Arthur museum shows off the region's global influence

BY CHET GARNER

GROWING UP in Southeast Texas, it was hard to appreciate the unique culture and people of the Gulf Coast. It wasn't until I moved to Austin and tried to order barbecued crabs at a restaurant and play zydeco music on the jukebox that I realized my upbringing was a bit different.

A recent trip to the Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur not only reaffirmed that belief but helped me realize that without the people of the Coastal Bend, Texas and even the U.S. wouldn't be the same.

When I stepped into this massive downtown museum, I felt like I had stepped into a life-size textbook. From Karankawa artifacts to the Spindletop oil boom, the museum captures the unique history of the Gulf Coast. There's a 125-foot mural depicting moments like the shipwreck of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca right next to a record-setting race car. Everybody can find something interesting here.

Upstairs are four rooms dedicated to the staggering crowd of people born in this region who have gone on to influence the world—governors and artists, actresses and war heroes, all hailing from this crescent of swamp and coastal prairie. The sports room was especially awesome, with tributes to famous coaches like Bum and Wade Phillips, along with Cowboys legend Jimmy Johnson.

The music room flooded my mind with great tunes from artists like the Big Bopper, ZZ Top and George Jones. However, no artist draws more visitors than the "Pearl"—Janis Joplin—who was born in Port Arthur in 1943. Folks come to see a replica of her classic Porsche Cabriolet and many of her gold records.

It just goes to show: Folks from small towns can go on to have a big influence on the world. I left inspired—and hungry for Cajun food. ■

ABOVE Chet channels some of Janis Joplin's cosmic blues at the Museum of the Gulf Coast in Port Arthur.

TCP Chet finds a piece of his heart and his roots at the museum. See his latest video on our website, and watch all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

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

SEPTEMBER

08

San Angelo [8-11] Arthur Stillwell's Dream of Steam, (325) 486-2140, sanangelorailway.org

09

Caldwell [9-10] Creative Memories Quilt Guild's Quilt Show, (512) 924-8716, englemann@suddenlink.net

Ennis [9-10] Patriot Day BBQ Bash, (972) 878-2625, ennis-chamber.com

Fairfield [9-10] Big T Memorial State Championship BBQ Cookoff, bigtmemorial.com

Brownwood [9-11, 16-18] Noises Off, (325) 998-2801, brownwoodlyrictheatre.com

10

Bartlett Metaphysical Night Gallery and Paranormal Tour, (512) 203-5561, austinghosttours.com

Caldwell Kolache Festival, (979) 567-0000, burlesoncountytexas.com

Plano Twenty Hounds: Downtown Sessions, (972) 941-5600, visitplano.com

Brenham [10-17] Washington County Fair, (979) 836-4112, washingtoncofair.com

11

Yorktown Holy Cross Festival, (361) 564-2893, holycrossyorktown.net

15

Lufkin [15-18] Texas State Forest Festival, (936) 634-6644, texasforestfestival.com

16

Nacogdoches [16-17] Old Town Rig Down, (936) 615-0580, oldtownrigdown.com

Amarillo [16-24] Tri-State Fair & Rodeo, (806) 376-7767, tristatefair.com

Kerrville [16-17, 23-25, 30-Oct. 2] Leading Ladies, (830) 896-9393, caillouxperformingarts.com

17

Anson Party in the Park, (325) 823-3259, ansonchamberofcommerce.com

Conroe Montgomery County Master Gardeners Fall Plant Sale, (936) 539-7824, mcmga.com

Plano North Texas Pride Festival, (469) 694-4834, visitplano.com

San Angelo Concho Valley Archeology Fair, (325) 657-4444, fortconcho.com

Taylor Texas Mamma Jamma Ride, (512) 297-7740, mammajammaride.org

Gladewater [17-18] Arts and Crafts, (903) 845-5501, gladewaterartsandcrafts.com

18

Kyle Doggie Dip, (512) 262-3939, cityofkyle.com

Stonewall Seed Stomp, (830) 644-2252, tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/lyndon-b-johnson

19

Kerrville [19-25] Paint Kerrville!, (830) 895-2911, kacckerrville.com

MORE EVENTS >

TCP *Submit Your Event*

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your December event by October 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.



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Pick of the Month

Balloon and Music Festival

Paris, September 9–12
(903) 517-2830
parisballoonandmusicfestival.com

The skies over North Texas are filled with hot air balloon flights and the evenings with food trucks, music, a kids zone, vendors and a live painting competition at this visually stunning festival.

25

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

30

Graford [30–Oct. 1] Possum Fest BBQ and Chili Cook-Off, (940) 779-2424,
possumkingdomlake.com

SEPTEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

22

Plano [22–25] Balloon Festival, (972) 867-7566,
planoballoonfest.org

Kerrville [22–Oct. 29] Roundup Exhibition and Sale, (830) 896-2553,
museumofwesternart.com

24

Brenham Suzy Bogguss,
(979) 337-7240,
thebarnhillcenter.com

DeKalb Saturday in the Park, (903) 277-3519,
dekalbtexasoktoberfest.org

Fredericksburg Back to the Basics,
(830) 997-3224,
backtothebasicsfestival.com

George West Mariachi Las Alteñas, (361) 436-1098,
dobie-westtheatre.com

Lakehills Medina Lake Cajun Festival,
(830) 460-0600,
cajunfestival-medinalake.com

Mason Old Yeller Day,
(325) 347-5446,
mason.ploud.net

OCTOBER

01

Bowie Chicken and Bread Days Heritage Festival,
(940) 872-6246,
cityofbowietx.com

La Grange Oktoberfest on the Square, (979) 968-3017,
visitlagrangetx.com

Lubbock [1–2] Miniaturists of Lubbock Show and Sale, (806) 885-4306,
miniaturistsoflubbock.org

Plano [1–2] Fall Plano Train Show, (972) 941-5840,
visitplano.com

07

Kerrville [7–16] Welcome Home Fest, (830) 257-3600,
kerrvillefolkfestival.org

Ingram [7–8, 14–16, 21–23] The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, (830) 367-5121,
hcaf.com

Light and Shadow

Out of the shadows and ready to shine, these photos are downright illuminating. Don't get left in the dark—join us as we cast a spotlight on Texas beauty.

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1 FAITH CAUGHN
TRINITY VALLEY EC

The East Texas Stampede equestrian drill team at the rodeo in Mesquite.

2 JOHN HOBBS
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

Yuccas at White Sands National Park.

3 CAMERON FOX
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

"You can't take the country out of a Texas girl raising her livestock."

4 PAUL GARCIA
MEDINA EC

The Texas Folklife Festival in San Antonio features historic reenactors in full period dress.



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Roll Call

Hail to the bus drivers, who help students get ahead

BY CYNTHIA L. MATLOCK
ILLUSTRATION BY TAYLOR CALLERY

WHEN I WAS A KID in the 1970s, the frame of a small school bus sat rusting in our neighbor's pasture. I asked my mother about it, and she told me that in the late 1930s, the neighbor, John Christian, had bought the bus.

So it was his. My mouth dropped in awe that an African American man in our rural Cherokee County community had bought a school bus.

That triggered my interest in school bus history as I watched bright yellow buses, large and small, coming and going, picking up and dropping off children as the school year began. They were headed home, to school or to their extracurricular activities.

I found out that in the second half of the 19th century, students who lived beyond walking distance of their school

were typically driven in the family wagon or a horse-drawn repurposed farm wagon with a tarpaulin stretched above the passenger seating.

It wasn't until the 1950s that buses operated by private drivers were widely replaced by district-owned fleets.

During the 1940s, many rural schools only went through the eighth grade. Beyond that, students often had to travel longer distances to their nearest high school. Very few families in rural communities had cars at that time. People like Christian—who made sure the school-age children in their farming areas had transportation to school—were so important.

“Oh yeah, Mr. John Christian bought a school bus, and he hired my father, Matthew Allen, to drive the bus to pick up the kids in the Green Chapel area,” Evelyn Allen, a former resident of the community, told me. “They all knew Mr. Christian.”

While the buses themselves have improved over the years, the experience is much the same. Schoolchildren—then and now—wait and anticipate the rumbling bus coming to their stop during the early dawn hours.

The bus rides to and from team sports, competitions and performances are the source of many friendships, laughs and arguments among the riders. Most riders can recall favorite drivers who stand out in their memories of their school days—like those who made them feel special or let them have safe fun.

Even the strictest drivers can be fondly remembered. Like one of my favorite drivers, J.C. Jones. My cousins and I knew he did not play. He'd look up in that wide rearview mirror and yell back to us in a commanding tone: “Y'all better set down back there.” And we'd immediately flop down in our seats.

Much gratitude is due to those bus owners, faithful drivers, mechanics and all who keep the buses rolling. Your work is important. ■

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