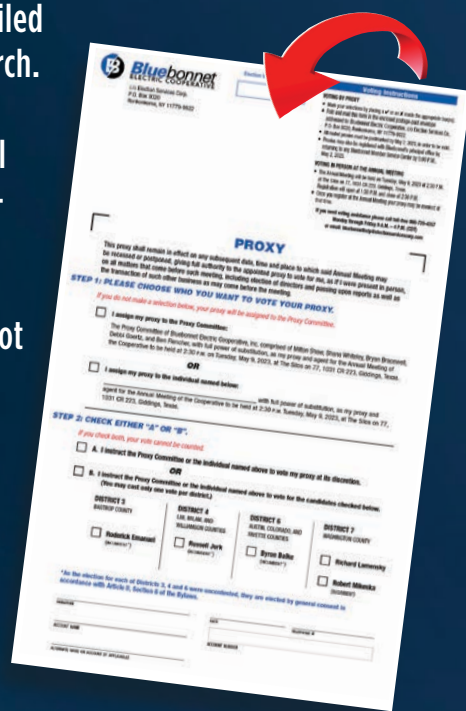


# Your co-op, your voice.

## Can't make the meeting? Submit your proxy form.

Mail your proxy form or hand it to a representative at any of our five member service centers. Everyone who returns a completed proxy will be entered in a drawing for prizes.

Proxy forms were mailed to all members in March. To vote by proxy, fill out the form and mail it back using the self-addressed postage-prepaid envelope provided. If you cannot find your form, you can pick up a new one at a Bluebonnet member service center from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.



**Completed proxy forms must be postmarked by May 2, 2023, or given to a representative at a member service center before 5 p.m. May 2.**

Get more information at [bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting](http://bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting) or call 800-842-7708.

# 2023 NOMINEES FOR BLUEBONNET'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Roderick Emanuel**  
District 3 (Incumbent)

Emanuel, vice president/vice chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric cooperative's Board since 2011. He has earned his Credentialed Cooperative Director, Board Leadership and Gold certifications through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He served as secretary/treasurer for five years, is chairman of Bluebonnet's Member & Employee Services Committee and a member of the Legal & Governance Committee. Emanuel's leadership as an officer and committee chairman has been a key reason for Bluebonnet's success since he joined the Board. He raises cattle on the family farm in Bastrop County with his son. Emanuel previously spent 34 years in education as a teacher, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent for the Bastrop Independent School District. He also worked at Gary Job Corps near San Marcos. He earned a bachelor's degree in education from what is now Texas State University and a master's degree from Prairie View A&M University. Emanuel is a motivational speaker and chairman of the deacon board at Hopewell Primitive Baptist Church in Cedar Creek. He previously served on the boards of directors of Hopewell Rosenwald School and the Bastrop Central Appraisal District. Roderick and Charlene have one son, Roderick Jr.



**Russell Jurk**  
District 4 (Incumbent)

Jurk has served four terms on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, starting in 2011. He has earned both Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certification through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He is chairman of Bluebonnet's Audit & Finance Committee and a member of the Energy Services Committee. His leadership has been fundamental in growing Bluebonnet's financial capacity and providing its members reliable, competitively priced power. He is vice president and general manager at Bobby Lehmann Inc., a Giddings-based trucking company that hauls oil field equipment. He has worked there since 1994. Jurk earned a technical degree from Southwest School of Electronics in Austin. He has served several positions with the Giddings Noon Lions Club, and he and his wife, Laurie, own Ashley's Attic, a boutique, home decor and collectibles shop in Giddings. Jurk is a past chairman of the Texas Trucking Association and has served as the association's foundation treasurer. His hobbies include target shooting, hunting, saltwater fishing and restoring old pickups and Jeeps. He and Laurie have two children, Ashley and Richard.



**Byron Balke**  
District 6 (Incumbent)

Balke, assistant secretary/treasurer of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric cooperative's Board since 2000. He is a member of Bluebonnet's Audit & Finance and Legal & Governance committees. Balke's experience and involvement on both committees and as a Board officer has been indispensable in developing Bluebonnet's financial strength. He is a cattle rancher and former shopkeeper from Bleiberville, a community of fewer than 100 people in northwestern Austin County. He helped run his family's historic general store and later operated a fertilizer and seed business. He played baseball at Blinn College in Brenham and had a short pro baseball career with the Houston Colt .45s (now the Houston Astros). He earned a bachelor's degree in agribusiness from what is now Texas State University and served in the Army Reserves. He is a member of the Austin County Livestock Association and the Bleiberville Volunteer Fire Department. His hobbies include collecting antiques, hunting and fishing on the Texas Gulf coast. He and his wife, Annette, have two children, Virgil and Phyllis, and four grandchildren.



**Robert Mikeska**  
District 7 (Incumbent)

Mikeska, secretary/treasurer of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric cooperative's Board since 2008. He has earned his Credentialed Cooperative Director certification through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He is chairman of Bluebonnet's Energy Services Committee and a member of the Audit & Finance Committee. His leadership as an officer and on these committees has been instrumental in providing reliable, competitively priced power and building Bluebonnet's financial strength. Mikeska spent 33 years at Mike Hopkins Distributing Co. in Brenham, and retired as senior vice president/controller in 2022. He earned a bachelor's degree in finance from the University of Texas at Austin. He has also worked for the Texas House of Representatives, the Texas Office of State-Federal Relations, Wholesale Beer Distributors of Texas and Brenham National Bank. Mikeska is a former Brenham City Council member and Washington County commissioner, an active member of Abiding Word Lutheran Church and former board member of Brenham's Senior Activity Center. He and his wife, Marita, have a daughter, Michele, and two grandchildren.



**Richard Lamensky**  
District 7

Richard Lamensky is a native of Needville, Texas. He attended Lamar University, where he earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. He and his wife, Cindy, whom he met in college during a dance at Riverside Hall in East Bernard, have been married 44 years. Lamensky fell in love with Brenham as a child while visiting relatives and has lived there his entire married life. He has been a Bluebonnet member for more than 30 years. Lamensky is the director of HVAC and energy management at Blinn College. His education and work experiences have enabled him to be familiar with the transmission and distribution of electricity from generation to the meter, and demand for power at homes and businesses. He is a member of Texas Energy Managers Association and holds the certification of an Accredited Energy Manager. He and Cindy have two children, Cassy and Chelsy, and three grandchildren. In Lamensky's spare time he enjoys hunting and fishing.



# MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

**TUESDAY, MAY 9**

## Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting is back in person.

- The Silos on 77 event venue ●
- 1031 County Road 223, Giddings ●

### SAVE THIS WRAP

for more information



Every member who votes by proxy or who registers at the Annual Meeting will be entered to

## WIN A TRUCK

being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet!

**Plus, drawings for other door prizes.\***

## 2023 ANNUAL MEETING & BOARD ELECTION Q&A

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at The Silos on 77, 1031 County Road 223 in Giddings. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. The meeting will start at 2:30 p.m. Look for details about the meeting inside this issue, on our social media and our website, bluebonnet.coop.

### How many Board of Director seats are up for election?

Four of the seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors are up for election this year. Three of the candidates — Roderick Emanuel, District 3 for Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, District 4 for Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; and Byron Balke, District 6 for Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties — were unopposed and will be elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. There are two candidates for the District 7 seat, representing Washington County: Robert Mikeska (incumbent) and Richard Lamensky. The term for the District 7 seat will end in 2027 in order to evenly distribute the number of directors' seats up for election each year.

### Bluebonnet's service area is divided into seven districts. Can I vote for candidates in all districts or just the district in which I live?

During contested Board elections, co-op members can vote for directors in all districts. The districts in the co-op's service area were drawn along Bluebonnet's service area boundary and county lines. The seven districts are represented by one to three directors based on, among other things, the number of meters in each district.

### What are my voting options?

Members may vote for Board candidates by submitting their proxy form by May 2, 2023, or by attending the Annual Meeting in person on May 9, 2023. There are currently no additional ballot items to be voted on this year. However, items can be added to the Annual Meeting agenda that would require a vote by members. Those items would have to be added no later than 10 days before the Annual Meeting. Your proxy could be used in that vote, in addition to selecting a candidate for District 7, which is why your proxy selection is important.

### What is proxy voting, and how does it work?

Proxy voting allows members to designate another person to vote in his or her place. On the proxy, members can assign their

vote to either Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee or to another member who attends the Annual Meeting. Proxies are counted to ensure at least 1% of Bluebonnet's membership is present at the Annual Meeting to constitute a quorum.

### Who serves on Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee?

The Proxy Committee is composed of all Bluebonnet Board members whose terms are not currently up for election. This year's Proxy Committee members are Milton Shaw, Shana Whiteley, Bryan Bracewell, Debbi Goertz and Ben Flencher.

### How do I vote by proxy?

Complete the proxy form and return it by mail or drop it off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor. If you cannot locate your proxy form, you can pick one up at a member service center. Proxies must either be hand-delivered to a member service center by 5 p.m. May 2, 2023, or mailed to:

**Bluebonnet Elections Processing**  
c/o Election Services Co.  
P.O. Box 9020  
Ronkonkoma, NY 11779-9822

Mailed proxies must be postmarked by May 2, 2023.

### Can this proxy be used again at future Annual Meetings?

No, the proxy is valid only for the meeting specified on the proxy form.

### Can I vote at the Annual Meeting if I send in a proxy form?

When you register at the meeting, you may revoke your proxy and then vote in person.

### Who administers the election?

Election Services Co., which is a third-party, independent vendor that specializes in administering corporate elections nationwide. It has the experience to efficiently and accurately tally proxies and votes while protecting members' confidential account information.

### What if I have more questions?

Visit [bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting](http://bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting), call a member service representative at 800-842-7708 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, or email [memberservices@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:memberservices@bluebonnet.coop).

# Join us!

for Bluebonnet's

## ANNUAL MEETING

**MAY 9, 2023**

The Silos on 77  
Giddings, Texas

**REGISTRATION**  
**1:30-2:30 P.M.**  
**MEETING STARTS**  
**AT 2:30 P.M.**



← LOOK INSIDE FOR MORE DETAILS!

*\*Bluebonnet employees, members of the Board of Directors and spouses are not eligible to win.*



CAN YOU BELIEVE  
THESE ARE GOURDS?

THE TEXAN WHO BEAT THE  
WRIGHTS INTO THE SKY

HOW THE PEOPLE OF WEST  
HAVE PREVAILED

# Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2023

## Brenham Is Smokin’

Here’s the scoop:  
The barbecue there  
is worth stopping for



**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18



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# April 2023



08

## Fruits of Their Labor

How passionate artists help each other turn gourds into richly embellished works of art.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers  
Photos by Julia Robinson

## 12 Make No Bones

Barbecue joints in Brenham, a town famous for ice cream, are attracting crowds of their own.

By Anna Mazurek  
Photos by Wyatt McSpadden

04

**Currents**  
The latest buzz

06

**TCP Talk**  
Readers respond

18

**Co-op News**  
Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

29

**Footnotes in Texas History**  
Grounded in Mystery  
By Martha Deeringer

30

**TCP Kitchen**  
Incredible Eggs  
By Megan Myers

34

**Hit the Road**  
Meteoric Fall  
By Chet Garner

37

**Focus on Texas**  
Photo Contest: Riding the River

38

**Observations**  
Rise Up West  
By Jeffree Wyn Itrich

ON THE COVER

Matt Lowery is proud of how the ribs at LJ's BBQ stack up.  
Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

ABOVE

The Hallettsville home of Blanche and Roy Cavarretta hoards their gourds.  
Photo by Julia Robinson



# Rising Stars

**WE SALUTE** a select group of Texas co-op employees this Lineworker Appreciation Day, April 10. Apprentices from Pedernales Electric Cooperative in Johnson City dominated at two competitions in 2022 that spotlighted and promoted lineworker skills and safe work practices.

PEC's Phillip Stapp finished first among 96 apprentices at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo in July, claiming the top prize for the co-op for the fourth consecutive rodeo. Co-workers Crispen Davis placed third and Cole Compton fifth. Then, at the International Lineman's Rodeo in October in Kansas, PEC's Zackery Gough, below, beat out 365 competitors to claim first place. Davis was close behind in second place, and Stapp was 14th.



“The hardest thing in the world to understand is income taxes.”

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE I DROVE ALL NIGHT TO ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our February prompt: **Rainy days make me ...**

Get in the kitchen and make soup or dumplings and do some baking.

ELAINE GARNER  
VIA FACEBOOK

Want to curl up with a cozy blanket and a good book.

MARGIE HARGROVE  
BOWIE-CASS EC  
DAINGERFIELD

Glad I'm retired from delivering mail so I can sit on my porch and enjoy it.

TANIS WILLIAMS  
WOOD COUNTY EC  
FRUITVALE

Want to make oatmeal, hot cocoa, tomato soup and grilled cheese.

KIMBERLEY BAILEY RIGGS  
VIA FACEBOOK

Remember when it was dry and I promised not to curse rainy days.

MARK BROWNING  
SAN HOUSTON EC  
GOODRICH

Visit our website to see more responses.





## April 8 National Empanada Day

Writer Vianney Rodriguez shared that empanadas were among her favorite types of pan dulce in *Sweet Memories*, from December 2020.

## Funny How Time Slips Away

Willie Nelson, the musical genius from the Hill Country who has won 10 Grammys, written more than 2,500 songs and turned plenty of others' tunes into hits of his own, turns 90 on April 29.

Here are the favorite songs of TCP's writers and editors:

Chris Burrows: *City of New Orleans*

Alex Dal Santo: *On the Road Again*

Travis Hill: *Hello Walls*

Jessica Ridge: *Pancho and Lefty*

Tom Widowski: *Seven Spanish Angels*

**TCP** Watch Willie perform each of these songs on our website.



# Holy Smokes!

**SEEMS ONLY FITTING** that the world's longest barbecue marathon took place in Texas.

Pitmasters from Panther City BBQ in Fort Worth grilled for 40 hours, 49 minutes and 17 seconds July 13–15, 2022, to set the record. Chris Magallanes, above, and two others cooked 450 pounds of hamburgers, 300 pounds each of tablitras (beef short ribs) and fajitas, and 100 pounds each of onions and peppers.

The food was donated to the community, including to first responders and a hospital.

## **TCP** Contests and More

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DAVE SHAEFER

**Caught Cuisine**

“I discovered hundreds of sundew plants growing in my backyard in Kountze. Let’s just say I had no problem with ants in my yard!”

EDWARD ROWLAND  
CECA  
EASTLAND COUNTY

**Kitty Hawk’s Mark**

My first carrier landing in an A-7 Corsair aboard the USS Kitty Hawk was in November 1968, and my last landing after 130 combat missions in Southeast Asia was August 16, 1969 [*Breaking Up*, February 2023]. There’s nothing like your first carrier deployment, especially if it’s to a combat zone.

Mike Scott  
Tri-County EC  
Granbury

It’s heartwarming to know that 95% of her will be recycled and that her armor will be incorporated into a new U.S. ship [*Breaking Up*, February 2023].

DAVID HURLEY  
VIA FACEBOOK

We just booked a guided trip through the ship channel [at right]. Our guide told us a few things about the retired carrier, but you filled in all the blanks.

Randy Carroll  
Wood County EC  
Winnaboro



COURTESY RANDY CARROLL

**Honoring the 442nd**

My parents—U.S. citizens—were among those who lost their assets and possessions when all those of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast were ordered into internment camps without due process and without any evidence of a crime [*Rescue of the Lost Battalion*, February 2023].

Two of my uncles served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Thank you for remembering the loyalty, valor and tremendous sacrifice of the Japanese Americans of the 442nd.

Jeanne Makihara  
Guadalupe Valley EC  
Cibolo

**Indianola Relocated**

After the destruction of Indianola by hurricanes and subsequent fires, many of the homes were dismantled and moved to nearby Cuero and Victoria for a safer location [*Important Entry*, February 2023]. A search of the internet reveals addresses where visitors can see these old homes in a restored setting.

Jeri Porter  
Pedernales EC  
Fischer

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power  
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor  
Austin, TX 78701

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

Texas Co-op Power

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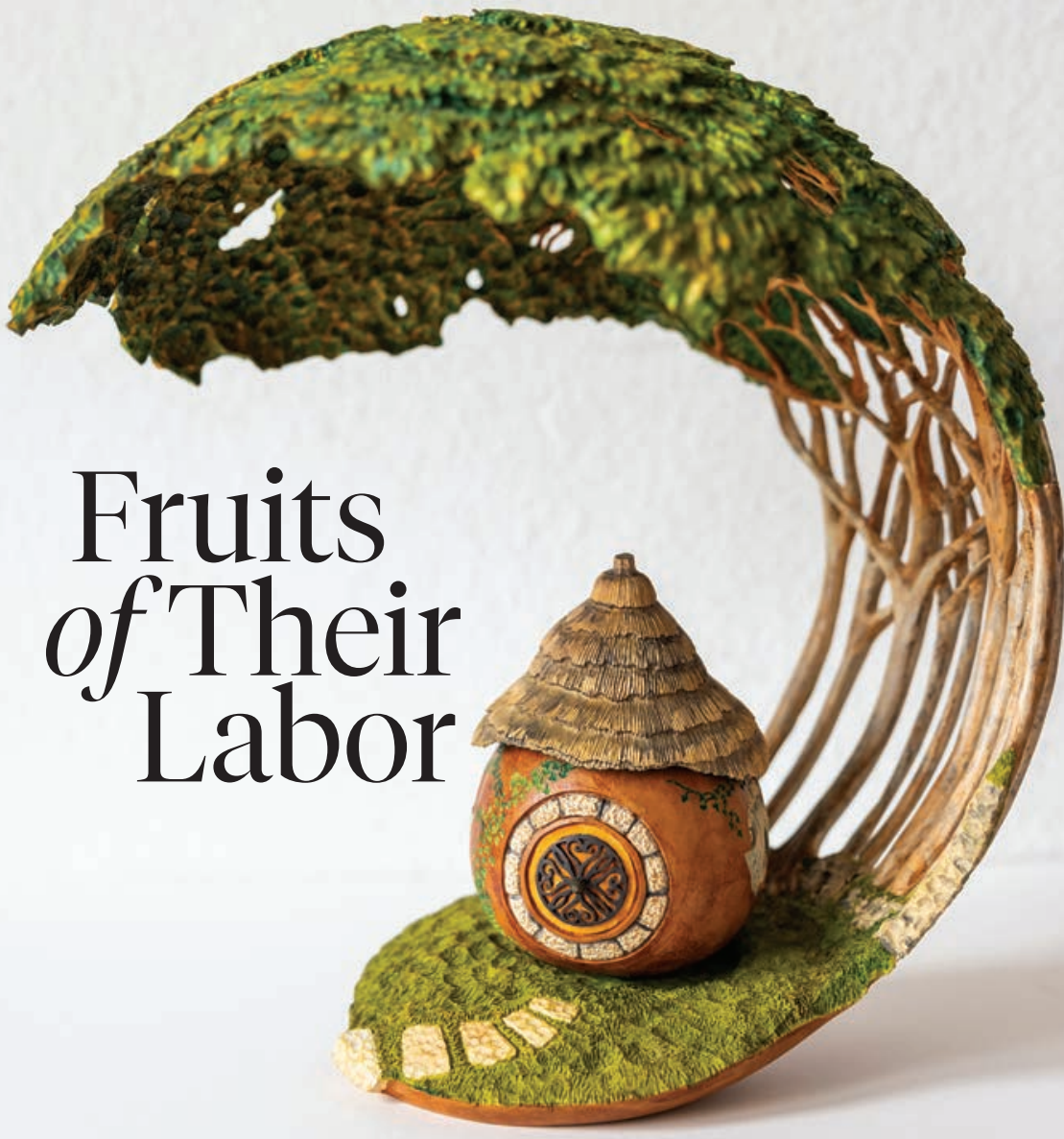
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# Fruits of Their Labor

How passionate artists turn gourds into richly embellished works of art

FROM LEFT Michael Ford's pieces sometimes incorporate multiple gourds. Ford, a former graphic artist for the Texas Department of Transportation, has been turning gourds into art since 2013.

**W**ith one hand, Wimberley artist Michael Ford grips what looks like a glossy beige birdhouse shaped like an hourglass and etched with black tendrils. Then he gives it a shake. *Boom, boom—BOOM.* The deep rumbles startle passersby at the Lone Star Gourd Festival in Fredericksburg. Like me, they're dumbfounded.

"This is a thunder gourd," says Ford, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. When shaken, a spring vibrates a drumhead, creating ominous notes that emanate through holes in the gourd.

"It's very functional. If your company stays too long, just duck into a hallway with your gourd," Ford says, grinning, then shakes it again, setting off more thunderous booms. "Then tell your guests, 'Uh-oh, storm's coming. Better leave while you can!'"

Ford's joking, of course. But he's dead serious about the art form that he calls his passion—much like his fellow gourd artists all over Texas. Using an array of techniques, they create bowls, holiday décor, birdhouses, masks, sculptures, jewelry, lamps and miniature hobbit homes, to name





a few examples. There are simple designs, like painted gourds, and richly embellished pieces that can sell for thousands of dollars.

But wait—what is a gourd? Is it just a smooth pumpkin? Well, close. Gourds and pumpkins, along with squash, melons and cucumbers, are members of Cucurbitaceae, a plant family that produces hard-shelled fruits that humans have used for food, ornaments and utensils over thousands of years. Experts believe gourds are the only plants that have been grown around the world since prehistoric days.

Historians in Peru have unearthed ancient gourd fragments associated with early humans. For generations, Peruvian artist Ana Poma and her neighbors in Cochas Chico have passed down the tradition of carving and burning intricate designs onto gourds as a way of storytelling. “Families teach their children,” says Poma, a vendor and teacher at the Fredericksburg festival. “I learned as a child from my mother, uncles and grandparents.”

For some artists, though, not just any gourd will do. Forget using our thin-skinned Texas natives, such as buf-

falo and balsam gourds. Instead, many artists prefer hard-shelled and decorative gourds available in endless shapes, sizes and thicknesses. Thicker shells (three-eighths of an inch thick or more) are sturdier for carving and burning. Standard gourd shapes, designated by the American Gourd Society, include cannonball, basketball, martin house, dipper, club and banana.

Many artists order their gourds from professional growers, such as the Wuertz Gourd Farm in Arizona and the Welburn Gourd Farm in Southern California. Some grow their own. John and Rickie Newell, Central Texas EC members near Llano, grow gourds. At the festival, Rickie—an artist who displays her work at the Llano Art Guild and Gallery—has a bin piled high with gourds for sale, ranging from 50 cents to \$12. Typically, gourds are priced according to their widest diameter. Those that have been cleaned on the outside and/or had their seeds and pulp scraped out cost more.

“We plant our gourds around April 15,” Rickie says. “Then we harvest when they’re dead in the field from October up to Christmas and dry them in a metal cage.”





## Get a Gourd Look

See for yourself at Central Texas shows this year.

**Southwest Gourd & Fiber Fine Art Show,**  
May 18–July 1,  
Kerrville

**Lone Star Gourd Festival,**  
Sept. 29–30,  
Fredericksburg

**Hill Country Collectables,**  
year-round,  
Wimberley



Choosing a gourd is just the first step for many artists, and gourd shows are an ideal place to learn about the craft and expand skill sets. This Texas show is one of a handful of annual events held across the U.S. that attract hobbyists and professionals alike. Artists and vendors welcome questions, and many sell basic supplies. The Texas Gourd Society, the nonprofit organization that sponsors and organizes the annual Lone Star Gourd Festival at the Gillespie County Fairgrounds, is also a resource for crafters. Across Texas, the society has regional chapters called “patches.”

“We learn techniques from each other, like leather stitching,” says Sherry Nelson, a member of the Guadalupe Gourd Patch in Kerrville. “In the gourd world, though, you never copy someone’s work. Instead, you can use their technique as an inspiration to create something new.”

On her gourds, Nelson, a Central Texas EC member, uses various methods, such as burning; carving; painting; applying alcohol dyes; and attaching horns, beads and cactus fibers. “Pyrography is my favorite,” she says. “I can draw with my wood burner for hours. It’s very relaxing.”

Like many gourd artists, Roy and Blanche Cavarretta, who live in Hallettsville and are members of San Bernard EC, started out by growing gourds and turning them into bird-houses. Then, while traveling in New Mexico, they viewed a gourd art exhibit at an art festival. “We had no idea so many things could be done with them,” Roy recalls. “It set us on a

CLOCKWISE FROM IMMEDIATELY ABOVE Roy Cavarretta’s Standing Tall, Jill Robinson’s Chasing Dreams and a James Medders spiraling piece. Rickie Newell continues work on her angel with wings. Robinson’s Green Goddess. Blanche and Roy Cavarretta’s hobby has them “on a journey we never could have imagined.”

INDIVIDUAL GOURDS: COURTESY THE ARTISTS





journey we never could have imagined. There's not a day goes by that we're not working on a gourd."

That was 11 years ago. The Cavarrettas still grow gourds. They've also become master gourd artists who've won countless awards. "At art shows, you enter at the novice level," Roy explains. "When you win at that level, you advance to intermediate, then advanced and master."

Together, the couple market their work as Gravel Road Arts. On her urn-style gourds, Blanche primarily uses pyrography, transparent dyes and a weaving stitch called closed coiling. Flowers, hummingbirds, dragonflies and inlaid gemstones adorn many of her pieces. Similarly, Roy uses pyrography and dyes along with chip carving using a gouge. His designs lean toward contemporary and Southwestern themes, such as his Spirit Doll that won Best of Show at the Fredericksburg festival.

The People's Choice award went to Chasing Dreams, a large kettle gourd intricately crafted by Austin's Jill Robinson. "I use a lot of random techniques," she says of her striking designs. "On this one, I used enameling, wood-burning, stipple carving and alcohol inks along with real cactus fibers and carved cactus fibers."

Visit with Robinson and other gourd artists, and you'll quickly pick up on their camaraderie and deep love for the craft. When artist James Medders of Morgan Mill lost the use of his left hand, Roy Cavarretta rigged a carving vise

that could hold a gourd in place for his friend. Soon Medders, a United Cooperative Services member, was back to woodburning, carving and painting on his gourds. Using a method called pine needle coiling, he also stitches longleaf pine needles into elaborate designs.

"Once I got started in gourd art eight years ago, I had a passion," says Medders, who has also won awards. "Why? I don't know. I just do. Sometimes my wife tells me, 'Put that gourd down! We've got somewhere to go.'"

Meanwhile, across the exhibit hall at the festival, a hands-on art area called the Imagination Station beckons newbies of any age. From a big pile of gourds, I choose a little one cut open like a bowl. Then I plunk down at a table with metallic paints, rhinestones, a paintbrush and a sponge.

"One of our goals is to pass on gourd art to young people so it won't die out," says Rona Thornton of Austin, who's overseeing the area. "I take the Imagination Station to garden clubs, schools and military bases. It's fun to see people who think they're not artistic create their own piece."

That would be me—I'm definitely no artist. But wait! Before long, my plain gourd has transformed into a sparkly urn. Wow, I *am* an artist.

Thornton smiles. "Anything's possible with a gourd," she says. ■

**TCP** See more gourds in this story on our website.





Barbecue joints in Brenham, a town famous for ice cream, are attracting crowds of their own



# MAKE NO BONES

**L**eonard Botello IV always wanted to have a roadside barbecue shack. So when a hole-in-the-wall barbecue restaurant 3 miles west of downtown Brenham on U.S. 290 went up for sale, Botello bought the 1,200-square-foot red metal building.

He grew up in a family of restaurateurs in Lake Jackson and initially swore he'd never follow the same path. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a biology degree in 2013. But after a visit to Austin's La Barbecue, Botello was blown away by the simplicity of the barbecue. Right away he started experimenting with his uncle's pit and later drove to Ohio to pick up his first offset smoker, a \$4,000 Craigslist purchase.

"It's like one big science project every single day because everything's completely different," Botello says. "Every cow is different. Every piece of wood is different. The weather is different."

He opened Truth Barbeque in July 2015 and added a covered patio next to his roadside barbecue shack on the outskirts of Brenham.

While Brenham is best known as the home of Blue Bell Creameries, there's more to the city's culinary scene than ice cream. The small town, population 18,000, has a handful of barbecue restaurants that are building impressive résumés. Two of these spots—Truth Barbeque and LJ's BBQ—are just a mile and a half apart, and both made *Texas Monthly's* list of the 50 Best BBQ Joints in 2021.

At either place, the owners and pitmasters could be stationed behind the counter slicing up the Texas trinity—brisket, sausage and ribs—each cooked with their own personal style and accompanied by an array of delectable sides. Brenham's location, halfway between Austin and Houston, makes it an easy day trip or weekend destination for barbecue. Come hungry and be prepared to loosen your belt.



OPPOSITE FROM TOP The staff at LJ's BBQ and a spread at the restaurant. ABOVE Preparing servings of LJ's ketchup-based sauce, which balances sweetness with apple cider and white vinegars.

## HONORING MAMAW

**LJ'S STARTED** in an unlikely place—the backroom of a downtown liquor store, where Matt Lowery, his cousin Leah Cook and her husband, Corey Cook, were selling lunches on a table at a side entrance in 2016. Pitmasters Lowery and Corey Cook were preparing the food at Leah's parents' house.

The trio moved their business to the current brick-and-mortar location, a concrete building with a red metal awning on West Main Street in 2017. Most days the parking lot is full and one of the three pitmasters—Lowery, Cook and Josh Jalomo, who joined the team in 2020—is behind the counter chopping brisket for one of their signature side dishes: brisket mac and cheese.

"It's just mac and cheese with chopped brisket on top," Corey Cook says. "It's no more simple than that. It's one of the most popular items."

The idea for the restaurant was hatched when Lowery began cooking barbecue and doing small catering gigs in 2014, when he was in graduate school at the University of Houston, studying hotel and restaurant management. After graduation, he was visiting the Cooks in Brenham when they began brainstorming an idea for a business. In 2015 they started doing pop-ups before moving to the backroom of the liquor store.

The trio decided to name the restaurant for their grandmother, Laura Jean, who lived in Brenham.

"One day, Leah said, 'How about we call it LJ's after our mamaw?'" Lowery says. "It just seemed like a good way to pay homage to her and had a great story."

LJ's main focus is locally sourced ingredients, from the post oak they burn to the collard greens they serve. "We get our collard greens from a local farmer here that's about 5 miles away from our restaurant," says Lowery about their twice-weekly deliveries from Whitehurst Farm. "The greens you order here at LJ's literally are in the ground no more than 24 to 48 hours before."

The brisket is seasoned with a salt and pepper rub. "It's simple, but it's done well," Lowery says. All the meat is cooked on one of four smokers—one 1,000-gallon and three 500-gallon offsets tucked behind the restaurant. In addition to brisket, sausage and ribs, LJ's also serves up pulled pork and turkey. All the meats pair well with their ketchup-based sauce that Cook calls the "perfect balance" of sweet mixed with apple cider and white vinegars. Peach cobbler and banana pudding are the stars of the dessert menu.

With so many options, deciding what to order can be tough. Lowery suggests starting with a three-meat plate, piled high with brisket, ribs and sausage.

"Obviously, the turkey is the hidden gem," Cook says. "But the first thing that you want to try are those."





to kind of complement the meat,” Botello explains.

His most popular sides are collards, corn pudding and potato tot casserole, a family recipe. But save room for the triple-layer cakes for dessert—each slice weighs a pound. Using another Botello family recipe, head baker Kiki Wilkins makes 12 rotating varieties of cake, including triple-chocolate, carrot, strawberry, tres leches and banana caramel.

Truth debuted on *Texas Monthly*'s list in 2017, earning the No. 10 spot. But getting there wasn't easy.

“I remember cooking three briskets a day and then nobody showing up,” Botello says. He initially chose Brenham to avoid being drowned out in bigger markets like Austin and Houston. Truth gained traction quickly, partially thanks to its photogenic plating that made Botello's barbecue ripe for social media. In 2019 he opened a second location, in Houston.

Success hasn't changed how Botello does business. He's still behind the counter cutting meat, and his dad is often at the register. “I like to be hands-on [and] talk to customers,” explains Botello, who always ensures sauce bottles are clean and facing the correct way. “I like to be approachable.”

Botello enjoys the questions and interactions. “When

they ask you questions, your brain starts to work a lot harder,” he says. “And you realize how much information you have locked up here that you're just doing [by] second nature. So it's good for them, and it's good for me.”

He teaches barbecue classes one Sunday a month, inspired by the openness of Wayne Mueller, a third-generation pitmaster and the owner of Louie Mueller Barbecue in nearby Taylor. One day, while Botello was eating, Mueller sat down beside him and started sharing his knowledge unprompted, including his temperature for cooking meat—often a secret in the barbecue world.

“Even though these are trade secrets, I could give them to you,” explains Botello. “But it's like Jimi Hendrix or Stevie Ray Vaughan teaching somebody how to play a guitar. They're never going to be able to recreate that no matter how many answers you give them.” ■

FROM TOP A sampling from the menu at Truth Barbeque. Owner Leonard Botello IV, left, is often found behind the counter cutting meat as his father works the register.



## MOMENT OF TRUTH

AT TRUTH BARBEQUE, Botello's Central Texas-style preparation consists of a simple rub made in-house and post oak to smoke the meat. To expand his skills and menu, Botello also serves up a rotating menu of less conventional dishes—smoked boudin, pastrami brisket and Carolina whole hog, a popular Saturday-only menu item. The meats are accompanied by a choice of three sauces: a traditional tomato base, tangy mustard or white barbecue. The latter two are his tribute to Carolina-style barbecue. “Our sauces are a smidge more vinegary than most sauces, but it's just

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# ANNUAL MEETING 2023



Bluebonnet  
members are  
invited to the  
cooperative's  
Annual Meeting on May 9

We

By Alyssa Meinke ● Photos by Sarah Beal

**WHEN YOU BELONG** to an electric cooperative, you're not a customer – you are a member and an owner. One of the many benefits of co-op membership is attending the Annual Meeting on the second Tuesday of every May and ensuring your voice is heard.

After two years of drive-through Annual Meetings, Bluebonnet is pleased this year to welcome back all members, longtime and new, to a traditional in-person gathering. Since our last in-person Annual Meeting, more than 30,000 members have joined the cooperative.

The 2023 Bluebonnet Annual Meeting is May 9 at the The Silos on 77 event venue, southeast of downtown Giddings at 1031 County Road 223. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m., and the meeting starts at 2:30. Members will hear a state-of-the-cooperative report, learn about milestones Bluebonnet reached and plans for the cooperative's future.

Members are invited to meet those who serve them on Bluebonnet's Board and staff, visit with other members, ask questions and take care of any business with Bluebonnet. Oh, and did we mention kolaches? A longtime favorite, locally baked kolaches, including traditional cream cheese, peach, apple and cherry, are





At left, members at the last in-person Annual Meeting in 2019 wait for the event to begin. Below far left, John Gardner, a member who has solar panels on his Brenham-area home, talks with Bluebonnet employee Brittany Hardy. Below, Rosalinda Serrano of Cedar Creek chats with Bluebonnet General Manager and CEO Matt Bentke before the meeting begins. This year's in-person meeting will be at The Silos at 77 event venue in Giddings on May 9.

# Welcome back!



among the meeting's refreshments.

At the beginning of the meeting, Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet's Board chairman, and Matt Bentke, the cooperative's general manager and CEO, will welcome members. Robert Mikeska, the Board secretary/treasurer, will give a report on the status of submitted proxy forms and open the meeting for business.

Sarah Newman-Altamirano, the cooperative's general counsel, will verify and announce the results of Bluebonnet's Board election, which will be administered by Election Services Corp., a third-party independent vendor that conducts corporate elections nationwide.

Members who are unable to attend the

Annual Meeting can still ensure their voices are heard by submitting a proxy form by May 2, 2023. Proxy forms were mailed to all members in March. (See Page 22.) Plus, any member who votes by proxy or who attends the Annual Meeting will be entered in a drawing to win a 2013 Dodge Ram 1500 crew cab with 4-wheel drive, which has about 190,000 miles and is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet.

Four of the seats on Bluebonnet's nine-member Board of Directors are up for election this year. Three of the candidates — Roderick Emanuel, District 3 for Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, District 4 for Lee, Milam and Williamson counties;

**Continued on next page**

## ON THE COVER WRAP

- About the meeting
- Board candidate bios
- Frequently asked questions

## MORE ON THE MEETING

- A chance to win a prize, **Page 20**
- A grand tradition, **Page 20**
- How to get there, **Page 21**
- A guide to proxy forms, **Page 22**



# ANNUAL MEETING 2023



Members who vote by proxy or in person at the Annual Meeting, will have a chance to win a prize including this 2013 Dodge Ram 1500 that is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet.

## Don't miss a chance to win great prizes!

**VOTING BY PROXY** or attending the Annual Meeting ensures your voice is heard and is one of the advantages of being part of a member-owned electric cooperative.

There's another advantage this year: Whether you vote by proxy or in person at the Annual Meeting, you have a chance to win a prize.

One of those prizes is a 2013 Dodge Ram 1500 crew cab four-wheel-drive truck that is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. The truck has about 190,000 miles.

Any member who submits a completed proxy form by mail, postmarked no later than May 2 or submitted in person at a member service center before 5 p.m. May 2, will be entered in a drawing for the truck. The drawing is planned for Wednesday, May 10, the day after the Annual Meeting.

Members who vote by proxy will also be entered to win prizes including a Yeti Tundra 45 cooler, a Blackstone flattop grill and a Vizio 50-inch TV. These prizes will be drawn at random on days leading up to the Annual Meeting.

Any member attending the Annual Meeting in person on May 9 will be entered in drawings for one of multiple door prizes.\*

\*Bluebonnet employees, members of the Board of Directors and their spouses are not eligible to win any prizes.



Above from left: Before there was PowerPoint, there were pie charts on posters, such as this one held aloft by Henry Umscheid at the 1964 meeting. Umscheid later became the cooperative's general manager. Bluebonnet's Bill Hammer lets a young

## The decades-long history of electric

*Excerpted from a story for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine, May 2014, by Ed Crowell:*

**IN TEXAS** during the 1940s, access to electricity was a given in most cities, but was new to rural residents. So, too, were the democratically controlled cooperatives that provided that electricity. Residents were member-owners, not customers, and they exercised control over their co-ops' rates and development.

Annual meetings of cooperative members across Central Texas provided a special time to gather and share experiences, hear speeches from current and would-be Board members and then vote in their

elections. Major actions that impacted co-ops' growth and financial health were on the agendas.

The Annual Meeting was typically a festive event: Members dressed up for the occasion, socialized and ate together, usually barbecue. They welcomed visiting speakers ranging from state legislators to federal lawmakers and governors.

They roamed through tents and booths looking at the latest in electric machinery, appliances and home comfort systems.

Entertainment came in the form of singers, dancers or storytellers. At some meetings, inspirational speakers gave members messages of hope and motivation. Children were treated to magicians,

### Continued from page 19

and Byron Balke, District 6 for Austin, Colorado and Fayette counties — were unopposed and will be elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. There are two candidates for the District 7 seat, representing Washington County: Robert Mikeska, the incumbent, and Richard Lamensky.

During registration before the meeting, the Jason Roberts Band from Austin will play Western swing music and co-op members will have the opportunity to talk to Bluebonnet

Board members and cooperative staff.

Nancy Littlefield, a Bluebonnet member in Paige, said the prizes are her favorite part of the co-op's Annual Meeting. "I have won four times," she said, listing off her winnings: a gift card, tools, a hammock and a laptop.

"Beyond that, I enjoy the information about what Bluebonnet is doing on their (electric) system and technology improvements they are making."

Throughout the Annual Meeting, Bluebonnet staff will draw names of members attending the Annual Meeting to win great door prizes, including bill credits, a



co-op member draw a ticket for a door prize during a meeting in the late '60s; the 1948 Annual Meeting of the Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative (later renamed Bluebonnet) was held in the Lee County Courthouse.

## cooperatives' annual meetings

movies and balloons.

The drawing of door prizes was the highlight of the day for many members (as it often is today). With luck, a member could take home a prize from among an impressive array of items donated by local merchants and service companies.

There was plenty of fun, but the serious, primary purpose of annual meetings was summed up on the 50th anniversary of the Rural Electrification Administration [established in 1935], which backed loans that the co-ops used to build their systems. This is how the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association described that history in its 1985 anniversary book, "The Next Greatest Thing."

"Annual meeting day became a high point of the year for many rural families ... Once a year, under the co-op's bylaws, the members assumed control. Assembled in annual meetings, they heard and acted upon the reports of their officers and employees. They elected new directors or re-elected incumbents. They made the changes they thought necessary in their bylaws and procedures."

On Aug. 2, 1939, the Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative received its state charter to provide electricity to residents in 11 area counties. In 1964, 1,400 members gathered and unanimously voted to rename the cooperative Bluebonnet.

television, a laptop, a riding lawn mower and more. The door prizes are donated by the cooperative's vendors.

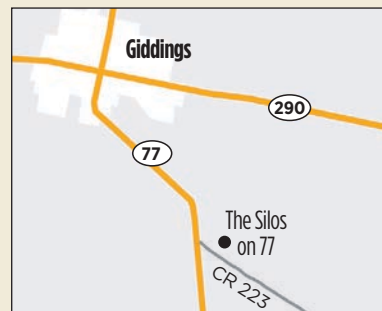
"The Annual Meeting is a great opportunity for us to visit with our members and show them how much we appreciate them," said Rachel Ellis, Bluebonnet's chief administrative officer.

While the drive-through meetings of the past two years still gave members an Annual Meeting experience and an opportunity to vote in advance by proxy, members attending this year's in-person meeting will enjoy visiting and interacting with Bluebonnet's directors, staff and each other.

"The drive-through meetings the past two years were wonderful, but my fellow directors and I are really excited about seeing everyone in person this year," said Board Chairman Flecher. "I encourage both new and longtime members to attend this year's Annual Meeting to celebrate our shared successes and hear what's in store for the future."

Whether you've attended the Annual Meeting for decades, or never attended, we can't wait to greet you, talk with you and answer your questions.

For more information, visit [bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting](http://bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting). ■



The Silos on 77 is 2.6 miles from downtown Giddings.

## Getting there

**THIS YEAR'S** Annual Meeting will once again be held at The Silos on 77 event venue in Giddings at 1031 County Road 223.

All Bluebonnet members are invited to attend the Annual Meeting.

Look for Bluebonnet banners on Texas 77 southeast of downtown Giddings indicating County Road 223 is coming up. More flags and a sheriff's deputy will be at the intersection with County Road 223, then you'll see Bluebonnet banners at the entrance to The Silos. Bluebonnet staff will guide you to a parking spot.

**If you plan to vote at the meeting, make sure to bring your April bill with the QR code on it, and a form of identification like a passport, driver's license or state-issued identification card.**

If you receive electronic bills rather than paper ones, you can get a copy of your bill by logging into your online MyBluebonnet account, clicking the Billing & Payments tab, then Billing History.

You can also register by verbally reciting two pieces of information on your account such as the name(s) listed on the account, your Bluebonnet account number, your birthday, last four digits of your Social Security number, your driver's license number or your mailing address.

If you have any questions, contact a member service representative at 800-842-7708, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday or email [memberservices@bluebonnet.coop](mailto:memberservices@bluebonnet.coop).



# ANNUAL MEETING 2023

This box should already contain your unique 10-digit voting number. This number is provided by Election Services Corp., the third-party independent vendor conducting the election.

## a GUIDE to your PROXY FORM

One of the benefits of being a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member is being represented by the cooperative's Board of Directors. Make sure your voice is heard by submitting your proxy form by May 2, 2023, or attending the Annual Meeting in person on May 9, 2023. Proxy forms were mailed in March.

**Bluebonnet ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**  
c/o Election Services Corp.  
P.O. Box 9020  
Rankonkoma, NY 11779-9822

**Voting Instructions**

**VOTING BY PROXY**

- Mark your selections by placing a ✓ or an ✗ inside the appropriate boxes.
- Fill and mail this form in the enclosed postage-paid envelope addressed to: Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, c/o Election Services Corp., P.O. Box 9020, Rankonkoma, NY 11779-9822.
- All mailed proxies must be postmarked by May 2, 2023, in order to be valid.
- Proxies may also be registered with Bluebonnet's principal office by returning to any Bluebonnet Member Service Center by 5:00 P.M., May 2, 2023.

**VOTING IN PERSON AT THE ANNUAL MEETING**

- The Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 9, 2023 at 2:30 P.M. at The Silos on 77, 1031 CR 223, Giddings, Texas.
- Registration will open at 1:30 P.M. and close at 2:30 P.M.
- Once you register at the Annual Meeting your proxy may be revoked at that time.
- If you need voting assistance please call toll-free 866-720-4357 Monday through Friday 9 A.M. - 4 P.M. (CDT) or email: [bluebonnet@electionservicescorp.com](mailto:bluebonnet@electionservicescorp.com)

**PROXY**

This proxy shall remain in effect on any subsequent date, time and place to which said Annual Meeting may be recessed or postponed, giving full authority to the appointed proxy to vote for me, as if I were present in person, on all matters that come before such meeting, including election of directors and passing upon reports as well as the transaction of such other business as may come before the meeting.

**STEP 1: PLEASE CHOOSE WHO YOU WANT TO VOTE YOUR PROXY.**  
*If you do not make a selection below, your proxy will be assigned to the Proxy Committee.*

I assign my proxy to the Proxy Committee:  
The Proxy Committee of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Inc. comprised of Milton Shaw, Shana Whiteley, Bryan Bracewell, Debbi Goertz, and Ben Flencher, with full power of substitution, as my proxy and agent for the Annual Meeting of the Cooperative to be held at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at The Silos on 77, 1031 CR 223, Giddings, Texas.

**OR**

I assign my proxy to the individual named below: \_\_\_\_\_ with full power of substitution, as my proxy and agent for the Annual Meeting of the Cooperative to be held at 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at The Silos on 77, 1031 CR 223, Giddings, Texas.

**STEP 2: CHECK EITHER "A" OR "B".**  
*If you check both, your vote cannot be counted.*

A. I instruct the Proxy Committee or the individual named above to vote my proxy at its discretion.

**OR**

B. I instruct the Proxy Committee or the individual named above to vote for the candidate checked below.  
(You may cast only one vote per district.)

<b>DISTRICT 3</b> BASTROP COUNTY <input type="checkbox"/> Roderick Emanuel (INCUMBENT)	<b>DISTRICT 4</b> LEE, MILAM, AND WILLIAMSON COUNTIES <input type="checkbox"/> Russell Jurk (INCUMBENT)	<b>DISTRICT 6</b> AUSTIN, COLORADO, AND FRYETTE COUNTIES <input type="checkbox"/> Byron Balke (INCUMBENT)	<b>DISTRICT 7</b> WASHINGTON COUNTY <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Lamensky <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Minksa (INCUMBENT)
---	--	--	--

*\*As the election for each of Districts 3, 4 and 6 were uncontested, they are elected by general consent in accordance with Article II, Section 6 of the Bylaws.*

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE # \_\_\_\_\_  
ACCOUNT NUMBER \_\_\_\_\_  
ALTERNATE NAME ON ACCOUNT (IF APPLICABLE) \_\_\_\_\_

The Proxy Committee is composed of all members of the Board who are not up for election this year.

If you assign your vote to another member, be sure to print clearly and legibly the name of that individual who will serve as your proxy at the Annual Meeting.

Choose only one candidate from District 7.

Your account number will be printed on the proxy you receive in the mail. If you pick up a proxy at a member service center, you must write your account number in this space. Your account number can be found in the upper left portion of your bill, below the name on your account.

If you cannot attend the Annual Meeting, choose to either assign your vote to another member who will attend the Annual Meeting or to the Bluebonnet Board Proxy Committee to vote in your place.

Please print clearly and legibly the name on your account as it appears on your Bluebonnet bill. You can find that name on the top left portion of your paper or online bill.

**Don't miss the deadline to turn in your proxy form. It must be postmarked by May 2, or dropped off at any Bluebonnet member service center by 5 p.m. that day.**

# Catching up with some devoted Annual Meeting attendees

**WE RECENTLY** talked with four Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members who have been regular attendees of the Annual Meeting for years. We wanted to know what keeps them coming back each year — and what they are looking forward to at the 2023 in-person meeting.



## HELEN WEISER

**Resident of:** Giddings

**Bluebonnet member for:** 16 years; Weiser's family has owned land in Giddings since the 1940s, she said, making her a multigenerational member of the cooperative.

**Number of Annual Meetings attended:** 15

**Favorite part of the Annual Meeting:** "I just enjoy the information that is shared," Weiser said. "I like to know where Bluebonnet is spending money to help communities and the service it provides."

## NANCY LITTLEFIELD

**Resident of:** Paige

**Bluebonnet member for:** 16 years, although Littlefield's family members have been Bluebonnet members since 1939, the year the cooperative was founded.

**Number of Annual Meetings attended:** 22, including meetings attended with her family.

**Favorite part of the Annual Meeting:**

**Meeting:** In addition to the door prizes, Littlefield enjoys the music before the Annual Meeting begins. Her favorite was a fiddler at the 2017 Annual Meeting who had learned his skills on YouTube. Littlefield has won a few prizes at Annual Meetings, including the hammock she is sitting on, above.



## JIMMY AND YOLANDA DAVILA

**Residents of:** Luling

**Bluebonnet members for:** 13 years

**Number of Annual Meetings attended:** 10; Jimmy and Yolanda (here with dog Chloe) usually go to the meeting with their neighbor, Mitchell Short.

**Favorite part of the Annual Meeting:** The Davilas like learning about the cooperative and the activity in Bluebonnet's service area. "After hearing about growth at the 2019 Annual Meeting, I felt informed and prepared for the changes when I began to see the construction around the Luling and Lockhart area," Jimmy said. Yolanda said she likes the prizes, too.

## DOUGLAS AND DIANE LEUTZ

**Residents of:** Lexington

**Bluebonnet members for:** 9 years

**Number of Annual Meetings attended:** 5; Douglas and Diane Leutz have attended every Annual Meeting since 2017; Douglas is a second-generation Bluebonnet member whose family were members for more than 40 years; he became a member in 2014.

**Favorite part of the Annual Meeting:**

Douglas has been attending events at The Silos on 77 (formerly the Sons of Hermann Hall) his entire life, he said. He enjoys the parties there, especially on a Tuesday afternoon in May. "It is nice to be able to go and enjoy the memories I have there and see everyone at Bluebonnet," he said. Diane said her favorite thing is a chance to win a truck.





# SPEND A DAY IN Fayetteville

By Alyssa Meinke

**FAYETTEVILLE**, just a 20-minute drive east of La Grange on Texas 159 in eastern Fayette County, is so rich in history that 345 properties there are on the National Register of Historic Places. The community has a past rooted in Native American settlements, followed in the early 1800s by settlers drawn by Stephen F. Austin's land grants, who were followed by many Czech immigrants. The town went by several names, including Lick Skillet – a lighthearted reference to community festival latecomers who arrived after the food was gone — so all they could do was “lick the skillet.” It was officially named Fayetteville in 1844, after the North Carolina hometown of prominent local Republic of Texas citizen Philip J. Shaver. The community was home to many Czech milestones, including the state's first Czech Protestant church and Texas' first Czech band, the Baca Family Band, formed in 1892. The town of 250 still celebrates Lickskillet Days (don't be late!) in October, ArtWalk in May, and Antiques on the Square in March and September.

## WHAT TO DO

Start with a town square walking tour: Begin at the **Fayetteville Area Heritage Museum**, 119 W. Washington St., to see exhibits and get a tour brochure. It is open Sunday-Friday by appointment, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. most Saturdays, 979-249-6249. Check out the wood-frame **Precinct 2 Courthouse**, built in 1880 in the square; the **Grand Fayette Hotel**, built in 1900, with its wine bar/restaurant and store, 201 W. Fayette St.; and the **Red & White Inn and Gallery**, built in 1835.

Stop and sip at **Blue Mule Winery's** tasting room and see its vineyard, 8127 FM 1291, noon-6 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday, noon-7 p.m. Friday and Saturday. If you prefer whiskey, try the handcrafted spirits at **Rek Hill Distillery**, 2737 E. Texas 159, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Thursday and Saturday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday.

View art displays or attend lectures on art, history or technology at **Arts for Rural Texas**, 114 N. Live Oak St., 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. Get information on upcoming events at [artsforruraltexas.org](http://artsforruraltexas.org).

**Lake Fayette**, also known as the Fayette County Reservoir, northwest of town, is a 2,000-acre hot spot for bass fishing, boating and swimming. **Oak Thicket Park**, 4819 W. Texas 159, has 87 acres for water activities, hiking, biking or camping; day passes \$7 a person, \$4 for 65 and older, free for kids 12 and younger. Although partially under construction, **Park Prairie Park**, 1250 Park Prairie Road, features a boat ramp that remains open; visit Oak Thicket Park for day passes, \$7 a person, \$4 for 65 and older, free for kids 12 and younger.

Continued on next page



Among the many historic buildings in Fayetteville is the wood-frame Precinct 2 Courthouse, above, which was built in 1880. Though no longer used as a courthouse, it is a prominent historic landmark. At left, Aly Wittingham won an honorable mention for her mixed media work at the 2022 ArtWalk; this year the juried art show is May 6-7 at the courthouse square. At left, Mike Gamble, co-owner of Blue Mule Winery, samples his wares with his daughter Ashley Dalhart, the tasting room manager. “I know the math and the chemistry, and she has the palate,” Gamble says. Below, the Grand Fayette Hotel, built in 1900, has a wine bar, restaurant and store. *Photos by Alyssa Meinke, Arts for Rural Texas, Blue Mule Winery*





Continued from previous page

## GRAB A BITE

Dining options ranked in Tripadvisor's top restaurants are:

**Orsak's café**, offering country cooking, including chicken fried steak, 121 W Fayette St., 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-10 p.m. Friday-Saturday.

**Joe's Place**, 120 N. Live Oak St., touts its all-American menu of steaks, seafood, burgers and more, 5 p.m.-9 p.m. Wednesday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5 p.m.-9 p.m. Thursday-Friday, 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Saturday, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Sunday.

Other dining options include **The 159 Junction**, 3024 E. Texas 159, which also offers live music, and **Pivo's Ice House**, 1564 FM 1291.

## STOP AND SHOP

Several shops around the historic courthouse are owned by local entrepreneurs. They include:

The **Vintage Rose Market**, 124 N. Live Oak St., sells antiques, home decor and clothing; 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursday-Sunday.

**Yesterday's Past** specializes in antiques, 112 N. Live Oak St., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Thursday-Saturday.

Get a fresh floral bouquet and home goods at **Bloom & Co.**, 126B N. Live Oak St., 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday.

Other shopping options include **The Spoiled Quilter**, 405 E. Main St.; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday; **Country Glam Antiques and Treasures**, 115 W. Fayette St., and **Fayetteville Vintage Gallery**, 202 N. Live Oak St.

## TIPS FROM LOCALS

Take home fresh food from **Yonder Way Farm**. It offers grass-fed beef, pasteurized chicken and pork, eggs, bread, coffee, dairy and cooking oils. Place an order online at [yonderwayfarm.com](http://yonderwayfarm.com) and arrange to pick it up by calling owners Jason and Lynsey Kramer at 979-530-4444.

The Fayetteville area is **brimming with bluebonnets** in the spring. Some of the best places to see them are along FM 955 southwest of Fayetteville. You can also visit the "viral" bluebonnet field 6 miles southwest of Fayetteville on U.S. 71, just east of Kitchen Lane. On a good spring afternoon, as many as 100 people may be taking family pictures there.

Get more information from [fayettevilletxmuseum.org](http://fayettevilletxmuseum.org) and [greaterfayettevillechamber.org](http://greaterfayettevillechamber.org)

*This is a part of a series of guides on spending a day in one of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's service area communities.*

Harlye Bonorden contributed to this story.



Bluebonnet's five member service centers will be lighted blue in April to raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention Month. *Sarah Beal photo*

## Bluebonnet puts spotlight on Child Abuse Prevention Month

**BLUEBONNET** Electric Cooperative's five member service centers will gleam blue in April to raise awareness of Child Abuse Prevention Month and the area organizations that support families affected by abuse and neglect.

Keep an eye on our social media channels in April to learn more about getting involved, key community events and resources. Bluebonnet-area groups working to prevent abuse include three Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) agencies that serve 11 counties in the Bluebonnet region, as well as the Children's Advocacy Center that serves Bastrop, Lee and Fayette counties and the SAFE Alliance serving eastern Travis County. These organizations welcome volunteers and donations.

At CASA, volunteers are pre-screened adults who are trained to work with children in the foster care system. In addition

to a prescreening interview, volunteers undergo a background check, and complete 30 hours of virtual or classroom training and observation in a courtroom. Volunteers can then be appointed by judges to work with one case (or a group of siblings).

The Children's Advocacy Center that serves Bastrop, Lee and Fayette counties and SAFE Alliance would benefit from donations. View their wish lists at [childrensadvocacycenter.org/get-involved](http://childrensadvocacycenter.org/get-involved) and [safeaustin.org/get-involved](http://safeaustin.org/get-involved).

If you suspect child abuse, neglect or exploitation, report it online at [txabuse-hotline.org](http://txabuse-hotline.org) or by calling the Texas Abuse Hotline at 800-252-5400 (available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year). Learn more at [childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing](http://childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing).

Find out about local child abuse assistance agencies with this story online at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop) or in our social media this month.

## Thank a line worker on April 10

**NATIONAL** Line Worker Appreciation Day is April 10. It's a chance to thank the men and women who work day and night, 365 days a year, to build, restore and maintain the nation's — and Bluebonnet's — power supply system.

Electric cooperatives observe the second Monday in April as National Line Worker Appreciation Day, after a 2014 decision by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association board.

Check out Bluebonnet's social media on April 10 to see our kudos to Bluebonnet's line workers. It's a perfect opportunity to say thanks to the cooperative's line workers.

Want to become a line worker? Bluebonnet accepts applications for its U.S. Department of Labor Certified Apprentice Program on the first Tuesday of every month. Find applications and other career opportunities at on our website, [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop), by clicking on Careers at the bottom of any page.



Bluebonnet line worker Frank Garza works in a bucket truck near Lockhart, above. There are more than 100 line workers and supervisors at the cooperative. April 10 marks National Line Worker Appreciation Day. *Sarah Beal photo*



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This knife boasts a full tang blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to Gear Patrol, a full tang blade is key, saying "A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."

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# Grounded in Mystery

Some believe Jacob Brodbeck made the first powered flight in history—but there's little proof

BY MARTHA DEERING • ILLUSTRATION BY DANA SMITH

NEARLY 40 YEARS before the Wright brothers made their famous first flight on a North Carolina beach in 1903, a German immigrant named Jacob Brodbeck flew a homemade airship in a field near Luckenbach in 1865.

At least he might have.

Many details have been lost to history, and uncertainty abounds. The Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas includes a passage about the feat, though it acknowledges the flight might have occurred in San Antonio—and perhaps even in 1868. An official Texas historical marker in Luckenbach affirms the flight with no mention of the year and somewhat vaguely pins the accomplish-

ment as occurring north of San Antonio.

Iris Brodbeck Macek, who is a great-granddaughter of Brodbeck, self-published *Wings Over Luckenbach*, a partially fictionalized account of the man and his life. In it, she acknowledges the perplexity of that flight: “Good stories never go away. Stories inspired by true events laced with mystery become even more memorable. Jacob Brodbeck’s story is one of these.”

Brodbeck, a professor, inventor and talented musician, was a German immigrant who settled in Fredericksburg, where he became a schoolmaster. He was captivated by the idea of manned flight. In Fredericksburg he made small

models of airships powered by tightly wound springs, an idea that grew out of his attempts to invent a self-winding clock. He took a model to local fairs where it drew attention from other mechanically minded innovators. Their interest prompted Brodbeck to offer shares in his invention.

In an 1865 article in a San Antonio newspaper, he wrote: “For more than 20 years, I have labored to construct a machine which should enable man to use, like a bird, the atmospheric region as the medium of his travels. I have therefore concluded to collect subscriptions ... in order to build a large Air Ship.”

He set the price of one share at \$5 to be repaid with interest when he sold the patent.

The airship featured a cockpit, helicopterlike propeller, compass and barometer. The TSHA writes that the airship rose 12 feet over a Luckenbach field September 20, 1865, and traveled about 100 feet before the spring that powered it completely unwound. A hard landing followed in which the craft was destroyed, but Brodbeck walked away without serious injury. His investors, who had hoped to make a fortune when he sold the patent, were not game for another try.

A photo purports to show the wrecked airship, though what happened to it after that day remains a mystery.

In spite of his failure, Brodbeck contributed much to pioneer Texas, serving as Gillespie County surveyor and later as county commissioner. In 1967, Gov. John Connally declared him the Father of American Aviation. ■



# Incredible Eggs

A prized ingredient that's as versatile as it's cracked up to be

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Eggs are such an essential part of our daily kitchen landscape, and yet we often forget how versatile they are. Fruit curds are a wonderful way to celebrate eggs. Here, tart grapefruit is mixed with honey for a luscious spread that can be served for breakfast or on top of angel food cake.

## Grapefruit Curd

**½ cup grapefruit juice**

**¼ cup honey**

**2 eggs**

**2 egg yolks**

**5 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces**

1. Fill a small saucepan with 2 inches of water and set over medium heat to simmer.
2. In a heatproof bowl that can sit on the saucepan, whisk together grapefruit juice, honey, eggs and egg yolks.
3. Set the bowl over the simmering water and cook, whisking until honey is melted and liquid is a uniform consistency.
4. Add the butter a few pieces at a time, whisking to melt and combine. Once the first pieces are almost completely melted, add the next few pieces. Keep adding butter and whisking until all the butter is incorporated. The curd should be smooth and noticeably thicker, coating the back of a spoon. It will thicken more as it cools; do not overcook. If desired, press the curd through a sieve to remove any lumps.
5. Pour into a jar, cover and chill at least 2 hours to set before serving.

**MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS**

**TCP** Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com), where she features a recipe for Cheese Quiche.





## Zucchini Crescent Pie

JUDY SEWARD  
HAMILTON COUNTY EC

Perfect for brunch or as a dinner side, this veggie-filled dish is a crowd pleaser. Slicing the zucchini thinly helps it bake into the filling along with the cheese.

- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter**
- 4 cups thinly sliced zucchini**
- 1 cup chopped onion**
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley**
- ¼ teaspoon dried basil**
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 2 eggs**
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella or Muenster cheese**
- 1 can crescent rolls (8 ounces)**
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard**
- Grated Parmesan cheese, for topping**

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat a skillet over medium and add butter to melt. Once melted, add the zucchini and onion and cook until very soft, about 10 minutes. Stir in parsley, basil, oregano, salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, beat eggs, then stir in cheese. Stir into vegetable filling.
3. Coat a 7-by-11-inch baking dish with nonstick spray. Unroll the crescent roll dough but do not separate. Press the dough into the bottom and partially up the sides of the dish, sealing any holes in the seams. Spread mustard evenly on dough.
4. Pour vegetable filling over the dough. Bake 18–20 minutes, until golden brown and filling is set. Let cool 10 minutes, then sprinkle with Parmesan and serve.

SERVES 6

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

## BLT Egg Salad

PAIGE STAFFORD  
PEDERNALES EC



Egg salad lovers, this one's for you. Bacon and sun-dried tomatoes add savory flavor to this classic sandwich filling. Any mustard from yellow to grainy Dijon works well for this spread.

SERVES 4–6

- 6 eggs**
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar or lemon juice**
- 6 slices cooked bacon, coarsely chopped**
- ¼ cup sun-dried tomatoes, coarsely chopped**
- 2–3 green onions, diced**
- ¼ cup mayonnaise**
- 1 tablespoon mustard**
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder**
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste**

1. To hard-boil, place the eggs in a medium pot and fill with water until they are covered. Add vinegar and a dash of salt. Bring the water to a boil, then cover and reduce heat to low. Cook the eggs 8 minutes, drain and place the eggs in an ice bath to cool.

2. Once completely cooled, peel the eggs and chop into bite-size pieces. Place in a bowl along with the remaining ingredients. Stir well to combine, then taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Serve with crackers or vegetables or as a sandwich.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**NO-BAKE DESSERTS** DUE APRIL 10

How do you beat the heat and still offer a flourishing finish? Send us your favorite no-bake desserts by April 10 for a chance to win \$500.





## Spicy Sausage and Egg Boats

PATRICIA STEHLING  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Egg boats make for a fun presentation at breakfast. Add your favorite vegetables, such as bell pepper, mushrooms or spinach, to the filling.

- 4 demi baguettes or large bolillos
- 8 ounces breakfast sausage
- 8 eggs
- ½ cup heavy cream
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- 4 green onions, sliced
- 4 jalapeño peppers, seeded and diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Scoop out the centers of the breads to create a boatlike shape, leaving an edge all around.
2. Cook sausage and set aside. In a bowl, beat eggs, then whisk in cream and salt and pepper. Stir in the sausage, cheese, green onions, jalapeños and garlic.



3. Spoon mixture into bread boats. Bake 25–30 minutes, until eggs are set and no longer runny.

**SERVES 4–6**

**TCP** These great dishes just scratch the surface of what you can do with eggs. Check out our website, where you'll find hundreds of reader recipes that feature eggs, many incorporating them in hard-to-resist baked goods.

## Egg-zact Replacements

BY MEGAN MYERS

**Many recipes default to using large eggs. But what if you don't have any large eggs on hand? Use this handy guide for subbing different sizes of eggs in recipes.**

You can replace **one** large egg with **one** egg of any other size.

Replace **two** large eggs with **two** medium, extra-large or jumbo eggs; or **three** small eggs.

Replace **three** large eggs with **two** jumbo eggs, **three** medium or extra-large eggs, or **four** small eggs.

Replace **four** large eggs with **three** jumbo eggs, **four** extra-large eggs, or **five** medium or small eggs.

You can also replace whole eggs with liquid eggs: 1 cup of liquid egg equals about five large eggs.



JASON RISNER PHOTOGRAPHY

## Fredericksburg

### Getaway Contest

Enter online for a chance to win a two-night getaway in Fredericksburg, including midweek lodging for two, dining and things to do.

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## 1 CUTS WATER BILLS AND MOWING BY AS MUCH AS 2/3

Would you believe a lawn could look perfect when watered just once? In Iowa, the state's biggest Men's Garden club picked a Zoysia lawn as "top lawn—nearly perfect." Yet, this lawn had been watered only once all summer!

## 2 NO NEED TO DIG UP OLD GRASS

Plant Amazoy in an old lawn or bare ground. Set plugs into holes in the soil checkerboard style. Plugs spread to create a lush, thick lawn, driving out weeds. Easy instructions included with every order.

## 3 ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

No weeding means no costly chemicals. Amazoy Zoysia lawns naturally resist insects, so you'll save money, while helping to protect the environment. Never expose your family and pets to weed killers and pesticide poison.

## 4 FOR SLOPES, PLAY AREAS, BARE SPOTS AND PARTIAL SHADE

Can't beat Amazoy as the low-cost answer for hard-to-cover spots, play-worn areas, partial shade and erosion on slopes.

## 5 IT STAYS GREEN IN SPITE OF HEAT AND DROUGHT

"The hotter it gets, the better it grows!" Amazoy Zoysia thrives in blistering heat, yet it won't winter-kill to 30° below zero. It goes off its green color after hard frosts, and begins regaining its green color as temperatures in the spring are consistently warm.



Thrives from partial shade to full sun.



Plant it from plugs.

## 6 CHOKES OUT CRABGRASS AND WEEDS ALL SUMMER

Your established Zoysia lawn grows so thick, it simply stops crabgrass and most summer weeds from germinating!

## 7 NOW 3 WAYS TO START YOUR AMAZOY ZOYSIA LAWN!

**1) Freestyle Plugs** come in uncut sheets containing a maximum of 150–1" plugs that can be planted up to 1 ft. apart. Freestyle plugs allow you to make each plug bigger and plant further apart – less cutting and planting – you decide.

**2) New Super Plugs** come precut into individual 3"x3" plugs ready-to-plant (minimum 1 per 4 sq. ft.). They arrive in easy to handle trays of 15 Super Plugs. Save time and get your new lawn faster!

**3) Amazoy Approved Seed** – As The Zoysia Specialists for 70 years, we now have a Zoysia seed that meets our standards and homeowners expectations.

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Guaranteed to grow new green shoots within 45-60 days or we'll replace it **FREE** – for up to 1 year – just call us. Valid on one order at a time, typically the most recent. We **ONLY** ship you mature, hardy field grown genuine Amazoy Zoysia grass harvested direct from our farms. Easy planting and watering instructions are included with each order.

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**Freestyle Plugs** You decide how big to cut the plugs. Each grass sheet can produce up to 150-1 in. plugs. Plant minimum 1 plug per sq. ft.

Max Plugs	Free Plugs	Grass Sheets	Your PRICE	+Shipping	SAVINGS
450	—	3	\$ 47.50	\$22.00	—
750	+150	6	\$ 72.50	\$27.50	25%
1100	+400	10	\$110.00	\$40.00	32%
2000	+1000	20	\$180.00	\$65.00	46%
3000	+1500	30	\$240.00	\$75.00	52%

**Super Plugs** Precut plugs 3 inches by 3 inches READY TO PLANT Packed in trays of 15 Super Plugs. Plant minimum 1 plug per 4 sq. ft.

Super Plugs	Free Plugs	Tray	Your PRICE	+Shipping	SAVINGS
15	—	1	\$ 27.50	\$15.00	—
25	+5	2	\$ 42.50	\$20.00	25%
60	+15	5	\$ 97.50	\$32.00	35%
120	+30	10	\$145.00	\$50.00	53%
240	+60	20	\$260.00	\$90.00	59%

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Meteoric Fall

Odessa crater marks the site of a space rock’s collision with Earth

BY CHET GARNER

IT’S NOT OFTEN you can say “it came from outer space” and actually mean it. But that’s what happened some 62,000 years ago, when an object fell from the sky and crashed just southwest of what is now Odessa. In search of an extraterrestrial experience, I grabbed my tinfoil hat and headed west.

My pulse quickened as I drove through cactus and mesquite in search of one of the largest meteorite impact craters in the U.S. Once there I stared at an empty field just slightly lower (about 15 feet) than the surrounding desert. “Hmm,” I thought. “Where’s the massive crater?” I needed some explanation.

Inside the visitor center, I learned how a 25-foot space rock hurtled toward Earth at 27,000 mph. It pierced the atmosphere and shattered into thousands of pieces that crashed into the land with the force of 19,000 tons of dynamite. The impact stretched over 2 square miles, with this largest crater measuring at least 500 feet wide and 100 feet deep. It has perplexed cowboys and scientists alike since it was first documented in 1892.

Over time, the crater became a mere shadow of its former self as dust and silt filled in the hole, leaving a simple depression marked by a rim of jagged rocks. In the 1940s, scientists dug a 165-foot shaft into the center to see if a large meteorite remained. They found fragments—the largest weighing 300 pounds.

While it may not be as impressive as it once was, it’s the only crater of its kind in America that visitors can walk through. I set off on foot imagining what it might have been like when the meteorite smashed into this exact location. I would have been pulverized in an instant. It was an appropriately existential thought for such an extraterrestrial place. ■

ABOVE The Odessa crater spreads out behind Chet.

**TCP** Follow along as Chet walks onto the very site of an extraterrestrial event. See the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



### Know Before You Go

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

## APRIL

### 07

**Canton [7–8] Tractor Show and Swap Meet**, (214) 837-8861, [lonestarihc25.org/canton](http://lonestarihc25.org/canton)

**Addison [7–9] Dallas Reggae Festival**, (832) 277-3874, [dallasreggaeifest.com](http://dallasreggaeifest.com)

### 08

**Kerrville EasterFest**, (830) 896-1155, [kerrvillechamber.biz](http://kerrvillechamber.biz)

**San Marcos Easter Egg Hunt and Festival**, (512) 392-4295, [heritagesanmarcos.org](http://heritagesanmarcos.org)

**Stonewall Easter at the Farm**, (830) 644-8107, [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov)

### 15

**Burton Cotton Gin Festival**, (979) 289-3378, [texascottonginmuseum.org](http://texascottonginmuseum.org)

**Corpus Christi Explore the Shore**, (361) 749-5246, [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov)

**Fredericksburg Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Department Fish Fry**, (830) 997-7521, [fbgtx.org](http://fbgtx.org)

**Gonzales Spring Plant Sale**, (830) 672-8531, [gonzalesmastergardeners.org](http://gonzalesmastergardeners.org)

**Grapevine New Vintage Wine and Gallery Trail and Art Show**, (817) 410-3185, [grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

**Kerrville Spring Native Plant Sale**, (830) 257-4837, [riversidenaturecenter.org](http://riversidenaturecenter.org)

**Stephenville Wine and Art Walk**, (817) 715-1682, [facebook.com/stephenville-downtownmerchants](http://facebook.com/stephenville-downtownmerchants)

20

**Chappell Hill [15-16] Bluebonnet Festival,** (979) 836-6033, [chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com](http://chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com)

**Lubbock [15-16] Arts Festival,** (806) 744-2787, [lubbockartsfestival.org](http://lubbockartsfestival.org)

21

**Dale [20-23] Old Settler's Music Festival,** [oldsettlersmusicfest.org](http://oldsettlersmusicfest.org)

**Henderson [21-22] East Texas Antique Tractor and Engine Club Show,** (903) 646-3769

**McKinney [21-22] Tom Cotter,** (214) 769-0645, [thecomedyarena.com](http://thecomedyarena.com)

**Terrell [21-22] Kaufman Quilt Show,** (972) 979-9152, [kaufmanquiltguild.org](http://kaufmanquiltguild.org)

**Fredericksburg [21-23, 28-30] The Play That Goes Wrong,** (830) 997-3588, [fredericksburgtheater.org](http://fredericksburgtheater.org)

**Ingram [21-23, 28-30, May 5-7] The Gods of Comedy,** (830) 367-5121, [hcaf.com](http://hcaf.com)

22

**Brenham One Night in Memphis,** (979) 337-7240, [thebarnhillcenter.com](http://thebarnhillcenter.com)

**Grapevine Spring Into Nash,** (817) 410-3185, [grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

**Helotes Fiesta Dachshund Dash,** (844) 703-6943, [ddrtx.org](http://ddrtx.org)

**The Colony Coach Cox's Kid Chase,** (972) 625-1106, [visitthecolonytx.com](http://visitthecolonytx.com)

**Tyler Ruthie Foster,** (903) 595-7274, [libertytyler.com](http://libertytyler.com)

[MORE EVENTS >](#)

### **TCP** Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com). Submit your July event by May 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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## Pick of the Month

### Conroe Crossroads Music Festival

Conroe, April 13-16  
conroecrossroads.com

Experience 40 shows across eight venues over four days in one city! A wide variety of musical genres are represented in the lineup, and daytime activities are free and fun for the whole family.

### APRIL EVENTS CONTINUED

27

**Alvin [27-29] Frontier Days**, (832) 868-1478, alvinrotary.org

28

**Gun Barrel City [28-29] Quilt Show**, (903) 391-3241, gunbarrelquiltersguild.org

**McKinney [28-29] James Camacho**, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

**Seguin [28-29] Yellow Rose Fiber Fiesta**, (210) 422-0619, yellowrosefiberfiesta.com

**Saint Jo [28-30] The Real West Symposium**, therealwest.org

29

**Hillsboro Wine and Photography Art Walk**, (843) 442-7424

**Ingram Stonehenge Celtic Festival and Highland Games**, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

**Johnson City JCTX Jazz and Art Festival**, (830) 868-7111, johnsoncitytx.org

**Kerrville Hill Country Chorale Spring Concert**, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

**Nacogdoches [29-30] Sacred Heart Catholic Church Multicultural Festival**, (936) 564-7807, sacredheartnac.org

**Waco [29-30] Central Texas Comic Con**, ctxcomiccon.com

**Llano [29-30, May 5-7] The Savannah Sipping Society**, facebook.com/llanocommunitytheater

MAY

05

**Brenham [5-6] Maifest**, (979) 337-7580, brenhammaifest.com

**Burnet [5-6] Utopiafest**, utopiafest.com

**Milam [5-6] Trade Days**, (430) 558-7134, milamsettlers.org

**Port Aransas [5-6, 12-13] PalmFest**, (361) 444-3631, palmfestporta.com

06

**Hilltop Lakes Kentucky Derby Gala**, (713) 503-0470, hilltoplakes.com

**Quitaque Experience Caprock**, (806) 455-1492, tpwd.texas.gov

**The Colony Up, Up & Away Festival of Flight**, (972) 625-1106, visitthecolonytx.com

**Willow City Willow City Volunteer Fire & Rescue Department's Fundraiser**, (830) 456-3785, willowcityfd.com

# Riding the River

Texans love to make a splash. So stock the cooler and grab your river shoes—it's time to dive in and test the waters.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

**1 STEVE COYLE**  
PEDERNALES EC

"Taking in sunset on Galveston Bay with a squall line approaching from the north."

**2 WENDY ALLEY MLADENKA**  
SAN BERNARD EC

A family day of kayaking on the Colorado River near Beason's Park in Columbus.

**3 ANGELA RIED**  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

The Frio River in Garner State Park.

**4 TAWNI AND MICHAEL WAYNE SOLISE**  
BANDERA EC

Stopping for a drink at sunset in Bandera.



## Upcoming Contests

**DUE APR 10** Hoof and Horn

**DUE MAY 10** Night Sky

**DUE JUN 10** Helping Out



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for more Riding the River photos from readers.





A memorial created in 2017 stood across the street from where the fertilizer plant exploded in West.

responded to a fire—later determined to be intentionally set—before it triggered the explosion that turned the scene into a war zone. In moments, 350 homes were destroyed or damaged, a nursing home came down like a tornado had roared through, and the emergency medical services building buckled and fell. Tommy Muska, the mayor then and still today, estimated that there was \$200 million in damage to the city and its schools and businesses.

The destruction was so severe that many outsiders projected it would be West's demise. Those outsiders, however, didn't grasp the soul of this town. "The city of West will not be defined by the explosion but by the resilience and the spirit of the citizens to rebuild their community," Muska said last fall. And that is exactly what has happened, in a remarkably short period of time.

Anyone who visits West these days won't find any physical evidence of blast damage. In the 10 years since the disaster, there have been more than 1,000 residential and commercial building permits issued, 82 new homes and three new schools built, 123 remodels completed, and over \$10 million in infrastructure improvements made. Currently, there are five subdivisions being built, in all price ranges.

A person has to wonder: How did this small town pull itself up by its bootstraps in the face of such overwhelming tragedy?

In short, the blast brought people together in unexpected ways. Their resilience and staunch faith made them stronger and more united than ever. They are a people who have proved themselves unshakable, even in the face of profound heartache and grief.

Perhaps Muska said it best when 10 years ago he proclaimed, "This town will not die on my watch." He was not alone in his commitment. The entire town lived it, believed it and made sure West would not only survive but would thrive.

And indeed it has. ■

## Rise Up West

10 years after a deadly explosion, the town is stronger than ever

BY JEFFREE WYN ITRICH

AS THE SAYING GOES, I wasn't born here, but I got here as soon as I could. And *here* is the small Czech town of West, north of Waco. I knew about this charming town long before I followed my Texas roots to settle here in the land of my forebears, who go back to the post-Civil War period.

I remember with razor-sharp clarity the night I watched a story on the evening news detailing how 30 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in a West fertilizer plant on April 17, 2013, at 7:51 in the evening. Five years later, my husband and I settled in West. It was only then that I understood the full scope of the explosion that registered as a 2.1 magnitude tremor and blasted a crater in the ground nearly 100 feet wide and 10 feet deep.

Fifteen people died in the tragedy, 12 of them volunteer firefighters who



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