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MAY 2023

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May 2023



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08 Surf Your Turf

Texas doesn't have the best or the biggest waves, but that's never stopped surfers.

*By Jennifer Simonson
Photos by Kenny Braun*

In a Whole New Light

A Rio Grande Valley museum showcases a transcendental collection of century-old art.

*By Eileen Mattei
Photos by John Faulk*

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By Shane Torno

ON THE COVER

Surfers arrive at the beach on South Padre Island.

Photo by Kenny Braun

ABOVE

Te Deum, the Gelman Stained Glass Museum's largest work, invites contemplation.

Photo by John Faulk



EISENHOWER STATE PARK

A Most Scenic Century

ADVENTURER PAM LEBLANC, a frequent *TCP* contributor, appreciates the splendor of Texas' state parks about as much as anybody: "I don't own a ranch or a big chunk of Texas wilderness, but because of our state park system, I feel like part of this big, beautiful state belongs to me."

Thanks to state leaders 100 years ago, Pam and all Texans can escape to 89 state parks, historic sites and natural areas. The State Parks Board was created in May 1923 to begin setting aside land for parks, and in 1963 it merged with another agency to form the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Happy trails, y'all.

May 20

National Be a Millionaire Day

Texas has some 650,000 million-aire households, second only to California.

Made in a Shade

Viva Magenta—a nuanced crimson that balances warm and cool—is the color of the year. The hue, announced last winter by Pantone Color Institute experts, was inspired by the red dye derived from cochineals. "This color merges the warmth of the natural world with the endless, rich possibilities of the digital space," says Pantone's Elley Chang. Learn more about the tiny insects called cochineals in our 2019 story *The Bugs That Make You See Red*.



TCP Contests and More

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FINISH THIS SENTENCE

MOM ALWAYS SAID ...

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 March prompt: **If I could fly, I would ...**

Finally take down all my Christmas lights.

WILLIAM MARTIN
SAN BERNARD EC
WALLER

Never be stuck in traffic again.

NANCY DABNEY
HILCO EC
HILLSBORO

Really hope I wasn't afraid of heights anymore.

JUDI RAISH
TRI-COUNTY EC
GRANBURY

Hope I could land.

KENNETH BRINSON
WISE EC
PARADISE

Not sit on power lines.

TERRY WOLBRUECK
HEART OF TEXAS EC
MOFFAT

Visit our website to see more responses.

Play It Safe

May is National Electrical Safety Month. It's also when many of us hit the water. Never swim near a boat, marina or launching ramp. Residual current could put anyone in the water at risk of electric shock drowning.

“I've learned that success comes in a very prickly package.”

—SANDRA BULLOCK



Ironing Out the Rough Edges

SOME 1,000 MEN and even more horses and mules trained in San Antonio 125 years ago in preparation for their participation in the Spanish-American War.

By the end of May 1898, Theodore Roosevelt, above center, and his Rough Riders were on their way to Florida before sailing to Cuba, where the future president led the charge up San Juan Hill.

While in San Antonio, the Rough Riders trained at what is now Riverside Golf Course, near the water hazard on the 16th hole.



COURTESY CHEF GARNER

'Lonesome' in a Library
 “The Wittliff Collections took us by total surprise. What a gem! This museum within a beautiful campus library offers surprisingly rich, diverse exhibits.”

SARA DUNN
 PEDERNALES EC
 WIMBERLEY

Allies in Aging

A Pet Project [March 2023] resonated perfectly. I have an 18-year-old black beauty named Rhiannan. She was my wife’s loyal companion until my wife passed away over five years ago and has since become very needy and close to me. She is skin and bones but eats well and fortunately does not appear to be in any distress or pain.

I am 82 myself, so we are dealing with aging together. I hope to outlive her so she won’t have to suffer.

Charles L. Glisan
 Pedernales EC
 Cedar Park

We need to honor and appreciate these men who risk their lives every day [First Responders, February 2023].

BETH CHAPMAN
 VIA FACEBOOK

Readers on a Roundup

Kudos to Eric Schlegel for his excellent photography and capturing the voices of the Huebner Bros. Cattle Co. cowhands in this fascinating story [Until the Cows Swim Home, March 2023].

As readers we felt we were moving across the Matagorda and Colorado waters, past the snakes, onto the island and back to the ranch.

Martha Everman Jones
 Victoria EC
 Victoria

Dove Doings

We had a *Lonesome Dove* party 30 years ago. Everyone had to dress as their favorite character of the miniseries/book. My husband dressed as Augustus McCrae, and I dressed as the stone-throwing Janey. My mother dressed as Peach and carried a live chicken under her arm.

Susan Mansell
 Coleman County EC
 Ballinger

CORRECTION

Though the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives had said in 2016 that the deadly 2013 fertilizer explosion in West was triggered by an intentionally set fire, other experts have since raised doubts about that finding [Rise Up West, April 2023].



ERICH SCHLEGEL

TCP WRITE TO US
 letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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 Austin, TX 78701

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

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SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest—but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

We found a limited supply of turquoise from Arizona and purchased it for our *Sedona Turquoise Collection*. Inspired by the work of those ancient craftsmen and designed to showcase the exceptional blue stone, each stabilized vibrant cabochon features a unique, one-of-a-kind matrix surrounded in Bali metalwork. You could drop over \$1,200 on a turquoise pendant, or you could secure 26 carats of genuine Arizona turquoise for just \$99.



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SURF

A woman in a pink bikini is surfing on a wave, riding a red surfboard. She is in a crouched position, balancing on the crest of the wave. The water is a vibrant green color, and the sky is clear blue.

YOUR

Two people are swimming in the ocean. One person is in the foreground, and another is slightly behind them. They are both in a swimming position, with their heads above water and arms extended.A vintage wood-paneled station wagon is parked on a beach. The car is light blue with wood paneling on the sides. Two surfboards are mounted on the roof rack. A man in a grey shirt and red shorts is walking past the car, carrying a surfboard under his arm. In the background, there is a wooden bench and a large umbrella.

TURF

Texas doesn't have the best or the biggest waves, but that's never stopped surfers

DURING THE HOT SUMMER months, thunderstorms develop in Central Africa each afternoon like clockwork. If the monsoon is at least partially active, a disturbance can intensify over North Africa as it marches west before being thrust out over the Atlantic Ocean near Cape Verde. Sometimes storms peter out right there, but if the ocean is warm and the conditions are right, a storm can continue its trek across the Atlantic, picking up power along the way until it reaches the Gulf of Mexico.

That's when a small but mighty group of Texas surf enthusiasts break out their boards.

Hurricanes bring world-class waves to the sluggish waters of the Texas Gulf Coast—waves that area surfers sometimes wait years for. When a storm begins tracking on the radar and swell reports look promising, pent-up surfers call out sick, miss family obligations and put plans on hold to head to the nearest beach.

“Most people are driving away from the ocean during hurricanes, but Texas surfers are driving towards it,” says William “Boog” Cram, owner of Ohana Surf & Skate in Galveston.

The existence of a passionate surfing community in Texas might come as a surprise to many—even those who grew up here. But surfing culture in Texas dates back to the 1960s, when the surf craze perpetrated by the Beach Boys, the documentary *The Endless Summer* and Gidget movies swept the nation. Much more recently, a renewed interest in the sport began when the pandemic pushed more people to embrace outdoor activities. Landlocked Texans wanting to escape city lockdowns headed to the beach, rented surfboards and tried their hand at a sport many people don't realize exists here.

“Usually when you tell people that you surf in Texas, the immediate response is: ‘There is surf in Texas?’” says Frank Floyd, longtime surfer and owner of Wind & Wave Watersports in Corpus Christi. That question is often followed up with a curiosity of what it's like to surf in Texas.

Are Texas waves large? No.

Do they have power behind them? Also no.

But can one surf in crystal clear water so beautiful that they forget about the waves? Absolutely not.

Surfing in Texas is not for the faint of heart. The state's 367 miles of coastline have a reputation for producing small, choppy, inconsistent surf in water with a less-than-ideal hue, and the Texans who surf here accept that. There's no false bravado that even the waves are bigger in Texas. What there is among surfers is an unwavering appreciation for the waves in their backyard.

“Texans are extremely enthusiastic about surfing in Texas. We have an amazing culture here,” Brad Lomax says. “To be a surfer in Texas you need to be an optimist with low standards.” A good sense of humor helps, too. Lomax has sold T-shirts that read, “Texas Waves: Slow, mushy and hard to catch” and “Texas Surfing: It is better than it looks.”

Lomax has been surfing the waters of the Coastal Bend since the mid-1960s. Originally from San Antonio, he spent his teenage summers selling T-shirts on the beach in Port Aransas just to live near the ocean. The surfer teen grew into a businessman who never left. After the success of his first Corpus Christi restaurant in 1983, Lomax opened the Executive Surf Club in 1990.

“My friends and I all had jobs, but we also surfed as much as we could, so we called ourselves the Executive Surf Club,” he says. “I wanted to open a place with a vibe where everyone could come together—guys from the refinery, old ladies, surfers, everyone—and unwind after a long day of work.”

There's no missing the surf vibe when walking into the brick building originally built in the 1800s. Surfboards line the walls, hang over the bar and are used as tables.

Fifteen years after opening the Executive Surf Club, Lomax along with a good friend, surfing legend Pat McGee, opened the Texas Surf Museum next door. Before it closed in September, the institution told the story of the evolution of Texas surfing with photos, vintage memorabilia, newspaper clippings, short videos and more than 30 legendary surfboards.

Galveston also draws surfers despite its similarly less-than-stellar waves. The continental shelf along the barrier island is long and shallow, creating small swells. The wimpy waves are welcoming for newcomers to the sport. Every summer, children in surf camps can be seen on the beach practicing pop-ups and in the water riding waves with a face full of concentration, arms up, hands pointed

OPPOSITE FROM TOP Rachel Gore takes on a wave at Isla Blanca Park on South Padre Island. A classic woody, the most iconic of surfmobiles.

Where To **HANG 10** in Texas

1 Surfside Beach Just south of Galveston, in Brazoria County, you'll find a variety of waves, including big swells, for a range of skill levels.

2 Matagorda Peninsula Specifically, where the Colorado River empties into the Gulf. The strong waves there, thanks to the area's deep ocean floor, are best for experienced surfers.

3 Port Mansfield Jetty The cut that separates North and South Padre islands is incredibly isolated but has arguably the best waves in the state—for seasoned surfers.

4 South Padre Island Jetties The gentle beach-break waves here, where the continental shelf drops off dramatically, are great for longboarding—from beginners to pros.

5 Boca Chica Beach Just a little farther south, Boca Chica is known for occasionally producing barreling waves when the swells are strong. With sometimes serious undertow, this beach is for the best of the best.



toward the shore—just like they're taught. The shallow water, relatively flat sandy bottom and lack of rocks make area beaches a great place to learn.

"If you can surf here, you can surf anywhere," Cram says from his surf shop in Galveston. "When you can master the wave here, you can take those skills to any waves around the world."

Cram started surfing in Galveston in the early 1970s after inheriting a hand-me-down surfboard from a friend's older brother. He and a friend would ride bikes 1 mile to the 47th Street break, between them holding the 9-foot board weighing close to 40 pounds. He has been surfing and skateboarding the island ever since. In 2005, Cram opened his brightly colored, Hawaii-style surf and skate shop across from one of Galveston's most popular surf spots—



the Pleasure Pier. His team teaches surfers to catch a wave even in the worst conditions.

While the beaches near Galveston are perfect for newbie surfers, as one travels south along the coast, the waves become bigger and more powerful. This is because the shallow continental shelf of the Gulf gradually deepens near the southern point of South Padre Island.

Beaches with the best waves, like Port Mansfield Jetty, are often in secluded areas requiring four-wheel-drive vehicles. Because of that, most surfers stick to their local beaches for an afternoon surf session. Weather patterns can change quickly and never last long. When the perfect conditions don't arrive, surfers make do.

"Texas gets some great quality surfers because we have to make something out of nothing," Floyd says.

When traveling, Texas surfers tend to have the most fun of anyone in the water, Floyd says. They appreciate waves that other surfers might take for granted, knowing that they're probably better than the waves at home. Unless, of course, a hurricane is on its way.

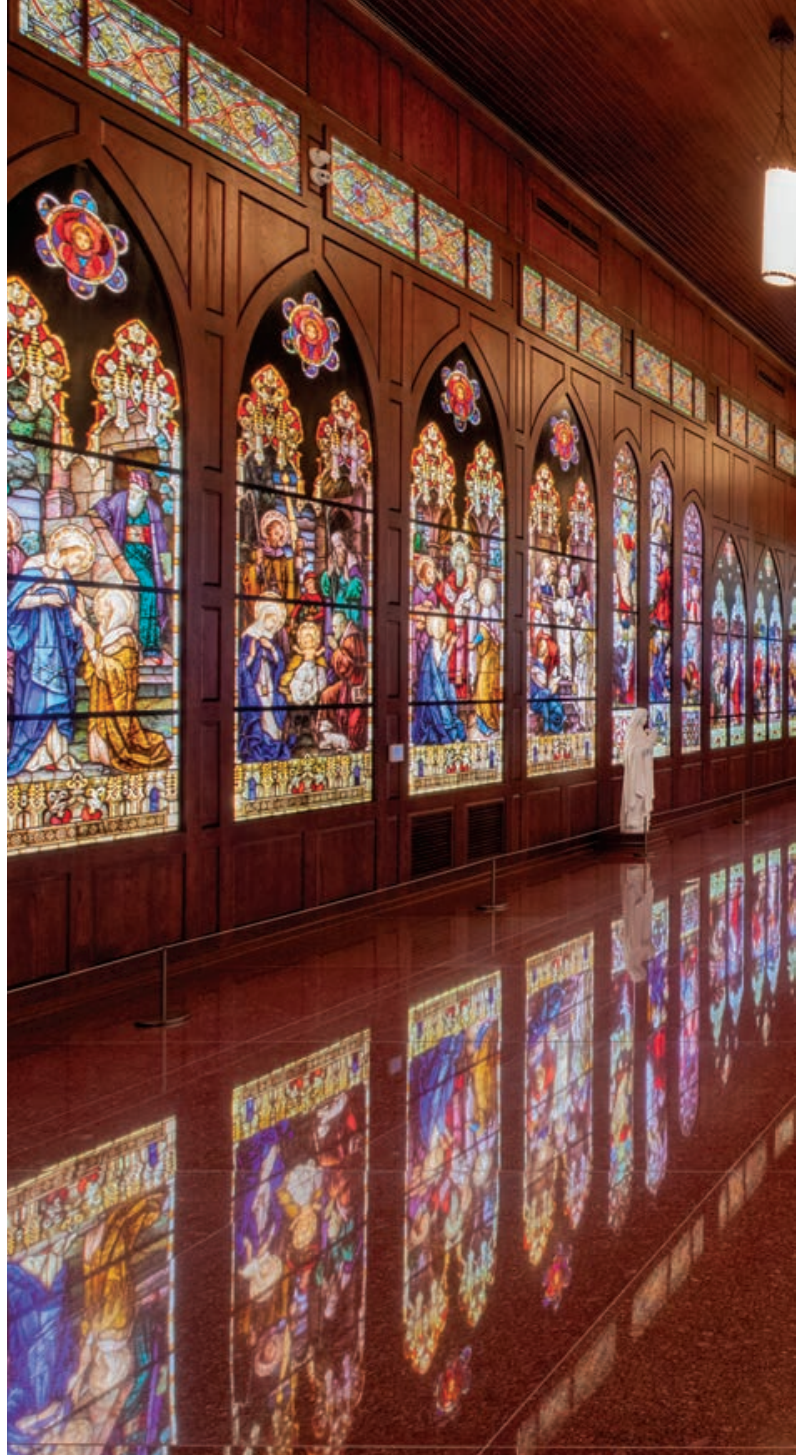
"We have to work at getting good in Texas," he says. "Then we can go anywhere." ■

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE PAGE Catching a wave off Port Aransas. Aarin Hartwell, with baby Brixton, is founder of SPI Sessions, a surf and water sports shop on South Padre Island. Brad Lomax has been surfing the waters of the Coastal Bend since the mid-1960s. A board, a bike and, down the road, a beach. Henry Fry's surfboards were some of the first made in Texas, in the 1960s.

IN A WHOLE NEW LIGHT

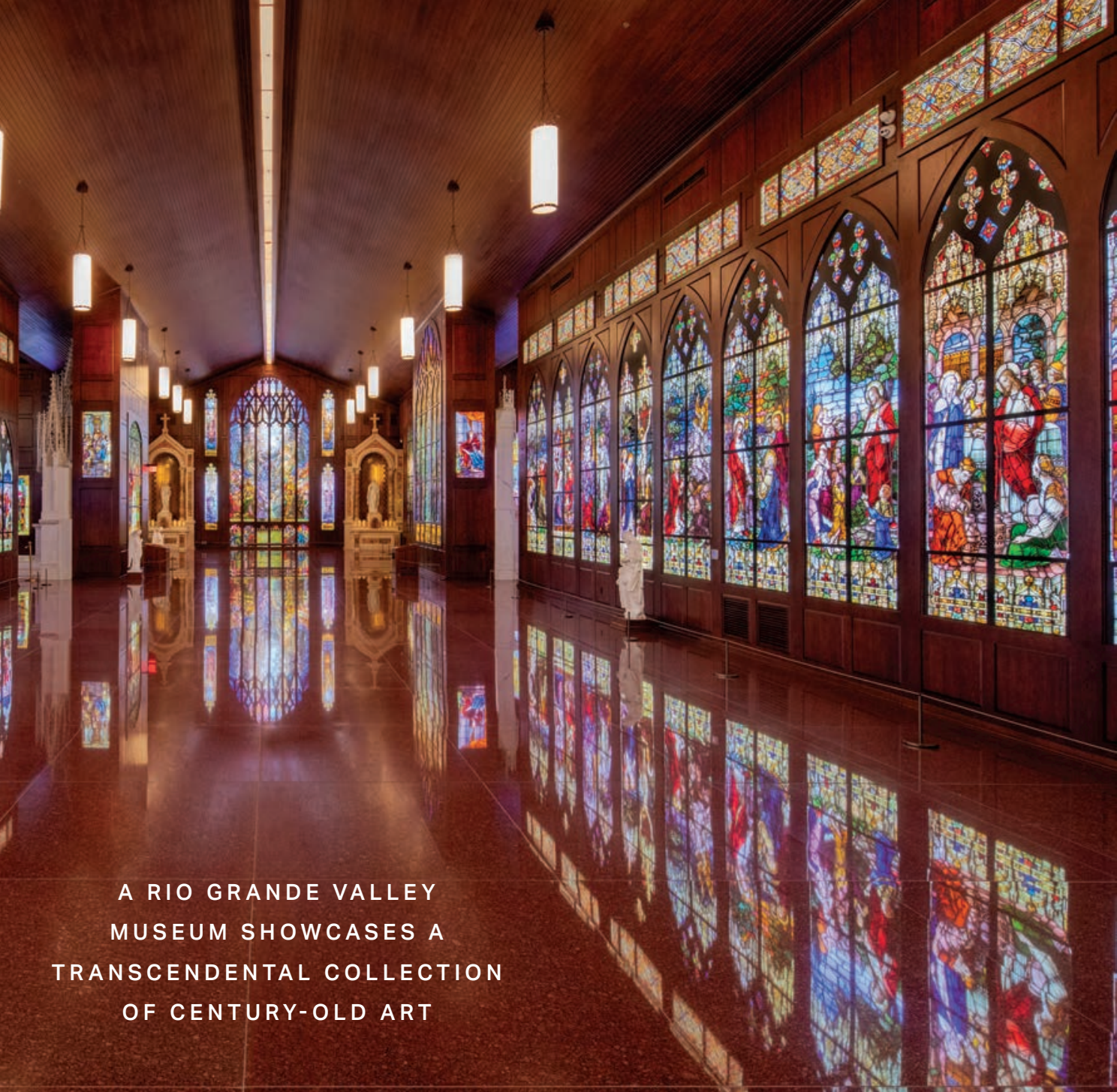


ABOVE The museum boasts eight Tiffany stained-glass windows depicting the Beatitudes, or blessings, including Blessed Are the Merciful. OPPOSITE A navelike passage illuminates works from now-closed churches.



I PULL OPEN THE DOOR of the Gelman Stained Glass Museum and step inside a kaleidoscope. More than 150 stained-glass windows and their reflections in the highly polished red granite floor immerse me in light, color and space. Then my eyes and brain begin to separate the profusion of shapes and colors into windows of religious scenes ranging from 10 to 25 feet tall, illuminated by what seems to be heavenly light.

Inside a gray stone building just off the highway in the heart of San Juan, in the Rio Grande Valley, the narrow, cross-shaped space is cool and dim. Most of the stained-glass windows in the museum, which opened in November 2021, originally graced now-closed East Coast churches, where they had been dedicated as memorials to departed loved ones. In their safe, new climate-controlled home, the complex LED arrays that backlight all the windows provide



A RIO GRANDE VALLEY
MUSEUM SHOWCASES A
TRANSCENDENTAL COLLECTION
OF CENTURY-OLD ART

a steady, otherworldly glow that compensates for variations in the thickness of the glass and paint amid the absence of natural light.

About 30 years ago, an auction catalog prompted Lawrence Gelman, an Edinburg anesthesiologist, to go to Atlanta, Georgia, to view a stained-glass window as it was being repaired. He later phoned in his winning auction bid and purchased the 4-by-7-foot landscape. “There’s something about the vividness of colors when light passes through stained glass,” Gelman says.

Captivated by the art, Gelman delved into the history and mastery involved, collecting more and more stained-glass windows until he had enough to fill a museum, which he chose to locate in San Juan, near the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle. That shrine annually receives more than 1 million

visitors, an audience primed to appreciate Gelman’s collection.

“Dr. Gelman wanted to replicate a sacred, transcendental experience,” says Miriam Cepeda, the museum’s director.

He has succeeded, no question.

Created between 1880 and 1910 by 12 master glasswork artists and studios of the art nouveau era, the works comprise the largest American museum collection of stained-glass windows. And with 71 Louis Comfort Tiffany windows, the Gelman has the largest collection of Tiffany glass windows in the U.S. Other noted glass artists represented here include John La Farge, Mary Elizabeth Tillinghast and those at J&R Lamb Studios—the oldest continuously operating glass studio in the nation, dating to 1857.

Cepeda gives me a quick explanation of stained glass. Traditionally, stained glass was actually painted glass.



WITH 71 LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY WINDOWS, THE GELMAN HAS THE LARGEST COLLECTION OF TIFFANY GLASS WINDOWS IN THE U.S.

The glass panels are supported and joined by flexible channels of lead called comes—and, in some cases, by copper foil. Tiffany Studios popularized the use of opalescent glass and layered glass to achieve shimmering, flowing colors for landscapes. Looking closely, I notice that even the faces and hands of Christ, the apostles and other religious figures have been painted onto the glass.

MANY OF THE WINDOWS represent biblical scenes, such as the Nativity, flight into Egypt, Good Shepherd, and Madonna and child, as interpreted by the artists. But La Farge's works here mostly portray medieval scenes.

The vivid jewel tones of Franz Mayer's stained-glass windows contrast with the luminous blues and greens of Tiffany Studios' masterpieces, such as the *Te Deum*. The museum is just one glorious work of art after another.

An eye-catching group of eight Tiffany windows portrays angels as stern warriors and loving guardians presenting the Beatitudes—sayings attributed to Jesus. These windows adorned a private mausoleum, out of the public eye for 108 years, until Gelman put them on display.

Similar memorial inscriptions evoke a bygone time, such as "To the Glory of God and in Loving Memory of Charles Chamberlain Gay 1835–1913." One narrow window honors the memory of three women who died in the wreck of a ship called the Paul Jones in January 1899 in the Gulf of Mexico.

The small but magnificent north chapel shimmers with windows rich in pastels. In the south chapel, a large pipe organ and an electronic organ, backed by superb sound systems, enhance the sensory feast. The museum hosts orchestral and chamber music concerts and has been the setting for weddings, workshops and secular celebrations.

The museum chose not to add interpretive displays to the windows, instead providing guests a compact map with QR codes that, with a click of your phone camera, link to in-depth descriptions of the windows, their artists and their techniques. The map also identifies the marble altars, statues and mosaics throughout the building.

La Casa del Vitral, an art studio in Edinburg, took on the restoration of the century-old windows and installed the glass art in the museum. They also made replicas of several windows held in other museums.

Admission to the Gelman Museum is by appointment only, made through its website, gelmanmuseum.org.

Once visitors are inside, benches invite sitting and contemplating. Subtle light washes over me while I listen to recorded voices raised in Gregorian chant. Peace and beauty. ■

The Good Shepherd, baptism of Jesus and flight into Egypt are among the biblical stories portrayed in stained glass framed by red oak paneling.



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How To Rock a Walking Stick

An essential part of a gentleman's wardrobe



In the 17th century, the walking stick overtook the sword as an essential part of a gentleman's wardrobe. Though it was primarily used as a decorative accessory, it could also function as a weapon if necessary. For men of the era, these walking sticks were a statement piece, and a way to communicate their wealth and refinement.

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Today, walking sticks still represent status and prosperity — a way to show off your deep pockets without being too flashy. In that vein, we present the Santa Fe Walking Stick. Made of eucalyptus wood painted a glossy black with an antiqued silver-finished sculpted handle, what gives this piece of finery a distinctive edge is an 18-carat turquoise inlay that's been enhanced to bring out its best blues. Don't be bashful about your affluence. See why the Santa Fe Walking Stick is the embodiment of sophisticated elegance for the modern gentleman.

Don't delay: Our must-have Santa Fe Walking Stick was one of our best-selling items this past year. Because of this, we can only offer 723 walking sticks at this price with this ad! See why Stauer is becoming one of America's fastest-growing sellers of walking sticks today!

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‘Everybody’s happy!’

Immigrants brought polka to Texas generations ago, and the beat goes on. Devotees of all ages still swirl around dance floors across the Bluebonnet region.

By Clayton Stromberger

IT’S EARLY on a Friday night in Fayette County, and the grassy parking lot of the Round Top Rifle Hall is already full. This evening’s special event is sold out: a four-hour show by Mollie B and SqueezeBox, an Ohio-based polka band, in the middle of its much-anticipated annual winter tour through the polka hot spots of Texas. Inside the 141-year-old hall — lovingly cared for by members of the Round Top Schützen Verein, or shooting society, formed by the community’s German immigrants in 1873 — recorded polka music plays over the loudspeakers, and folks chat, greet friends and take their reserved spots at the tables lining the wooden dance floor.

The crowd is a mix of local residents, polka lovers from communities near and far, old-timers serenely surveying the scene and families with young children. Schützen Verein members sell cold Shiner Bock longnecks at the far end of the hall for \$3 (cash only), and a dinner waits to be served during a break.

Then the four-member band takes the stage. After a few words of greeting, it’s time for the polka party to begin. The unmistakable sound of a push-button accordion kicks in with a cheery whoosh of bellows-driven air, and two voices singing in close harmony — bandleader Mollie Busta Lange and husband Ted Lange — glide above the brisk drumbeat and bouncy bass line:

*Let’s ... dance ... the polka ...
Twirling around the floor
We’ll all clap our hands
and we’ll shout for more
Doing the party polka ...*

The best dancers are up first, hopping eagerly out of the hall’s metal folding chairs and hitting the floor with gusto. Within seconds their feet move in perfect sync: *one-two-three ... one-two-three ... one-two-three...*

Others follow their lead, and the hall becomes a swirl of movement. Older couples who’ve danced together since they were first courting take hands and begin working their way slowly around the floor — the knees may not move like they used to, but the steps are instinctive after so many years, so many dances. A dad in cowboy boots dances sweetly with his young daughter, while a mom and her young son spin around the floor, inventing their own steps as they go. A grandfather smiles as he dances with his granddaughter. Weaving between the dancers, Michael Sacks — one of the event organizers — shakes some sawdust from a can onto the floor, seeking just the right amount to provide glide.

Continued on next page



Megan Hughey, Brad Kieschnick, Paula Amsler and Louis Stewart Jr., above, from left, stomp and shout to the ‘Seven Step Polka’ at Round Top Rifle Hall. The dance includes a tight circle in the middle of the dance floor, hand slaps and a hearty “Hey!”

Mollie B and SqueezeBox with Ted Lange, right, is an award-winning, popular polka band that tours the nation, making regular stops in Texas during their winter 2023 tour.

Sarah Beal photos





“(Polka) just brings the whole family together. It’s like going back to the old days, when you brought your kids out on a Friday night. You don’t see that at a country and western or rock ‘n’ roll show.”

Raymie Kana
of Columbus,
enjoying the Mollie B
and SqueezeBox show

Continued from previous page

“Everybody’s happy!” said polka expert and Texas Polka News editor, photographer and chief correspondent Gary E. McKee of Fayetteville, watching with approval from near the stage. “Everybody.”

Every weekend is a polka weekend in the Bluebonnet region, if you know where to look.

Somewhere in these parts, on any given Friday night to Sunday afternoon, the sounds and melodies carried across the ocean from Central and Eastern Europe generations ago are ringing out — perhaps from the stage of an old SPJST or American Legion dance hall, or at a wedding anniversary celebration or even from a kitchen radio tuned to a weekly polka show. Wherever polka plays, you can be sure someone within earshot reaches for a dance partner.



Gary E. McKee of Fayetteville is a polka expert and editor of Texas Polka News.

“It’s a lively music,” said polka legend Alfred Vrazel, a resident of Buckholts in Milam County who played in his own polka band for decades. His weekly radio show has beamed polka into parts of the Bluebonnet region from KMIL-FM in Cameron since 1955. “Happy music for happy people,” he said.

The Texas polka culture began with the Czechs, Germans and Poles who immigrated to Texas in the 19th and early 20th century, bringing their music and favorite dances — and sometimes even their musical instruments — with them. Historians debate the origins of polka, but many believe the dance, which may have evolved as a fast version of a waltz, came to life in a village in Bohemia, now part of the Czech Republic. By the 1840s polka was one of the hottest dances in Europe and “polkomania” hit the big ballrooms of Paris.

“Polka was big in parts of Texas in the first half of the 1900s through the 1970s,” McKee, 69, said. “It was the culture, it was the old country, it was the sound their families grew up with in Central Europe. The Czech language, for example, was spoken quite frequently as a first language up until the 1950s. When I was growing up in Schulenburg, some of my friends spoke German or Czech until they got to grade school.”

Polka’s rise in areas of Texas was mirrored by its growing fan base in the Midwest, especially Chicago, which is associated with Polish-style polka, and Cleveland, home base of Slovenian polka star Frankie Yankovic, “America’s Polka King.” Yankovic had a string of hits in the late 1940s. Polka is the official state dance of Wisconsin, and “Beer Barrel Polka” is still performed in the seventh inning stretch at Milwaukee Brewers’ baseball games, in addition to the traditional “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

There was a time when, in certain pockets of this part of Central Texas, you could hear a polka band several times a week, McKee said. “In my database I have over 4,200 dancing events from 1900 to 1980 for Fayette County,” he added.

The legendary bands of the time — such as the Baca’s Band and Orchestra of Fayetteville, formed in 1892 — would play up to 300 gigs a year in the 1930s, “but they never had to go more than 30 miles,” McKee said. The concept of the weekend didn’t yet exist in that mostly agricultural era. Farms required hard work seven days a week, so dances and weddings were often on weeknights or Sunday afternoons.

The names of the great bands from that heyday of Texas polka are still spoken with affection and reverence in this area: along with the Baca’s Band, you often hear of Lee Roy Matocha (“The Fayetteville Flash”), Vrazels’ Polka Band from Buckholts, the Joe Patek Orchestra from Shiner, the City Polka Boys from Houston, the Leo Majek Orchestra from Cameron, the Hi-Toppers Orchestra from New Braunfels, and the list goes on. That was when polka was king.

Continued on next page

‘We enjoy seeing our friends, and the music brings back fond memories of our youth as well, of our grandparents, of other bands before us.’

John Dujka

The Dujka Brothers band



5 fun facts about polka

1 Polka was so popular in the late 1800s in Europe that the prefix ‘polka’ was added to product names to make them more desirable. One familiar example? The fabric pattern of identically sized, close-together filled circles known as “polka dots.”



2 According to the Handbook of Texas online, both the Poles and the Czechs at various times have claimed credit for being the originators of polka dancing. The Czech word *pulka* means “half-step,” which fits with the 2/4 time of a polka dance; in Polish, polka translates as “Polish woman.”



Dujka Brothers, Mark and John, from left, play at Blase's Hall near Hallettsville in March. The Dujkas formed their band in 1986 and they have performed at hundreds of events. The pair have also appeared at some of the most popular festivals in Texas. Frank Baca started Baca's Band and Orchestra, shown below in the 1920s. The band eventually included all of his 13 children. The Baca family band, from Fayetteville, became Texas' most popular Czech orchestra.

Photos courtesy of Gary McKee (left), Polka Lovers Club of Texas Museum



Lively conjunto music's roots in immigrants' polka

By Clayton Stromberger

More than a century ago, in the days before widespread radio broadcasts, Mexican and Mexican-American musicians in South and Central Texas first began to hear an irresistible new sound pouring out of dance halls in communities formed by Czech and German immigrants.

The upbeat rhythm of polka music, played on a diatonic button accordion — where one side of buttons plays the melody, the other the bass chords — caught the ears of these creative folk artists, who were then inspired to introduce the European instrument into their traditional Mexican ensembles of guitar, violin, contra-bass, and a “ranch drum,” often made of goatskin.

Eventually the six-string guitar was replaced by the thumping bass beat of the 12-string bajo sexto guitar, and out of this fusion emerged a new sound that came to be known as *norteño*, for Northern Mexico, or *conjunto*, which means “musical group” in Spanish. Like jazz or the blues, conjunto is a unique and durable musical form born in the United States, and in this case primarily in Texas.

In parts of South Texas, according to polka writer and historian Gary E. McKee, Czech and Mexican immigrants working as farm laborers “bonded together over music, borrowing each other’s sound and rhythms.”

The upbeat feeling of polka found a similar expression in this new form.

Conjunto surged in popularity beginning in the 1930s — the same time polka was hot in Texas — with the release of popular records by Narciso Martinez, known as the “Father of Conjunto,” and Santiago Jimenez, the father of conjunto legend and Grammy Award winner Flaco Jimenez.

The music’s enduring impact in Texas can be heard May 17-21 in San Antonio, when the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center hosts the 41st annual Tejano Conjunto Music Festival.



Narciso Martinez, born in 1911, grew up in La Paloma, Texas. Known as the father of conjunto music and ‘The Hurricane of the Valley,’ he was a hit in the 1950s in Tejano dance halls across the southwest and a popular recording artist. He died at 80.

Photo courtesy The Arhoolie Foundation

3 The accordion, integral to a polka band, is part of the wind instruments family and was invented in 1822 by Friedrich Buschmann in Germany.

4 The longest-running polka festival in Texas is the National Polka Festival, which began in 1967 in Ennis, south of Dallas. It is still held there every Memorial Day weekend.

5 The first Grammy Award for Best Polka Recording went to Frankie Yankovic in 1986. The award category was retired in 2009 by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, to the disappointment of polka lovers. Polka music now falls under the Grammy categories of folk or world music.

“We never made much money, but we made a lot of friends. We were very close to our audience. It wasn’t, and still isn’t, uncommon for people to drive hundreds of miles to a polka dance.”

Alfred Vrazel

Retired member of Vrazels’ Polka Band and radio host



Continued from previous page

Even Willie Nelson started out in a polka band, getting his first gig at age 10 playing guitar with the John Rejcek Bohemian Polka Band at beer halls around West, north of Nelson’s hometown of Abbott.

Competition from television and the rise of Sunday afternoon sports on TV began to put a dent in polka’s popularity in the 1960s, McKee said. And of course every generation seeks its own music. In the 1920s, young people were drawn to jazz and swing, and later it was rock ‘n’ roll or country and western as the hot new thing. In the disco era it became trendy to hire DJs for dances, reducing the demand for live bands.

But polka has weathered all those cultural changes and survived, mostly thanks to those who love to play this music, or dance to it or just listen to it. They are determined not to let it slip away.

“It’s not fading, it’s changing,” Gene Hackemack of Burton said as he watched Mollie B and SqueezeBox swing into another jaunty number. Hackemack has played the accordion in polka bands for many years, and once famously helped wake up the astronauts on the space shuttle in 1995 with a live performance of “Beer Barrel Polka,” earning him a plaque from NASA commending the “first polka in space.”

Hackemack grew up in Burton in Washington County — “I’m a fifth-generation Texan and I still speak German,” he said proudly — and remembers the family listening to polka together when he was young. “We sat around this little radio and listened to KWHI in Brenham, the ‘Polka Party Hour.’” The dance hall bands today have to dip into a variety of musical genres to reach a more diverse audience, he said. “They’re mixing it with a lot of Texas country music.”

Those who love to polka don’t mind driving a while to get to a dance.

“It just brings the whole family together,” said Raymie Kana of Columbus, who wore her “Polka On!” button to the Mollie B show. “It’s like going back to the old days, when you brought your kids out on a Friday night. You don’t see that at a country and western or rock ‘n’ roll show.”

Kana grew up going to dances as a little girl, and, in a ritual familiar to many in the crowd, her parents made a pallet under the table so she could fall asleep as the dancing went into the wee hours. She and her husband go to polka dances several times a month, anywhere from Eagle Lake in Colorado County to Hallettsville, Shiner and Moravia in Lavaca County. This was her “eighth or ninth” time to see Mollie B and her band on tour.

“I love to polka, love to waltz,” Kana said. “My husband doesn’t dance, but he lets me dance, so it’s all good.”

Alfred Vrazel recalled that while he played in Vrazels’ Polka Band with his brothers and cousins, “we never made much money, but we made a lot of friends. We were very close to our audience. It wasn’t, and still isn’t, uncommon for people to drive hundreds of miles to a polka dance.”

Dance partners Louis Stewart Jr. and Paula Amsler drove to Round Top from Moulton in Lavaca County and Kingwood in Harris County, respectively, to see Mollie B. They had also driven to Hallettsville the night before to see the band play there. “We keep track of our steps and miles,” grinned Stewart Jr. displaying his fitness-tracking watch. “Last night we did 23,000 steps and 12 miles of dancing!”





Paula Amsler and Louis Stewart, Jr., above, met while dancing at the National Polka Fest in Ennis in 2021. Amsler said it feels like a Cinderella story every time they dance together. On this night, their bright red shirts are standouts on the Round Top dance floor. Katelyn and Jeff Ebrom from Poth, left, dance with their children, Annie, 2, and Chandler, 5, at the same show in Round Top's Rifle Hall. *Sarah Beal photos*

Amsler added: "I love polka because it's such a high-energy, fun dance. You'll see a lot of two- and three-year-olds just bouncing to the music. If you can count to three, you can do it."

Brad Kieschnick and Megan Hughey from Cat Spring in Austin County — one of the younger couples on the dance floor, at ages 46 and 31, respectively — had also been at the Hallettsville show the night before. "It brings us a lot of happiness and joy," Kieschnick said. "I wish more people our age would be interested in this kind of dancing. We're trying to keep it alive."

Some polka weekends in the Bluebonnet region are bigger than others, especially if it's time for a community festival such as Maifest in Brenham, the Kolache Fest in Caldwell or one of several annual celebrations at the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center in La Grange. Those events usually feature several polka bands. Then there is the church picnic season, from spring to late summer. Polka lovers say these gatherings at small historic churches throughout the area are some of the best opportunities in this region to hear and dance to Texas' Czech-influenced polka music.

There are also two museums in the region for those who want to learn more about the history of polka in Texas. (See list, Page 20D.)

The more you dive into the world of polka, the more you discover how deeply the music is woven into the fabric of many area communities. In Giddings in Lee County, Spencer Schneider is city manager and has been a drummer in several polka-focused bands, including the Central Texas Sounds from Fayetteville and the Ellinger Combo, a well-loved band formed in the community of that name in Fayette County in the 1960s. Schneider started playing music as a young man in Giddings in 1975, focusing on country and rock, but he gradually worked his way back to polka, he said.

"My roots in music, because of my dad, was always listening to as

Continued on next page



Alfred Vrazel, a retired member of his family's polka band, has hosted his namesake polka show on KMIL-FM in Cameron since 1955. *Sarah Beal photo*

Tune in to a polka radio show

Polka radio shows are still going strong, and there are several you can hear in or near the Bluebonnet region. Some you can hear live online at the stations' websites. The shows include:

- **Alfred Vrazel's Polka Show** (on the air since 1955): KMIL 105.1 FM, Cameron, 12:15-2:30 p.m. Sunday
- **Larry's Polka Time with Larry Sodek**: KLVG 1570 AM, La Grange, 12:45-2 p.m. Monday-Saturday, on both KVLG-AM and KBUK 104.9 FM noon-4 p.m. Sunday
- **Texas Polka Time with Mark Stanley**: KWHI 1280 AM, Brenham, 9-10 a.m. Saturday
- **Czech Polka Time with Ronnie Horčica**: KAGC 1510 AM, Bryan, 10:05-11 a.m. Saturday, 4:05-5 p.m. Sunday
- **Saturday Morning Dance Time with John Dujka**: KULP 1390 AM & 106.7 FM, El Campo, 10 a.m.-noon Saturday
- **Michael Craig's Polka Show**: KRXT 98.5 FM, Rockdale, 11 a.m.-noon Monday-Friday, 1:15-6 p.m. Sunday
- **Czech Melody Time with Thomas Durnin**: KOOP 91.7 FM, Austin, 7-8 p.m. Wednesday

Find listings of other Texas polka radio shows in the weekly Polka Weekend email newsletter (subscribe at polkabeat.com) or at the Texas Polka Music Museum website, texaspolkamuseum.com (click on "Polka DJs.")

Get more polka into your life

• The monthly magazine **Texas Polka News**, at right, has updates on musicians, history, events and activities in the Central Texas region and around the state; digital subscription is \$27 a year; print and digital is \$32 a year. Go to texaspolkanews.com and click on "Subscribe."

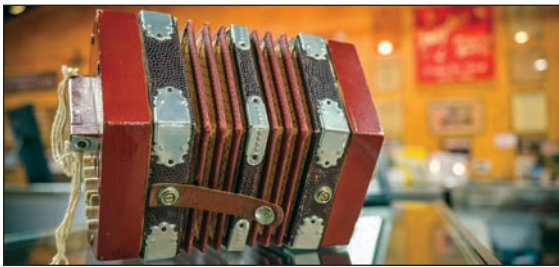
• Sign up for the free weekly **Polka Weekend** email newsletter to learn where polka is planned. Go to polkabeat.com, click on "Newsletter," then click on "Join our free email mailing list." Fill out the online form and click "Sign Up."





The Polka Lovers Club of Texas Museum, above, opened in La Grange in 2006. The museum features photos, records, videos, instruments, and an extensive library of polka music and albums dating back to the early 1900s. Located near the Fayette County Fairgrounds, it is open by appointment. Go to plctm.com for information. *Sarah Beal photos*

See Texas polka history at two museums in the region



An antique hexagonal-shaped concertina, believed to be from Germany, was a traditional part of Czech polka music and is part of the Polka Lovers Museum collection. Smaller than an accordion, the concertina usually has buttons on both ends.

Polka Lovers Club of Texas Museum, La Grange

275 W. Fairgrounds Road, La Grange (next to the Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center); open during Texas Czech Heritage and Cultural Center events at the Fayette County Fairgrounds or by appointment. Visit plctm.com; email Gary Bucek at info@plctm.com or call 713-252-2162; admission is free, but donations are welcome.

Texas Polka Music Museum, Schulenburg

The museum, 712 Lyons Ave. in Schulenburg, has recordings of polka music, listings for DJs and bands, and exhibits of instruments, photos and costumes; 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Thursday, Friday & Saturday, call 979-743-4752 or visit texaspolkamuseum.com; admission is free, but donations are welcome.

Continued from previous page

much polka music as possible,” Schneider said. “When he listened to the radio, it was always set to polka music, so that’s what you listened to also.”

Twenty miles to the south in La Grange, Mark Hermes, a Hallettsville native and director of the Texas Czech Heritage and Culture Center, is also in a polka band — the Czechaholics. The band plays 40 or so shows a year.

“That’s what we grew up on,” Hermes said. “It’s our heritage, it’s something we love to play, we love the sound. You can’t listen to it and be upset. And if we don’t do it, who will?”

The folks who grew up in the glory days of Texas polka may be getting older, but they don’t show it on the dance floor. At the Mollie B show, Betty and Ronny Sacks — who opened Round Top Mercantile in 1984 — beamed as they waltzed and polkaed their way around the hall. “I grew up dancing from ‘this high,’” said Betty Sacks, holding her hand just a few feet off the ground. “I learned to dance with my mom and dad. Dancing is just a form of having fun and enjoying life.”

“German aerobics!,” chimed in Ronny Sacks, who grew up going to dances at Rifle Hall.

Today’s polka bands tend to mix in waltzes. “The polka crowd is getting older, and you can’t play ten polkas in a row. The waltzes are a bit easier for them,” said Mark Dujka of the Dujka Brothers polka band, which he formed in 1986 with his brother John. The brothers grew up on a farm in the blackland prairie region of Fort Bend County, southwest of Houston. They play various instruments, backed by a bass and drum track laid down by the Dujkas themselves. John Dujka lives near Brenham now, and Mark Dujka still lives in Fort Bend County.

The polka tradition is passed along note by note, step by step. In pockets of the Bluebonnet area, it plays on, buoyed by the hope that a new generation will pick up the accordion when the time comes.

“My brother and I grew up going to the community festivals and church picnics and heard a lot of the old bands play,” said John Dujka, who is a music professor at Blinn College in Brenham. “Before all the TV and other competing media, what did people do? They went to dances and celebrated life.

“That’s the thing that keeps us engaged in it. We enjoy seeing our friends, and the music brings back fond memories of our youth as well, of our grandparents, of other bands before us. It’s a tradition that we’re trying to keep going.” ■

“The Annual Meeting sounds like a great benefit of being a Bluebonnet member: music, meeting new people, prizes and learning more about my cooperative. I’m excited to attend my first Annual Meeting, participate in my cooperative and learn about the things it’s doing to support my community.

Thank you, Bluebonnet!”

— **Megan Kirk,**

5-year Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member, Giddings



Thank you, Mrs. Kirk.

Malisa Espinal, on the left, is a Bluebonnet member service representative who has been helping people at the cooperative’s Bastrop member service center for 15 years. She has attended 10 Annual Meetings, where she registers members and helps them take care of any business with Bluebonnet. It’s a great day for Malisa to connect with members, update their account information if needed and answer their questions.

**We never forget:
We’re a cooperative.**

OUR
power
COMES FROM
you



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.**



ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

Dear Member:

Pursuant to its Bylaws, the Annual Membership Meeting of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Inc. will be held on May 9, 2023, at The Silos on 77, 1031 County Road 223, Giddings, Texas. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. The meeting will start at 2:30 p.m. Business coming before the meeting will be conducted on behalf of Bluebonnet's members via proxies directed to the Board and the Proxy Committee and registered with the Cooperative on or before May 2, 2023.

Four director seats, District 3, District 4, District 6 and District 7, are up for election this year. Three of the incumbent candidates — Roderick Emanuel, District 3, representing Bastrop County; Russell Jurk, District 4, representing Lee, Milam and Williamson counties; and Byron Balke, District 6, representing 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. Other business that may come before the meeting will also be addressed.

Sincerely yours,

Robert Mikeska
Secretary/Treasurer
Bluebonnet Board of Directors



Roderick Emanuel
District 3
(Incumbent)



Russell Jurk
District 4
(Incumbent)



Byron Balke
District 6
(Incumbent)



Robert Mikeska
District 7
(Incumbent)



Richard Lamensky
District 7



BRING YOUR APRIL BILL

with the QR code
to the Annual Meeting
and

BREEZE THROUGH REGISTRATION!

2023 ANNUAL MEETING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why is it important to attend the Annual Meeting?

Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting, held each year in May, is one of the many benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative. The 2023 meeting will be an in-person event, and members will have the opportunity to receive co-op information, get refreshments and ask questions.

What information do I need to bring with me to register at the Annual Meeting?

If you bring your April bill with the QR code on it, you'll breeze through registration. If you can't find your paper bill, you can use a computer to log in at bluebonnet.coop, go to the Billing & Payments tab, then Billing History to find the April bill and print a copy to bring to the meeting. On our mobile app, log in, go to the Bill & Pay tab, then Billing History to pull up your April bill. Otherwise, you'll go through the same account verification process as the one performed any time members transact business on their accounts. A member service representative will ask for your driver's license or any two of the following pieces of information about your account: 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.

What are my voting options?

There are two candidates for the cooperative's District 7 Board seat. There were no additional ballot items to be voted on at the time this material was printed. Items can be added to the Annual Meeting agenda that would require a vote by members up to 10 days before the Annual Meeting. Your proxy could be used in that vote, which is why your proxy selection is important.

Who administers the election?

Election Services Corp., 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.

Can I change my address or do other business at the Annual Meeting?

Representatives will be available to help members with most of their co-op business and answer questions they would normally handle at a member service center or by phone. If your question would take some time to answer, they will record it and have someone contact you later that week.

Get more information at bluebonnet.coop/annualmeeting, email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or call 800-842-7708 between 8 a.m-5 p.m., Monday-Friday.

2023 Annual Meeting Agenda

1:30-2:30 p.m. — Registration and voting

2:30 p.m. — Welcome and introductions

Call to Order — Ben Flencher, Board Chairman

Invocation and Pledges of Allegiance — Roderick Emanuel, Board Vice President/Vice Chairman

Chairman/President's Report — Ben Flencher, Board Chairman

Secretary-Treasurer's Report — Robert Mikeska, Board Secretary-Treasurer

General Manager's Report — Matt Bentke, General Manager/CEO

Door Prize Drawings

Ballot Canvassing Results — Sarah Newman-Altamirano, General Counsel

Adjourn



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 prizes.*

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

Teens chosen to represent Bluebonnet on 2023 youth tour

By Sidni Carruthers

Two high school students with lofty career goals have been selected to represent Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative on the annual government youth tour this summer in Washington, D.C. They will join hundreds of other students representing electric cooperatives from across Texas and the nation for a 10-day visit to the nation's capital.

Johnique "J.T." Thomas, a junior at Manor Early College High School, and Tara Williams, a junior at Colorado River Collegiate Academy in Bastrop, were selected to represent Bluebonnet. Emma Smith, a senior at Lexington High School, is the alternate representative who would join the tour if one of the winners is unable to attend.

Thomas and Williams will each receive a \$1,000 scholarship in addition to the all-expenses paid Government-in-Action Youth Tour planned for June 11-19. While in D.C., the students will visit historic sites and the U.S. Capitol, meet members of Congress and attend events hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The recipients were selected in March from among 19 applicants.

Thomas, 17, of Manor, is a standout athlete for the Manor Mustangs and is excited about playing college football after he graduates from high school in 2024. He plays center and has been a captain of the football team for the last year. Thomas is parliamentarian for the school's National Honor Society and director of community service for the school's Leo Club, the youth organization of the Lions Club.

After college, Thomas hopes to become a maternal-fetal medicine physician — an obstetrician with three additional years of training who specializes in high-risk pregnancies. This became his career goal, he said, when he learned that pregnancy is more risky in the United States than in other high-income nations. He also wants to better understand how government impacts health care.

Williams, also 17, of Bastrop, is the student council president at the collegiate academy and serves on the school's student superintendent advisory council. In 2021, she reached the district level of University Interscholastic League speech and debate competitions. She credits those competitions with giving her confidence in public speaking and critical thinking, as well as the ability to respect others' opposing opinions.

Williams participates in competitive dance through Liberty Dance Center in Bastrop.

She plans to attend a four-year university to study architecture with a career goal of preservation and conservation of historic buildings. She has always loved historic architecture, she said, adding that



Johnique 'J.T.' Thomas, left, a junior at Manor Early College High School and Tara Williams, right, a junior at Colorado River Collegiate Academy in Bastrop, have been chosen to represent Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative at the 2023 government youth tour this summer in Washington, D.C. Emma Smith, center, a senior at Lexington High School, is the alternate representative. *Sarah Beal photo*

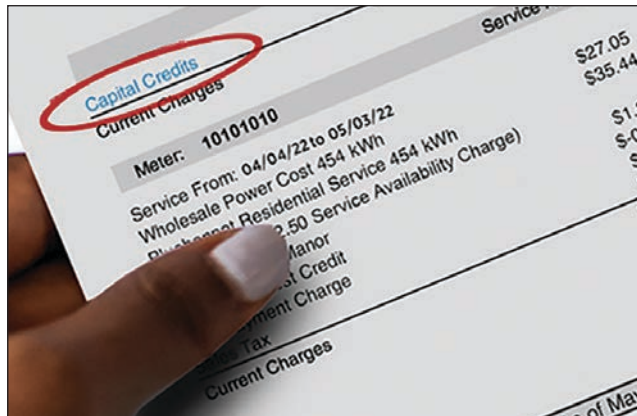
it saddens her "to see historic homes and buildings that are abandoned or deteriorating."

Smith, 18, of Lexington is involved in several school organizations, including the National Honor Society and student council. She volunteers at her church, is active in the Lee County 4-H program and volunteers weekly at the local senior citizens center. Smith plans to attend Sam Houston State University in the fall to study political science and legal studies, with hopes of becoming an attorney and lobbyist in the oil and gas industry.

This will be the first visit to Washington, D.C., for both Thomas and Williams.

Thomas wants to see the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. "I wrote about [the memorial] in a short essay about my great uncle who was sent to Vietnam and never came back," the Manor student said. "I always heard stories about him and the person he was, and he has been a role model to me even though I never got to meet him. He is the man I want to grow up to be."

Connecting to military history in D.C. is also on Williams' list, because her family has ties to the armed forces. But she is most interested in seeing Capitol Hill and some of the city's many museums,



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MOST BLUEBONNET Electric Cooperative members will see a credit on their bill in May. It's called "capital credits," and it is one of the benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative. Capital credits represent your share of the cooperative's excess revenue above what is required to operate the cooperative.

Bluebonnet will return capital credits this month. In the last 20 years, the cooperative has returned \$84.8 million in capital credits to its members.

Here is how capital credits work:

1. When you move into a home or establish a business in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area, you become a member-owner of the cooperative.
2. Each year, any money remaining after expenses have been paid and money has been reinvested by the cooperative to continue providing safe, reliable electric service, are allocated to members.
3. Bluebonnet's Board of Directors, made up of members just like you, approves amounts to return each year, while considering the impact that the credits will have on the cooperative's financial strength.
4. The amount members receive as a credit is calculated based on how much electricity they used in the previous year and how long they have been Bluebonnet members.
5. Current members will see a credit on their May electric bill. Former members who are still owed a capital credit will be mailed a check in May or June.

Questions? Contact a member service representative at memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or 800-842-7708, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed May 29 for Memorial Day. If you have a power outage, you can report it by texting OUT to 85700 (to register, text BBOUTAGE to that number), online at bluebonnet.coop, via our MyBluebonnet mobile app or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay bills any time online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (press option 2 when prompted).

she said, describing herself as a "museum nerd."

On their youth tour applications, students were asked to list their school accomplishments, extracurricular activities, leadership experience and community service work. They were also asked to submit a video in which they answered the question: "What is the greatest energy issue facing your generation, and how can youths be a part of the solution?"

During his video, Thomas spoke of the nation's reliance on fossil fuels and, more specifically, how that impacts communities and families with low incomes. "The rising prices of energy have a direct hand in the rising cost of everything else, which I am seeing playing out in my community," he said. The solution for this, he proposed, is accessibility to renewable energy options for those communities and families.

In her video, Williams also touched on energy insecurity in local communities, and referenced severe weather in the region in recent years that has led to energy emergencies. "It is [my] generation's duty and responsibility to collaborate with industry experts, as well as lawmakers, so that we can work towards ending energy [insecurity] for good," she said.

Before leaving for D.C., the two Bluebonnet student representatives will join other tour members from across the state for a visit to the Texas Capitol and the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin.

This is the 57th year for the youth tour program. It has more than 50,000 alumni, including CEOs, state and national elected officials, and countless business and community leaders.

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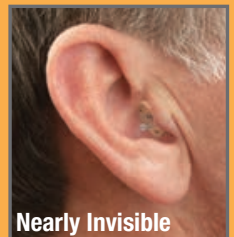
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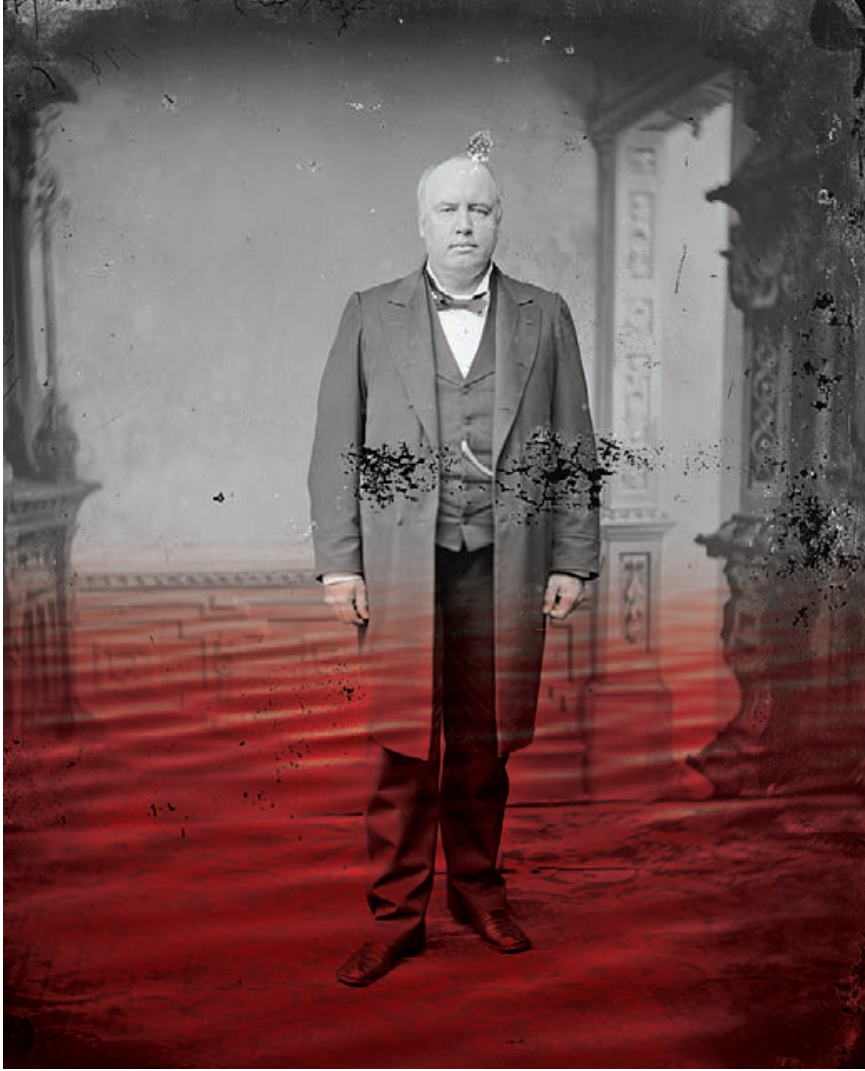


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Redwater Christening

East Texas residents washed away their sins—and their town's original name

BY W.F. STRONG

GO EAST OF DALLAS on Interstate 30 past Sulphur Springs until you reach U.S. Route 67. Take that east and before you reach Texarkana, you'll arrive in a little town of about 1,000 named Ingersoll. Well, it *was* called Ingersoll.

The name was unofficially changed to Redwater about 10 years after its 1875 founding—a change that was made official by the post office almost a decade after that.

Founders of the town admired Robert Green Ingersoll and decided to name their town after him. You may have never heard of Ingersoll, but that's only

because you didn't live in the late 1800s in America.

Back then, Ingersoll was one of the most famous people in the nation. He was friends with presidents and Mark Twain. He was a giant among politicians of the day, and any Republican who wanted to succeed at the national level needed and lusted after Ingersoll's endorsement—and his oratorical talents.

Had he wanted to, he would have made a formidable candidate for the presidency himself, except for the little problem of his nickname: the Great Agnostic.

Despite Ingersoll's reputation as a free-

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



thinker and anti-religious zealot, he was widely liked.

His central creed was this: “Happiness is the only good. The place to be happy is here. The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to make others so.”

Ingersoll, a devoted reader of Shakespeare and, ironically, the Bible, was known as the most brilliant wordsmith of his age. He mesmerized audiences with his genius for creating poetic oratory. His voice was captivating in tone, and his articulation was flawless.

Ingersoll was ahead of his time. The New York native who served as the 16th attorney general of Illinois after commanding a Union cavalry regiment in the Civil War was an outspoken abolitionist and supported voting rights for Black people and women.

But Ingersoll's fame died with him, in 1899. It seemed he would be confined to the century that had defined him.

Even in Texas. A revival meeting was held in the early 1890s in the East Texas town that was named for Ingersoll, and it was a mighty successful one.

That week 110 people were baptized, or “born again,” in the community. It suddenly became thoroughly devout and could not suffer the indignities of living under the name of a famous agnostic. So they agreed to rename the town Redwater, after a well that had recently been dug there was found to yield red water. Perhaps they also saw some religious significance in the name. In the Old Testament's telling, God parted the Red Sea to save Moses and the Israelites.

That's how Ingersoll became Redwater and one more reason that the man himself became, as *The Washington Post* called him in 2012, “the most famous American you never heard of.” ■

Berries

Make a grand entrance with your favorite diminutive delights

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Berries have long been my favorite kind of fruit. Not only are they wonderful eaten out of hand, these versatile little gems shine in recipes of all kinds. For these cornmeal pancakes, blueberries are combined with jalapeño for a tart, sweet, slightly spicy topping.



Cornmeal Pancakes With Blueberry Jalapeño Sauce

PANCAKES

- 1 cup self-rising flour**
- 1 cup cornmeal**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- ½ teaspoon baking powder**
- 1 cup buttermilk**
- 2 eggs**
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, melted, plus more for the pan**

SAUCE

- 1½ cups blueberries**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 1 jalapeño, seeded and diced**
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice**

1. PANCAKES In a large bowl, stir together flour, cornmeal, sugar and baking powder. Whisk in buttermilk and eggs until smooth. Let batter rest while you make the sauce.

2. SAUCE In a small saucepan, combine blueberries, sugar, jalapeño and lemon juice and stir well. Set over medium heat and cook 5 minutes, stirring occasionally and mashing blueberries with the back of a spoon. Turn heat to low and let simmer while you cook the pancakes.

3. Warm a nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add a small amount of butter to the pan and swirl to coat.

4. Stir the 4 tablespoons melted butter into the batter. Scoop ¼ cup of batter and pour into the prepared pan, repeating as allowed for pan size.

5. Cook pancakes until edges are dry and bubbles appear (1–2 minutes), then flip and cook an additional 2 minutes. Remove to a plate and repeat until all the batter is used. Serve immediately with warm sauce.

MAKES 1 DOZEN PANCAKES

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Raspberry White Chocolate Cookies.



Strawberry Burfee

SHUBHADA KORE
PEDERNALES EC

This burfee, an Indian dessert similar to fudge—also spelled burfi, barfi, barfee or borfi—is a wonderfully easy treat. Top it with coconut, sprinkles or chopped nuts for festive flair.

- 1 cup strawberries**
- 1 cup almond flour**
- 1 cup brown sugar**
- ½ cup desiccated coconut**
- 1 tablespoon butter**

COOK'S TIP Desiccated coconut can be made by pulsing shredded coconut in a food processor until finely chopped.

1. Wash, trim and purée strawberries until smooth. Set aside.
2. In a nonstick pan over low to medium heat, roast almond flour for 5 minutes or until it is lightly browned and aromatic. Pour into a bowl and set aside.
3. Return the pan to the heat and add strawberry purée and brown sugar. Cover and cook 2–3 minutes on low to medium heat.
4. Once the berry and sugar mixture is bubbling, remove lid and stir in almond flour and coconut. Mix well, then stir in butter. Cook on low, stirring constantly, until mixture comes together into a dough, about 5–6 minutes. It will be somewhat sticky, with excess moisture cooked off.
5. Let the mixture cool slightly and then spread onto greased parchment or into a buttered square pan, using a spatula to shape into ½-inch thickness. Let cool completely and slice into squares or diamonds to serve.

SERVES 8–10

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

Berry Burst Pavlova

JUANITA GUERRA
MAGIC VALLEY EC



Pavlovas are always impressive on the table, especially when layered with a creamy filling and fresh fruit. Make sure not to open the oven during baking and cooling so the pavlova dries fully.

SERVES 12



PAVLOVA

- ¼ cup fresh or frozen berries of choice**
- ¾ cup egg whites at room temperature (about 6 eggs)**
- 1 cup superfine sugar**
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch**
- 1½ teaspoons cream of tartar**
- ½ teaspoon lemon or almond extract (optional)**

FILLING

- ¼ cup fresh or frozen berries of choice**
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened**
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 ounces)**
- ¼ cup lemon juice**
- ½ teaspoon lemon or orange extract**
- 1 pound mixed fresh berries**

1. **PAVLOVA** Preheat oven to 240 degrees. Draw an 8-inch circle on a sheet of parchment and set aside.
2. Microwave berries for 1 minute, smash with a fork and drain off any excess liquid. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl, whisk egg whites using an electric mixer on low until soft peaks form, 5–6 minutes. Continue to whisk, adding sugar 1 tablespoon at a time, waiting 15 seconds between each addition. Once all the sugar is added, increase mixer speed to high and whisk meringue to stiff peaks and until mixture is smooth. Sift in cornstarch and cream of tartar, add extract (if using), and whisk to incorporate.
4. Drop the heated berries into five areas on top of the mixture and fold in lightly with a spatula to create swirls.
5. Place a small amount of meringue onto each corner of a baking sheet and set the parchment, pencil side down, on top of it, sticking the corners down. Scoop the meringue onto the parchment, using the spatula to spread and fill the circle shape evenly. Bake 1½ hours, then turn oven off and let the meringue cool with the door closed for at least 2 hours.
6. **FILLING** Microwave berries 1 minute, smash with a fork and drain off any excess liquid. Set aside.
7. In a medium bowl, beat the cream cheese until fluffy. In another bowl, mix together the condensed milk, lemon juice and extract until smooth. Add to the cream cheese and whip until smooth and fluffy. Drop the heated berries into five areas on top and fold in lightly to make swirls.
8. To assemble, carefully transfer the cooled pavlova to a serving plate. Spread the filling into the middle and top with fresh berries.

\$500 Recipe Contest

BEANS DUE MAY 10

Submit your most delicious bean dishes, and we'll award \$500 for the winning recipe.



Raspberry Bread Pudding

JANELLE NIX
NUECES EC

Excellent for breakfast or dessert, this bread pudding is bursting with tart raspberries. It's topped with a creamy vanilla sauce, which Nix's mother has been making for decades.

BREAD PUDDING

1 loaf French bread
3 eggs
2½ cups half-and-half
1 cup sugar, divided use,
plus 2 tablespoons
½ cup brown sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
½ teaspoon salt
2½ cups fresh raspberries
¼ cup water
Zest of 1 small orange
Butter for the pan

VANILLA SAUCE

½ cup sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
Dash of salt



1½ cups half-and-half
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter

- 1. BREAD PUDDING** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Slice bread into ½-inch cubes to yield 5 cups of cubes and spread onto a baking sheet. Bake 7–10 minutes, until dry. Set aside.
- 2.** In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, half-and-half, ½ cup sugar, brown sugar, vanilla and salt. Fold in the toasted bread, coating evenly. Let soak for 30 minutes.

3. Place the raspberries in a bowl. In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine water, orange zest and ½ cup sugar, stirring to dissolve sugar. Cool syrup slightly, then pour over raspberries and stir to coat.

4. Lightly coat a 9-inch square baking pan with butter. Pour ¾ of the bread mixture into the pan, then spoon raspberries and syrup over the top. Add remaining bread mixture, then sprinkle on 2 tablespoons sugar. Bake 50–60 minutes, until center is set.

5. VANILLA SAUCE While the bread pudding is baking, make the sauce. In a small saucepan, whisk together sugar, cornstarch and salt. Whisk in half-and-half, then set over medium heat. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens and coats the back of a spoon, about 10–15 minutes. Remove from heat and whisk in vanilla and butter until blended and smooth. Serve on top of the bread pudding.

SERVES 8



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

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At Mammoth Lake Texas, it's what's inside that counts

BY CHET GARNER

I WAS WALKING like an awkward, eager duck with all my gear shaking like heavy tail feathers behind me. Mammoth Lake Texas attracts divers from all over the country, and I understood why as soon as I submerged myself into its strange underwater menagerie.

You can use your fingers to count the number of inland scuba diving destinations in Texas. Some offer a natural glimpse of spring-fed pools (like San Solomon Springs at Balmorhea State Park), and others offer swims through sunken objects. Mammoth Lake in Clute mixes the natural and artificial to create an underwater amusement park.

Below the depths of this 65-acre lake lie more than 150 objects ranging from small sculptures to the entire fuselage of a C-130 cargo plane. With a reservation and a current dive license, visitors can rent gear and embark on the most unusual underwater scavenger hunt in the state—in the largest and deepest dedicated scuba lake in Texas. Most attractions are in 35–40 feet of water, but a deeper hole reaches down to 75 feet.

I was joined by a knowledgeable divemaster, Alex Amaro, who took us on an epic expedition through a World War II submarine and a fighter jet. There's even a life-size sculpture of a Columbian mammoth marking the spot where fossils were found when this was just a sand pit. My favorite stops were the decommissioned rides from Six Flags AstroWorld, which owner Jason Burlison bought and submerged.

All around us were bass, perch and turtles that seemed to be enjoying the sunken treasures as much as I was. Unfortunately we didn't get a glimpse of the 7-foot paddlefish that call the lake home—just another reason to come back. ■

ABOVE Instructor Alex Amaro, giving the diving OK sign, with Chet and Todd White, producer of *The Daytripper*.

TCP Follow along as Chet goes sightseeing underwater. See the video on our website and check out all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

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MAY

07

Ennis Cinco de Mayo, (972) 878-4748, visitennistexas.com

09

Amarillo [9–10] Fiddler on the Roof, (806) 378-3096, amarillociviccenter.com

11

South Padre Island [11–13] Shallow Sport Owners Tournament, (956) 233-9489, shallowsporttournament.com

Abilene [11–14] Western Heritage Classic, (325) 677-4376, westernheritageclassic.com

12

Johnson City Movies at the Memorial, (830) 868-7111, johnsoncitytx.org

Saint Jo Sporting Clay Event, (817) 296-3104, saintjosportingclay.com

Boerne [12–13] Hand-made Market, boernehandmademarket.com

Coolidge [12–13] Mesquite Tree Festival, (254) 203-6198, facebook.com/mesquitetreefestival

Lindale [12–13] Piney Woods Wine Festival, (903) 881-5103, visitlindale.com

McKinney [12–13] Y'all Had To Be Here Live, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

Ingram [12–June 23] Of the Earth: Metal and Wood, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

13

Brenham T. Graham Brown, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Brownwood Lake Brownwood Bash, (325) 784-5223, tpwd.texas.gov

Fort Davis Mile-High Mountains Fest, (432) 426-3337, tpwd.texas.gov

Fredericksburg Cherry Mountain School Open House, (830) 685-3321, historicschools.org

Mesquite Historic Mesquite Inc. Preservation Month Open House and Porch Party, (972) 216-6468, cityofmesquite.com

Texarkana Dragon Boat Festival, (903) 798-3211, texarkanadragonboat.com

The Woodlands Buzzfest, (281) 364-3010, woodlandscenter.org

Victoria Mother's Day Brunch, (361) 573-3734, goldencrescentcasa.org

18

Corsicana Yesterday & Today: The Beatles Experience, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

Giddings [18-20] Lee County Fair, leecountyfairtx.com

19

Grapevine [19-21] Main Street Fest, (817) 410-3185, grapevintexasusa.com

Plano [19-21] Texas Mineral and Fossil Show, (972) 941-5840, planoeventcenter.org

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MUSIC ★ FOOD

FRIDAY, JUNE 9
Texas Craft Beer Competition
Awards, Dinner & Tour at
Altstadt Brewery

SATURDAY, JUNE 10
Hours: 11:00am - 7:00pm
Downtown Marktplatz
Texas Craft Beer • Live Music
• Cornhole Toss • Brew & Suds
Demos • Food Concessions

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 Non-Beer Drinkers!*



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Tickets and Festival Details:
fbgcraftbeerfestival.com



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Pick of the Month

Cinco de Mayo Celebration

Cleburne, May 7
 (817) 645-2455
 cleburnechamber.com

This festive celebration will feature vendors and Mexican dishes, plus ballet folklorico, dancing horses, live music, a custom car show, kids' zone and *luchadores* from Advanced Pro Wrestling.

26

McKinney [26-27] Erica Rhodes, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

Bandera [26-28] Memorial Day Weekend Stampede, banderaprorodeo.org

Fredericksburg [26-28] Crawfish Festival, fbgcrawfishfestival.com

Kerrville [26-28] Texas Masters of Fine Art and Craft Invitational Exhibition, (469) 223-4162, texasmasters.com

27

Brenham Gunhild Carling, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

New Braunfels [27-28] Randall King, (830) 606-1281, gruenehall.com

28

Lewisville Fiesta Charra, (972) 219-3401, visitlewisville.com

31

Navasota [31-June 10] Grimes County Fair, grimescountyfair.com

MAY EVENTS CONTINUED

19

Richardson [19-21] Wildflower Arts and Music Festival, wildflowerfestival.com

20

College Station Troubadour Festival, troubadourfestival.com

Hico Texas Steak Cook-off, (254) 485-4984, texassteakcookoff.com

La Grange Pat Byrne, (979) 968-9944, thebugleboy.org

Jefferson [20-21] Train Show, (903) 665-3733, visitjeffersonstexas.com

21

Fredericksburg The Moanin' Frogs, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

25

Grapeland [25-27] Memorial Day Gospel Bluegrass Festival, (936) 687-2594, salmonlakeresort.com

Kerrville [25-June 11] Folk Festival, (830) 257-3600, kerrvillefolkfestival.org

JUNE

01

Fredericksburg [1-4] Hill Country Film Festival, (866) 224-7714, hillcountryff.com

02

Hillsboro [2-3] Bond's Alley Art Festival, (254) 582-5499, hillsboromainstreet.org

03

Fredericksburg Car Fest, (830) 456-2735, fredericksburgcarfest.com

04

The Colony Take on the Heat Triathlon, (214) 370-9010, visitthecolonytx.com

Taking Flight

Texas, where dreams take wing and the spirited soar! Whether it's to fly the friendly skies or capture the beauty of local wildlife, Texans love being outdoors. With a taxi down the runway and clear skies ahead, it's time to take off into the wild blue yonder.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 LARRY ALFORD
PEDERNALES EC

A great blue heron takes flight at Cypress Falls in Wimberley.

2 CRYSTAL MARTIN
FARMERS EC

Blue Angels soar over Pensacola Beach, Florida.

3 FAIN ZIMMERMAN
VICTORIA EC

A female ruby-throated hummingbird and thistle plant.

4 RACHEL SPENCER
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

"The turkeys here on the ranch are very busy in the fall. On this day they were flying across one of our creeks to find more food."



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAY 10** Night Sky
- DUE JUN 10** Helping Out
- DUE JUL 10** Golden Hour



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Taking Flight photos from readers.



TCP Try your hand at working through the maze to reach the dewberries. See the solution online.

sharp thorns, so I wear thick leather gloves. However, you cannot pick delicate berries with rigid gloved hands, so I cut off the glove tips of my thumb and index finger on my right hand.

Since I'll be kneeling or lying in the pasture, I also wear thick long-sleeved shirts and heavy long pants, which are quite uncomfortable in the May heat and humidity.

I've discovered that these berry vines love the same environment as poison ivy, and often the two plants intermingle. Since I'm focused on berries, I sometimes miss the signature three leaves of poison ivy until I am neck deep. Thus, I keep a trash bag in my supplies so I can change out of and isolate exposed clothes.

Another hazard lurking in the berry patch is the diamondback rattlesnake. The warm spring days are a holiday for them, and a step in any direction is a leap of faith. So before plopping down in the bushes, I probe with a walking stick and listen for the warning rattle.

I have been chased from a berry patch by wild hogs more than once. That's why I keep a pistol on me, though I've never had to use it.

If it's been a wet spring, you can expect good berries but also lots of mosquitoes. Ticks and chiggers are also common pests, so I apply a high-grade bug repellent. I am fair skinned, too, so I wear a large hat and sunscreen to guard against the sun.

I often wonder why no one in my family enjoys the berry picking as much as I do. Oh, they eat them, but they have quit coming with me on the harvest adventure. Once I even offered to get my 15-year-old son out of school early to tag along with me, but he said he had homework. Odd for a Friday. ■

Crawling With Trouble

Harvesting wild dewberries takes patience, will—and an armory

BY SHANE TORNO
ILLUSTRATION BY
CHANELLE NIBBELINK

DEWBERRIES GROW WILD in the scrub brush country of South Texas, and as a child I would pick them with my grandparents. Most of what we picked we ate immediately, but often we would collect enough for my grandmother to bake a cobbler that she served warm, topped with vanilla ice cream—South Texas springtime perfection.

Over the years, I have found very few locations where wild dewberries grow, and they tend to be hard to access. When I do find berries to pick, I am careful to outfit myself properly.

Usually I pick them as they trail along the ground or climb among taller pasture weeds. I have to get on my hands and knees, sometimes even lying on the ground to pick them. Mind you, dewberry vines are covered in thousands of short,

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