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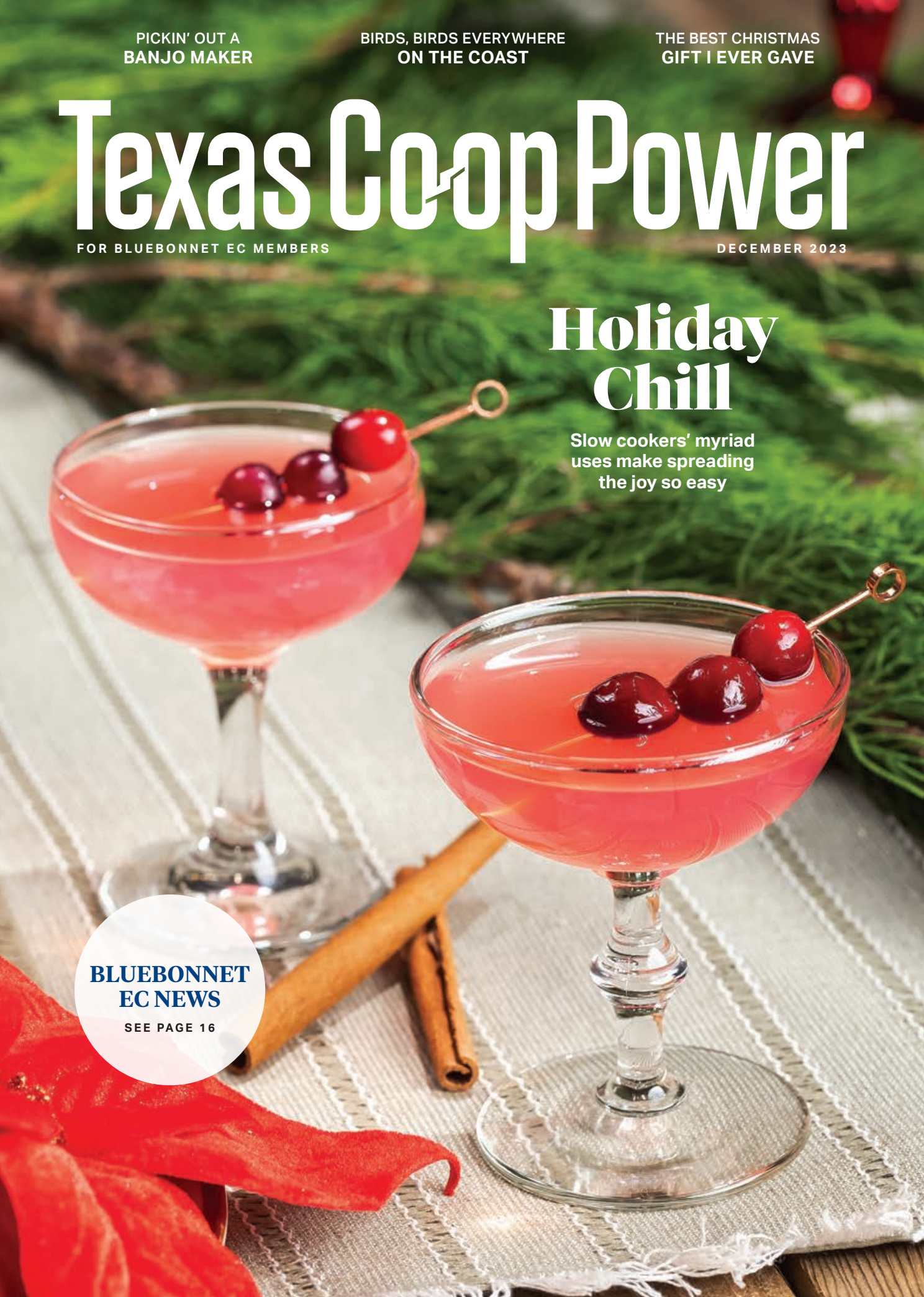
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**BLUEBONNET
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SEE PAGE 16



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December 2023



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Strings Attached

A Houston woodworker turns rich woods into custom banjos with a lot of dedication and sandpaper.

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Slow Cooker Holiday
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Photo by Jason David Page

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A banjo handmade by
David Getman.
Photo by Nathan Lindstrom



Make Your Tree a Cut Above

CUTTING DOWN your own Christmas tree can be a fun family outing that gets everyone in the holiday spirit.

The Texas Christmas Tree Growers Association website lists dozens of Christmas tree farms in the state. You might find one near you.

Did you know that most trees grown in Texas are between 3 and 6 years old when they're sold as Christmas trees?



A Year in Big Bend

Photographer and writer E. Dan Klepper, an occasional contributor to *TCP*, was selected to provide the photos for the Big Bend National Park 2024 Calendar. Order your copy and support the Big Bend Natural History Association at bbnha.org.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Can't I have just one more ...

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 October prompt: **I collect ...**

Memories of people who extend small acts of kindness.

LORETTA BEDFORD
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC
SAN AUGUSTINE

Vintage clothing. I enjoy designing unique outfits. It's like a snapshot of history that lives on.

HEATHER MCMEANS MCCARROLL
VIA FACEBOOK

Nothing. But cats seem to collect me.

VALLEE GREEN
BLUEBONNET EC
ELGIN

Sand from every beach I visit in hopes of retiring to a beach someday.

SHIRLEY WETSEL
SOUTH PLAINS EC
WOLFFORTH

Things my children will throw away someday.

LISA STAPLETON
CENTRAL TEXAS EC
FREDERICKSBURG

Visit our website to see more responses.

TCP Contests and More

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Don't let National Cookie Day, December 4, pass without trying—and sharing—some of the cookie recipes on our website. We have dozens. Just search "cookies."

Our Cup of Tea

“I so enjoy your publication. It’s like sitting down with a friend and a cup of tea.”

MAX BERNREUTER
PEDERNALES EC
CEDAR PARK



JULIA ROBINSON

Root of All Evil?

That’s cute—so which one is picking on my fiddle leaf and plumeria [Currents, *Planter Banter*, September 2023]?

Rachelle Shockey
Via Facebook

Three Cheers For ...

I would like to thank Vianney Rodriguez for the spectacularly delicious Three-Bean Salad recipe [October 2023]. This is a keeper!

Laura Fortenberry
Panola-Harrison EC
Carthage

Uplifting Story

It was so much fun to see my hometown high school, McGregor High School (class of 1958), featured for its rocket science project [*It’s Rocket Science (And so Much More)*, October 2023].

McGregor has quite the history in that arena. My great-grandparents had land

that was used during World War II for a bomb plant. Later it was used by Rocketdyne to produce solid jet fuel. Now SpaceX is close by.

Kudos to the teachers who are teaching them to think for themselves and be challenged.

Joan Roberts
CoServ
Denton

These students embody all that makes America the best in the world.

Whenever I encounter a young person who is courteous and has a goal, be it college or a trade school or just a job, I take the time to thank them and let them know that I am proud of them, for they are the future of our country.

Ted Pasche
CoServ
Argyle



SCOTT VAN OSDOL

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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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 80, Number 6 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is \$4.44 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

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A Houston woodworker turns
rich woods into custom banjos
with a lot of time and sandpaper

Strings Attached





DAVID GETMAN was working in a music store in Brooklyn, New York, in 1997 when a friend gave him a box of banjo parts. The friend suggested that he see what he could make with the pieces.

Getman was intrigued. “I was 22. I had no tools. I wasn’t a woodworker,” he says. “But I liked to tinker.”

After fashioning a banjo from the parts, Getman became more interested in the instrument that has deep roots in North America. “I wasn’t a big fan of bluegrass, but I liked syncopated picking.”

Experimenting with playing and composing his own banjo music led Getman to develop a deep appreciation for the Appalachian style of banjo playing known as frailing or clawhammer. Unlike the three-finger bluegrass style, which typically consists of an up-picking motion by the fingers and down-picking of the thumb, clawhammer is all down-picking with a clawlike hand.

Clawhammer is typically done on an open-back banjo that produces a more mellow sound. Getman likes “the rich, deep notes, like rolling thunder” that these banjos produce.

Seventeen years after that first banjo, Getman discovered rotted floor joists in his Houston home. He bought tools to

do the repair work. Then he wondered what else he could do with his expensive new tools. That led to a new avocation.

Today, as a banjo-maker, restorer and player, Getman, 49, runs Lindale Banjos out of his home in Houston’s Lindale Park neighborhood while working full time as a social science researcher and raising a son and daughter with his wife. He’s proud that the renowned Fiddler’s Green Music Shop in Lockhart accepted one of his banjos in 2021—the first he made that he thought was good enough to sell. The store has been selling his instruments ever since.

“Fiddler’s Green is known to musicians beyond Texas. They have customers from as far away as Japan,” says Getman, who plans to make banjos full time when he retires.

Banjos come in two distinct styles. Bluegrass musicians prefer banjos that have wooden, bowl-shaped attachments called resonators on their backs. A resonator projects the sound outward toward the audience. Getman makes clawhammer banjos with open backs, a style used by musicians who play old-time or Appalachian music.

Making a banjo of either style is a long, complicated process.

“A guitar is made entirely of wood, but a banjo has both metal and wooden parts,” says Jim Penson, another Texas banjo-maker. “Quality bonding of those two different materials requires quality workmanship.”

Penson, who also restores, plays and teaches the instrument, makes resonator banjos at his shop in Arlington. He works in intervals of 15–20 minutes that total 80–100 hours for each banjo he produces. Between work sessions, he must

OPPOSITE David Getman plays an all-walnut banjo with a calfskin hide head that he custom-made for a client. ABOVE Getman sands a banjo rim in his Houston workshop.



LEFT Detail of a custom-inlaid headstock on a Getman banjo.
BELOW Forming a perfectly round rim is part of the time-consuming process of constructing a banjo.



allow time for lacquer or glue to dry completely before undertaking the next step.

“The most difficult part is also the least important. It’s finishing the instrument, making it look glossy,” says Penson, 69. “People who spend a lot of money for a custom-made banjo want it to look perfect.”

The Penson family lived in a 120-year-old farmhouse in Illinois, and his father was always restoring something in the house. Watching and helping his dad got him interested in woodworking. He moved to Texas in his 20s and got much more involved with banjos. He played in various bluegrass bands, including one with the late Earl Scruggs, considered the most influential banjo player in the world.

About 25 years ago, he opened Penson String Works, where, amid demand for his custom guitars, he turns out three banjos every year.

“You can use good components and not make a good banjo,” Penson says. “You can have not so good components and good workmanship and get a good banjo. It’s kind of the luck of the draw.”

Long soaks are required to make the wood pliable enough to be formed into the banjo’s round rim. Getman gains back a bit of that time with efficiency: He cuts four of each part before resetting his lathe. Still, it takes several weeks to finish a banjo.

Getman likes to use walnut because it’s sustainable and easy to get, but he also uses cherry. Maple is a popular choice for banjos, but it’s lighter—almost bright, he says, in

appearance and tone. He prefers “the darker woods, walnut and cherry, for both the aesthetics and the tones they give the banjos.”

The most challenging aspect of making a banjo is “the tedium of sanding,” Getman says. “You want the finished wood to look like glass. You sand parts five, six, seven times with different grades of sandpaper until it feels as smooth as it can be.”

And the most difficult part?

“From a technical point, it’s making the part at the end of the neck where it meets the pot,” Getman says. “Cutting that exactly right is next to impossible without the right tool.”

An experienced banjo player looks for an instrument that feels good in their hands, Getman says. The tone and volume should be consistent up and down the range of notes.

Custom banjos can cost \$1,200 or more, and musicians often request custom inlays of ivory, mother of pearl and other expensive materials for the headstock and fretboard.

One of Getman’s customers requested a headstock inlay depicting the night sky. Getman had saved a burl of wood—what looks like a knot when it’s attached to the tree trunk—because he liked its wavy grain. He added black ebony for the sky and cut the burl open to represent ocean waves below.

It’s challenging work but the rewards are plenty.

“Hearing the finished product is the best part,” says Getman, who makes four or five banjos a year. “You take the different pieces and your ideas, and then when it’s finished, you get to hear that banjo’s tone.” ■

TCP Find this story on our website to hear David Getman play one of his banjos.



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Counting on Christmas

I'M sloshing through a marshy field in Matagorda County, along the Texas coast, a pair of binoculars dangling around my neck and cold raindrops pelting my bright blue jacket.

A hundred yards away, ornithologist Rich Kostecke points toward a cluster of what looks to me like a group of white footballs on stilts. I slap a mosquito off my arm and take a closer look: egrets.

We've just ticked off another species in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, which takes place across the country between December 14 and January 5. The event got its start on Christmas Day in 1900. Instead of holding a hunting competition, as was popular at the time, an ornithologist and Audubon Society officer named Frank Chapman came up with a less destructive alternative: Count—but don't shoot—the birds.

The idea caught on. Today, tens of thousands of birders participate in counts in all 50 states and in 20 countries.

During the 2021–22 count, they logged almost 43 million birds at more than 2,000 sites.

I'm new to birding, but I love tromping around outdoors, and I could spend all day watching wildlife. Besides, it feels good to contribute to science, and this annual count provides data that sheds light on long-term avian trends.

But joining the Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh Preserve count is especially exciting. The plot where I'm birding—a circular area with a 15-mile diameter—almost always records more species than any other area in the country.

The Matagorda County count began 30 years ago when Brent Ortego, then a biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Jim Bergan, formerly of the Nature Conservancy, realized they could position a count circle that would incorporate a bit of the Gulf of Mexico, a stretch of coastline and some land along the Colorado River. Much of the 176-square-mile plot is on private land, but it also includes the Nature Conservancy's Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve and the neighboring



In an annual nationwide bird count, **Matagorda County** has led the US for 15 years in a row

Mad Island Marsh Wildlife Management Area.

It's fertile territory for birding.

"A lot of habitats come together here—coastal prairie, marshes, bay and forest," says Kostecke, who heads the small team to which I've been assigned for the count.

Under the bird count guidelines, teams tally all the species they see during a single calendar day. You don't need any special training or certification to participate, but only birds spotted by knowledgeable birders figure into the official total. Still, newbies like me typically can participate if there's room.

"It's a repeated count at the same time, year after year, so we're getting a snapshot across the nation over that time period," Kostecke says.

In a typical year, birders here log about 230 species during the count. But today's stormy weather doesn't bode well.

About 100 birders are participating in the count this year. Last night we lined up for bowls of chili and hot cornbread and talked strategy.

One group would watch for yellow-headed blackbirds.

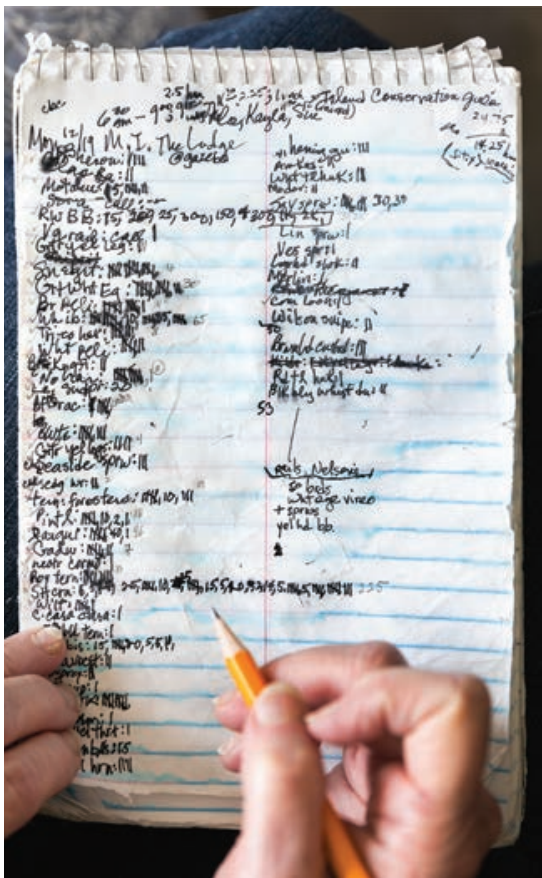
Another would head out at night, hoping to flush out tiny yellow rails and black rails in the darkness. The circle was divided into 16 sectors, with groups assigned to each one. We knew the weather would be a challenge because, like humans, birds hunker down in the rain.

"We may have to work harder to get them out," says Ortego, the official compiler for the event.

The count officially begins at midnight. I'm tucked inside my camper van then, but a hardy group of birders heads into the night to look for owls and other nocturnal birds.

I meet my team—Kostecke, along with ecologist Charlotte Reemts, her husband and their two daughters—early the next morning, which dawns gloomy and damp.

OPPOSITE From left, Rich Kostecke, Charlotte Reemts and author Pam LeBlanc are among about 100 birders who spent a rainy day participating in the Mad Island Marsh Preserve count. ABOVE A painted bunting's breeding grounds include much of Texas.



Since 1970, the population of birds in North America has dropped by 3 billion birds, or nearly 30%.

We pile into two cars then head down a gravel road, stopping periodically to scan the surroundings.

Within 20 minutes, Kostecke has already logged 10 species. He doubles that when we reach a lake, and his list grows further when we hike into the brush and eventually reach the marsh. I love birding but definitely do not know my birds, so I leave the identification to the experts.

We spend all morning admiring turkey vultures perched in trees and great blue herons wading in the water. At noon, we head back to headquarters. Raindrops plunk on the roof; it's foggy outside. Birders peel off soggy rain jackets as they come in for a break.

"What did you get?" someone asks a dripping man who walks in.

"Wet," he responds with a chuckle.

The birders munch leftover chili and discuss what they've spotted. So far, no one has recorded anything that's never been seen here before. But they have logged lots of birds, from Pepto Bismol-colored roseate spoonbills to pelicans, crested caracaras, white ibises and plenty of noisy sandhill cranes.

"There's still quite a few rocks to turn over," preserve manager Steven Goertz says as the birders head out for the rest of the day.

In the end, the Matagorda County-Mad Island Marsh Preserve circle reports 218 species, enough to retain the crown for the most species in the country. A count in San Diego comes in a close second with 213. It marks the 24th time this corner of Texas has come in first or tied for first—and the 15th straight year it has topped the list outright.

But the rain took a toll. A dozen species usually recorded here weren't seen. Still, they got some good ones—the scaly-breasted munia, with its checkerboard chest; a squat-looking bird with an impressively long bill called a green kingfisher; the rose-breasted grosbeak, the male of which

LEFT Unforgiving December weather leaves Sue McBeth Welfel's notebook a bit soggy. ABOVE Sandhill cranes were quite plentiful during the count.



looks like it's wearing a red bandana around its neck; the Western kingbird, with its lemon-colored belly; and the tall, spindly wood stork.

They also found one that I've long wanted to see—the tallest bird in North America, the whooping crane, which stands nearly 5 feet tall and has a wingspan of 7½ feet. Whooping crane numbers dropped to about 20 individuals in the 1940s but, thanks to conservation efforts, a population of about 600 now exists in the wild. They winter near here.

"It's an adrenaline rush," Ortego says of the count he helped start. "It's pride that you had the skills to locate an unusual bird when people are counting on you."

The count has scientific value as well. Biologists have seen a reduction in the raw number of birds in the past 50 years, and the counts provide evidence.

"For us, these data sets are important because the populations of birds that they monitor are not the subject of any formal monitoring program," says Lisa Gonzalez, executive director and vice president of Audubon Texas.

Since 1970, the population of birds in North America has dropped by 3 billion birds, or nearly 30%, she says.

The decline has hit nearly all species. Wetland birds like geese and swans are the exception; their numbers have stayed mostly stable, Gonzalez says.

Much of the loss is due to human activity. "Collisions and impacts are one of the major causes of bird loss, along with overall declines in habitat and a change in environmental conditions driven by climate change," Gonzalez says.

The public can help.

"Share the shore," Gonzalez says. "If you live or recreate along the coast, understand that it doesn't take a lot to disturb birds, especially nesting birds. When you're boating or fishing, steer clear of islands where birds nest—and keep dogs on a leash."

Watch for birds that nest on the ground when you drive on beaches, and turn off unnecessary outdoor lights during spring and fall migrations. And, if you're willing to spend a day outside looking for a flash of feathers, consider joining a bird count in your area.

"It's a fun thing to say we have the No. 1 count, but the count would be fun even if we weren't No. 1," Reemts says. "It's just all about the experience of being out here and seeing stuff." ■

TCP See this story on our website to learn if there is a Christmas Bird Count near you.

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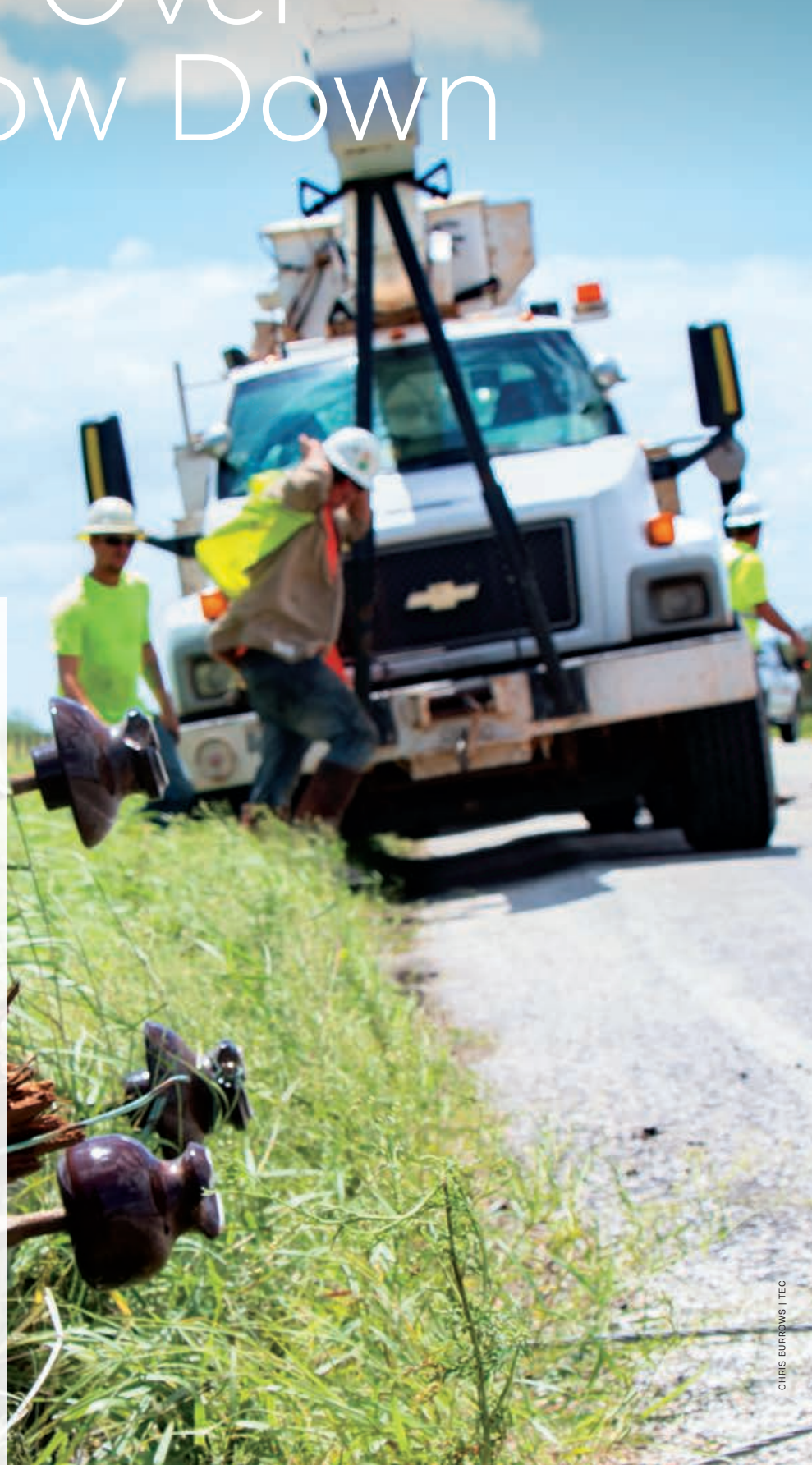
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Where history lives

Visiting 14 historic homes across the Bluebonnet region

Stories by Clayton Stromberger
and Addie Broyles • Photos by Sarah Beal

SPRINKLED AROUND the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area are hardy survivors of bygone eras — historic houses that have somehow dodged the vagaries of decay, fire, lightning strikes, changing tastes in home design and the human impulse to scrape away the past to make room for something new and novel.

“Whether it is a farmhouse, a cottage, or an elegant Victorian-style mansion, every house has a story to tell,” says Robbie Moore Sanders, author of the book “Historic Homes of Bastrop, Texas.”

In this issue, we showcase 14 of our region’s historic homes within seven counties where Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative has provided power since 1939. All have state or national historic designations, and they range from rough-hewn cabins built after the Texas Revolution to a grand Main Street mansion befitting the bustling era at the dawn of World War I. These homes offer wonderful examples of old-world craftsmanship and architectural invention.

But most of all, these survivors invite us to delve into stories of the past. Within their walls, you can learn about early settlers arriving after the Texas Revolution, and doctors setting up first-floor clinics in their elegant homes. They teach us about Ulysses Cephas, a civic leader and renowned blacksmith in the historically Black neighborhood of Dunbar in San Marcos, and Wilhelm Neese, an industrious German immigrant who tragically died before he could finish building the stately Warrenton home that still carries his name.

These structures exist today thanks to passionate efforts by communities that refused to let a house fall apart or disappear — whether preserved by family members, local historians or new owners. Some old homes shelter a new generation, while others have become community spaces, museums, city offices or bed-and-breakfasts.





REEVES- WOMACK HOUSE

Caldwell, Burleson County

George Franklin Barber was brilliant at both architecture and marketing. One of the country's top residential architects in the late Victorian era, Barber sold his home designs through his "The Cottage Souvenir" catalogs. Customers chose from dozens of designs — mostly in the Queen Anne or Colonial styles — and then hired master builders to construct the homes. Around 1895, Caldwell native and successful private banker William Reeves built this elegant, Barber-designed, six-bedroom home out of cypress and pine at 405 W. Fox St., three blocks from the town square. In 1907, it was sold to Civil War veteran Capt. Mansell Lewis Womack, a local business and civic leader, and one-time Burleson County sheriff. The home belonged to the Womack family until 1957. Since 2003 it has been owned by Peggy Gaskamp, whose mother was also a Caldwell native. Gaskamp created a Facebook page to celebrate the house, which has earned state and national historic designations. "This house is a grand ol' lady," declares Gaskamp, "and I love her high ceilings, the beautiful wood trim, her grand staircase, and especially her quirkiness!"



ZEDLER HOUSE

Luling, Caldwell County

The industriousness and ingenuity of German immigrant Fritz Zedler lives on in the Zedler House, adjacent to the Zedler Mill site in Luling. Zedler arrived in Texas at age 12 in 1852 with his family. Thirty-two years later, he moved to Luling and became a prominent citizen, bringing his father's legacy of German mill work to Central Texas. He joined a group of investors to buy a mill on the San Marcos River, just south of downtown Luling, and was the sole owner by 1888. In 1900, he designed and built near the mill a 10-room, four-porch house with a "widow's peak." He lived there with his wife, Louise, their two daughters, and a son-in-law. Into the 1920s, Zedler Mill was the city's only source of water and power. Cornmeal was ground there until the mill closed in the late 1950s. The home was restored in 1972 and became a Texas Historic Landmark two years later. It was purchased by the City of Luling in 2002 and renovated as a site for weddings and gatherings. Rooms, suites or the entire house can be rented. The Zedler Mill Museum just across the road is open daily and free to the public.

More homes on next page

Continued from previous page

DR. I.B. NOFSINGER HOUSE

Elgin, Bastrop County

This elegant Queen Anne home — made of Elgin pressed brick and adorned with touches such as half-timbering and a turret — has long played a role in the civic life of Elgin. The house, at 310 N. Main St., was built in 1906 by a Kentucky-born doctor, I.B. Nofsinger, and designed by his wife, Mary, a pharmacist. They operated a medical practice on the first floor. The home remained in the Nofsinger family until 1978, and it later became the home of Elgin Savings and Loan. In 1991, the city purchased it and converted it into a unique city hall. The wraparound porch serves as a swearing-in spot for city officials and occasionally as a stage for local dramatic productions. The house has both state and national historic recognition. Many interior features, from doors to fireplaces, are original. “All the architectural elements and the big windows make it a really nice place to have an office,” says Amy Miller, Elgin’s community services director. From its days as a bank, it still has a drive-through window, now used by residents pulling up to pay their utility bills. Elgin City Hall is open to the public 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays.



WILHELM NEESE HOUSE

Round Top, Fayette County

When the Original Round Top Antiques Fair is in full swing, State Highway 237 from Warrenton to Carmine becomes a swirl of signs, storefronts and thousands of bargain-hungry tourists. One shopping destination stands alone in its historic grandeur: The Wilhelm Neese



House in Warrenton, which beckons with its festive exterior of bright paint and floral patterns. Neese, who left Germany for Texas in 1847, opened a general store in this community and sold cotton. In 1869, he began building a grand home for himself and his wife, Louisa, using stone from a nearby quarry. Neese was killed in 1872 in a confrontation with a thief at his store, but his unfinished home was completed by local merchant F.G. Cordes in 1894. The house was known for its ballroom upstairs, the site of parties and performances. Since 2016, it has been owned by Tom and Diane Conlee, who brought colorful whimsy to the exterior. Each spring and fall, during the antiques events, it becomes Punkie’s Place, Diane’s shop for handmade goods and antiques. “My husband loves the house for the history,” she says, “and I love it because it’s fabulous!” The house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the William Neese Homestead.





How to visit area historic homes

Four of the homes in this calendar are open to the public as museums:

- The N.W. Faison House, 822 S. Jefferson St., La Grange (faisonhouse.org)
- The Schubert-Fletcher House, 183 E. Hempstead St., Giddings, site of Lee County Heritage Center (giddingstx.com)
- Kraitchar House, 203 E. Buck St., Caldwell (caldwelltx.gov, click Discover Caldwell, then Museums)
- Lexington Log Cabins and Heritage Center, 524 Fourth St., Lexington (hours vary, call Trudy Holland, 512-496-2779, for information)

You can also visit:

- Nofsinger House, 310 N. Main St., Elgin, open for City of Elgin business (elgintexas.gov)
- The Giddings Stone Mansion, 2203 Century Circle in Brenham, open for special events (giddingsstonemansion.com)
- Punkie's Place, at the Neese House, 4218 S. H. 237 in Warrenton, open during the Round Top Antiques Fair (punkiesplace.com/location and roundtoptexasantiques.com)
- Cephas House, 213 Martin Luther King Drive, San Marcos and the Calaboose Museum across the street (calaboosmuseum.org)

You can spend the night at:

- Katy House Bed & Breakfast, 201 Ramona St., Smithville (katyhouse.com)
- Zedler House, 1115 S. Laurel Ave., Luling (cityofluling.net, search for Zedler)



CEPHAS HOUSE

San Marcos, Hays County

lifelong San Marcos resident Ulysses Cephas was the area's most renowned blacksmith and shoer of horses for decades. He was also a builder and owner of rental houses, a deacon and choir leader at First Missionary Baptist Church, and the organizer of the San Marcos Independent Band, which performed around Central Texas. Cephas was born in 1884 in San Marcos to former slaves Joe and Elizabeth Cephas. He learned his trade from his blacksmith father and eventually owned his own shop at 224 Guadalupe St. He and his wife, Cora Willie Cephas, raised a family in this handsome, sturdy early-1900s home on what is now West Martin Luther King Drive. They lived in the heart of the Dunbar neighborhood, then a thriving community with many Black-owned businesses just south of downtown San Marcos. Hays County preservationist Johnnie Armstead persuaded the city to purchase the Cephas home to renovate it as a community center, which it has been since 2013. The Calaboose African American History Museum across the street tells the story of Dunbar, now a city-designated historic district.

More homes on next page

Continued from previous page

SCHUBERT-FLETCHER HOUSE

Giddings, Lee County

After the last residents move out, some old houses have the good fortune to be reborn as museums, becoming resources for the public to share and enjoy. “Historic houses have a lot of character,” says Kelita Thomas, who counts herself fortunate to work in the Schubert-Fletcher House in downtown Giddings, 183 E. Hempstead St. Thomas, tourism director for the town’s Chamber of Commerce — which has its offices in the old home — is always

ready to guide visitors through exhibits of the Lee County Museum in the house. “You’ve got beautiful wood floors, amazing craftsmanship, high ceilings,” Thomas says. “It feels very much like home to work here.” Merchant August Schubert built the two-story house in a Greek Revival style in 1879. Antique furnishings, including a treadle sewing machine and a wicker pram, fill the second-story room, pictured. It is also a favorite hangout for Meow, the resident cat and “pampered lady of the house,” Thomas says. Schubert sold the house to Concordia Lutheran College in 1894, and state legislator Baylis J. Fletcher purchased it in 1900. Fletcher family members lived there until the mid-1980s. They donated it to the Lee County Heritage Society, which passed it along to Lee County in 2017. The house is on the National Register of Historic Places and is open for tours during weekday Chamber of Commerce business hours.



J.J. SHAVER HOUSE

Chappell Hill, Washington County

As the story goes, the first telephone in Chappell Hill was installed on the second-floor landing of the house on Main Street. J.J. Shaver, the first president of Farmers State Bank, built this two-story, asymmetrical house with a wraparound porch in 1914. It blends Prairie, Craftsman and Greek Revival architectural styles. Shaver’s descendants — including Bernice Shaver, who ran the now-closed Chappell Hill Drug Store — lived in the house until 2001. Kathy and Clay Parker have been the guardians of this treasure in Chappell Hill’s Main Street Historic District, adding only a functioning kitchen and a bathroom downstairs. Not long after they bought the house, the Parkers found its original blueprints in a closet: They framed them, and today the plans hang in the stairwell. Although it has two restored bedrooms, the couple use the home as an office, driving in from their ranch outside of town each workday to run the family business. Kathy said they enjoy pecans from the trees in the yard in the fall and, in spring, the white blooms of the massive magnolia on the north side of the house. The tree nearly dwarfs the residence. The Parkers also share the elaborately decorated house with visitors who take the Chappell Hill Garden Club’s annual Christmas Home Tour each winter.





E.S. ORGAIN HOUSE Bastrop, Bastrop County

It was a very big wedding present — a brand-new, 2½-story Classical Revival-style home, with fluted Doric columns and three coal-burning fireplaces, at 1704 Main St. in Bastrop. The house, completed in 1915, was a gift from Capt. Benjamin Darby (“B.D.”) Orgain — former county attorney and a founder of the First National Bank in Bastrop — to his son Elbert and daughter-in-law Louise. The Orgain family owned the home until 1974. Since then, a succession of private owners have cared for and restored the home, here decorated for the Christmas holidays in 2022. It was the setting for the 2013 holiday-themed movie “Angels Sing,” starring Harry Connick Jr., Lyle Lovett and Willie Nelson. It is one of three historic homes in Bastrop with the Orgain name, along with the B.D. Orgain House at 1508 Church St., built in 1888, and the house at 602 Cedar St., built before 1858, that was the longtime residence of Sarah Jane Orgain. She was an esteemed teacher who married Edmund Orgain, Benjamin Orgain’s brother. “There are over 80 homes in Bastrop listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and this is one of them. It’s beautifully restored and in pristine condition,” says Robbie Moore Sanders, author of the book “Historic Homes of Bastrop, Texas.”

THOMAS KRAITCHAR JR. HOUSE

Caldwell, Burleson County

Does Ella Kraitchar still pace the wooden floors of the house where she was born and spent most of her life? Footsteps have been heard more than once in the old home in the center of Caldwell, at 203 E. Buck St. Some say lights are turned on when no one is there. “I’m a little skeptical about ghosts,” says Caldwell resident Linda Chamberlain, a member of the Burleson County Historical Society, which owns the Victorian cottage-style home made of cypress. She opens the home for tours, “but, I assure you, I’m not going in the house alone after dark.” Merchant Thomas Kraitchar Sr. built the home in 1891 as a wedding present for his son Thomas Jr. and daughter-in-law Mary. Ella Kraitchar, their last surviving child, moved out of the home in the 1970s. Period furnishings give visitors the feeling of stepping back in time. The house became a Texas Historic Landmark in 1983 and is also on the National Register of Historic Places. Caldwell Elementary School third-graders visit Kraitchar House every year. It is open during Caldwell’s Kolache Festival and Christmas homes tour, as well as for tours on request.



More homes on next page

Continued from previous page

GIDDINGS STONE MANSION

Brenham,
Washington County

This stately Greek Revival mansion south of downtown Brenham, completed in 1870, was built on elevated land to evade mosquitoes, which had caused a recent yellow fever epidemic. It was the home of prominent Brenham banker, lawyer and landowner Jabez “J.D.” Giddings and his wife, Ann. J.D. Giddings came to Washington County in 1838 from Pennsylvania to claim land given by the Republic of Texas to the heirs of his older brother, Giles Giddings, who was mortally wounded at the Battle of San Jacinto. The nearby town of Giddings was named for the family, thanks to their role in bringing the railroad to the region. The home, later owned by daughter Mary Louise Giddings Stone, has 11 rooms and a five-bay, two-story front porch with Doric columns. Subsequent remodeling made it the first house in Washington County with indoor plumbing. Mary Louise and her descendants lived in the home until the 1970s. In 1976 it was donated to the county’s heritage society and in 1991 it became a Texas Historic Landmark. Today, it is a popular site for weddings and events.



KATY HOUSE

Smithville, Bastrop County

Many longtime Smithville residents still know the grand home at 201 Ramona St. — home of the Katy House Bed & Breakfast since 1994 — as “Dr. Stephens’ place,” even though its Texas Historical Marker refers to it as the Chancellor House. J.D. Stephens was a company doctor for the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad, known as the M-K-T or “Katy” line. He bought the home in 1941 after the death of its original occupant, local real estate developer and grocer J.H. Chancellor. The home’s first floor served as Dr. Stephens’ clinic through 1968. Built around 1909, the



home is distinctive for its Italianate styling, Classical Revival balustrade, fluted columns and arched porch. Tiffany and Joe Prior bought Katy House in December 2019. “I just fell in love with everything about it,” Tiffany Prior says. Six rooms are available for guests, and they wake up to something special — Katy House was honored for the “Best Breakfast in Texas” in 2022 by the Texas Bed & Breakfast Association. In the backyard, you can still find a reminder of earlier occupants: the minnow tank built for Dr. Stephens’ wife, Neva, who was an avid fisherwoman nicknamed “Pete.”

CARDWELL HOUSE

Lockhart, Caldwell County

The man who built the white house with the columns at 505 S. Main St. in Lockhart never had the opportunity to live in it. John M. Cardwell moved to Caldwell County in 1856, when he was 18. After the Civil War, he returned to Lockhart to be with his wife, Mattie, and he became a merchant with a store on the courthouse square downtown. In 1917, he had the two-story Classic Revival-style home built, but he died that year. His wife lived there until 1944. The house features four columns, 11-foot ceilings, five fireplaces and a second-floor balcony. Shaded by towering oak trees, Cardwell House was originally restored by Charles and Carol Haynes in 1979, and has had several owners. It first got air conditioning in 2012. Cassie Epperson-Jones, who grew up on the Texas Gulf Coast admiring Galveston's grand historic homes, bought the house in 2016 to raise her school-aged children. The family converted the carriage house into a living room with a modern bathroom, put in a driveway and transformed the back porch into a laundry room. "When my daughter was in junior high, the kids used to tease her about living in a mansion," Epperson-Jones said. "I told her, 'Nobody who shares a bathroom lives in a mansion.'"



N.W. FAISON HOUSE

La Grange, Fayette County

After moving to Fayette County from Houston two decades ago, author Marie Watts became intrigued by an African American cemetery near her home in Muldoon. She learned the land for the cemetery had been donated after the Civil War by Nathaniel Faison, a wealthy white La Grange merchant and land speculator originally from Tennessee. In 2005, while flipping through old property documents with local historian Janelle Dupont at the Fayette County clerk's office, they found a deed signed by Faison in 1870 leaving his home to his Black housekeeper, Louisiana Brown. He died later that year. "She is one of the first freedwomen in the state of Texas to own property," says Watts, vice president of the Faison Preservation Society, which owns the home and runs a museum there. Established in the 1960s by the La Grange Garden Club, the house, at 822 S. Jefferson St., introduces visitors to the rich, complex stories of Brown, the Faisons, and race relations in the area after the Civil War. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the house is one of the oldest in Fayette County. Construction began in 1841. It has original furnishings and household items from the late 1880s.

LEXINGTON LOG CABINS

Lexington, Lee County

In our nation's bicentennial year of 1976, the citizens of Lexington — from history buffs to high school students — pitched in to carefully disassemble and relocate two pioneer cabins from the countryside in northern Lee County to the town square. Originally built several miles apart around 1850 by settlers who came to farm or ranch on the area's open range, the two-room cabins were made with hand-hewn oak beams and had rugged stone fireplaces. They were built in the traditional dogtrot style, with a center breezeway for hot summer afternoons. Today the cabins are cared for by the nonprofit Lexington Log Cabins and Heritage Center, which opens them for school group visits and tours, and during the Lexington Homecoming festival each May. Graham Brown's family owned one of the cabins when he was young, and the Lexington native remembers playing in and around it in the early 1950s while grownups harvested peanuts nearby. "I would sit on that hill and look around and think about the old days," Brown recalls. You can think about the old days, too, on a visit to the cabins and the accompanying Heritage Center, which features exhibits on Lexington's history.



Bluebonnet's Energy Expo shines spotlight on solar power, battery storage, electric vehicles

By Sidni Carruthers

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC Cooperative opened its doors to nearly 100 eager members and guests at its Energy Expo on Sept. 30. The eighth annual renewable energy event showcased the cooperative's commitment to educating its members about solar power, battery storage and electric vehicles.

Members and guests attended the event at Bluebonnet's headquarters in Bastrop to learn about the latest innovations in renewable energy and get behind the wheels of two Tesla cars, a Model X and a Model Y. Tesla representatives were there to answer questions.

As in previous years, the Texas Solar Energy Society hosted an installer fair with 11 solar and battery system vendors. The society also offered a Solar 101 presentation to teach guests about the basics of solar power and battery storage. The Texas Solar Energy Society is a statewide nonprofit organization committed to advancing solar energy in Texas.

Sarah Fischer, a Bluebonnet system engineer, spoke about the cooperative's goals for the event: "We empower our members with knowledge and access to resources that will help them make informed decisions about renewable energy systems, battery storage and electric vehicles," she said.

One expo attendee, Misty Smith, a Bluebonnet member from Brenham, said she liked the event and what she learned. "There was a lot of great information, and we were pleased to have our solar energy questions answered. I think the highlight of the visit was test-driving Tesla models," Smith said.

Three cooperative members who have installed solar and battery storage systems talked to attendees about their experiences. Ken Jantzen of Austin, Charles Linam of Cedar Creek and Matthew Overson of Bastrop spoke about the installation process as well as cost savings on their electricity bills.

Jantzen said he appreciated the opportunity to share his experience with having solar panels installed on his home in east Austin with other Bluebonnet members. He received many questions about the impact having a solar system has had on his electric use and costs, he said, adding: "The people I spoke with had great questions about working with Bluebonnet."

Bluebonnet members have increased the number of solar energy systems on the cooperative's system by 20% since 2022, a pace that is expected to continue for several years. To learn more about renewable energy, go to bluebonnet.coop/solar, or call a member service representative at 800-842-7708, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Get more information from the Texas Solar Energy Society's website at txses.org.

Photos by Sarah Beal





Top: From left, Cory Jackson and Ryan Albert of Lighthouse Solar talk to Bluebonnet members Roger Freund and Bob Smith, both from Smithville, about the process of mounting solar installations.

Left: Bluebonnet member Ken Jantzen, behind the wheel of a Tesla Model X, gets guidance from Tesla representative Cheri Brew.

Below: Bluebonnet member service representatives Roxanna Aquilar and Roxana Ocampo, from left, talk to member Luis Rodriguez of Manor about where on his electric bill to find out how much electricity he used.



2024 Bluebonnet Board election

Members interested in serving on Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors can run for one of two seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 14, 2024.

Bluebonnet's Board is made up of nine directors who serve staggered three-year terms. Directors represent one of seven districts in Bluebonnet's service area.

There are two seats up for election in 2024: District 2, Travis County; and District 3, Bastrop County.

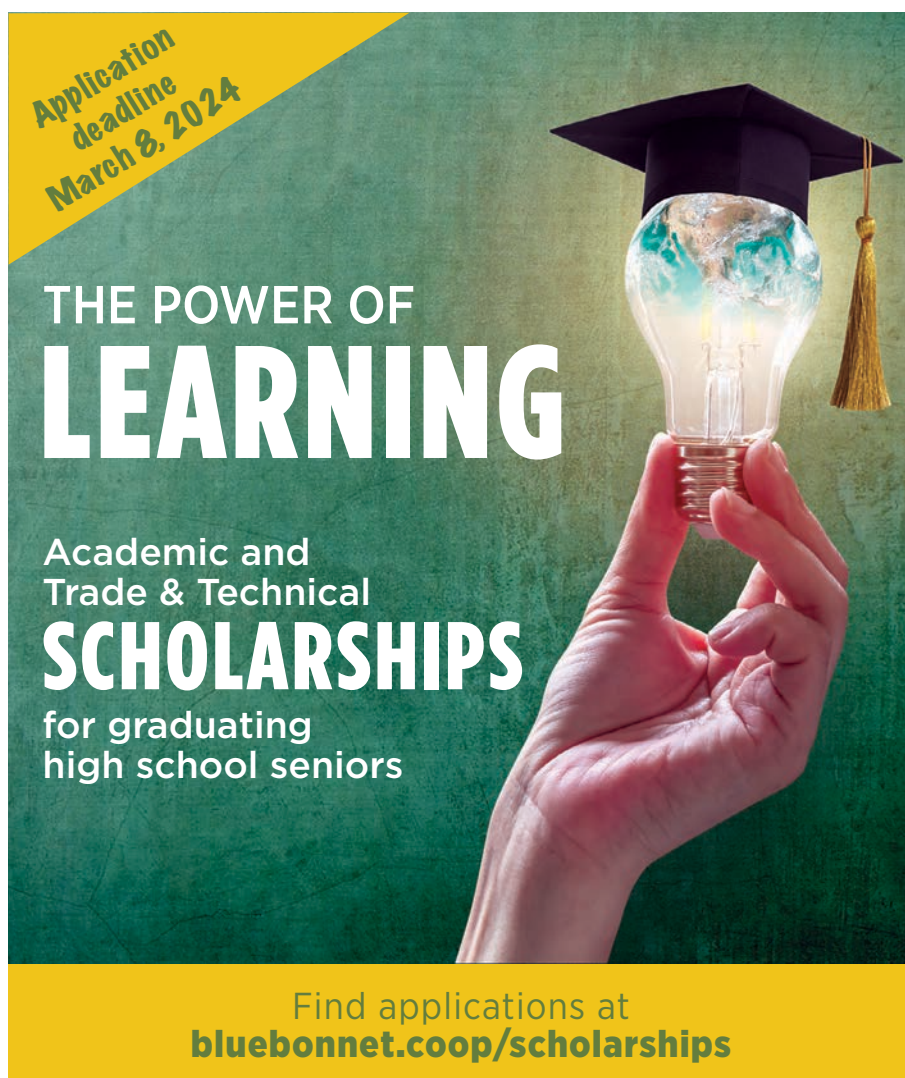
Candidates can be nominated in two ways: either by presenting a completed Application for Nomination of Candidate form with at least 50 signatures from cooperative members in their respective districts or by filing fee (\$250 in certified funds.)

Qualifications for Director candidates can be found in Bluebonnet's Bylaws under Article III, Section 2. Those bylaws are online at bluebonnet.coop/board-directors.

Application for Nomination of Candidate forms are available at Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor and online at bluebonnet.coop/board-directors. All candidate applications by petition or filing fee must be delivered to a Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 14, 2024. For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Dec. 25 and Dec. 26 for the Christmas holiday and Jan. 1, 2024 for the New Year's Day holiday. 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 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 (select option 2 when prompted).



**Application deadline
March 8, 2024**

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Bluebonnet
85th
ANNIVERSARY

In 2024, Bluebonnet celebrates 85 years of providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service to its fast-growing membership. Throughout the year, join us in celebrating this milestone as we honor our past and plan for the future.

**POWERING
PROGRESS**

SINCE 1939



Top: Line workers, circa 1945, outside the cooperative's headquarters, then located in Giddings.
Above: Journeyman line worker Cade Courtemanche at work in Bastrop.

A Time of Porpoise

A memorable beach moment: You're basking in the warm sun, toes in the sand, letting the gentle turn of the foam-capped waves lull you into a state of complete relaxation. As your eyes scan the endless horizon of blue on blue, you're rewarded with a pod of dolphins making their way across the sea.

There's no denying their signature shape as they leap from the water. If you don't see anything else extraordinary the rest of day, you can take solace knowing you've witnessed one of nature's most playful and human-like creatures in their natural habitat.

Why not re-create that special moment with our **Balinese Dolphin Pendant**? We've captured two dolphins mid-jump in sterling silver crafted in the Balinese style. Tucked between these beloved sea mammals is a full carat of shimmering blue topaz. Made by some of Indonesia's finest artisans, this pendant is an absolute steal at **JUST \$29!** That's what we call our Stauer **IMPOSSIBLE PRICE!**

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How Texas Became a Desert

Films shot in Arizona, Utah and Spain gave the world some wrong impressions

BY W.F. STRONG

TO MUCH OF THE WORLD—and to many Americans who have never been to Texas—the state is a vast desert.

It's not the Sahara but a high-plains arid region studded with rocky mesas, sweeping wall-like cliffs and dusty canyons—and sometimes adorned with thousands of saguaro cactuses (native to Arizona, not Texas).

And, yes, certainly there are parts of West Texas that fulfill some aspects of these images, but more than half the state is green, with rolling hills, lush forests and vibrant coastal plains. Yet desert images dominate minds in distant

lands. For that, we can thank Hollywood.

There are many John Wayne Westerns with storylines that meander through Texas, but those films were mostly shot in Utah and Arizona. The most jarring example to me is *The Searchers*.

“Someday this country’s gonna be a fine, good place to be,” Mrs. Jorgensen, a tough frontierswoman, says in one scene. As she says this on her front porch, Jorgensen is facing Monument Valley, which is in Arizona and Utah.

Wayne made five movies in Monument Valley, even though two of them, *The Searchers* and *Rio Grande*, had story-

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



lines based in Texas. “Monument Valley is the place where God put the West,” Wayne said.

Another Wayne film that is shocking to a Texan is *The Comancheros*. Wayne plays Texas Ranger Jake Cutter.

In one scene, he arrests an outlaw on a boat arriving in Galveston. As Cutter exits the boat with his handcuffed prisoner in tow, he walks right into eastern Utah, where the film was shot. It was stunning country for CinemaScope technology to capture, but it’s not Texas.

Rio Bravo and *El Dorado* were two Wayne films with Texas settings shot in and around the Sonoran Desert west of Tucson. The landscape there is dominated by saguaros, enormous 40-foot-tall cactuses called the sentinels of the desert. Such sights don’t exist in Texas.

Clint Eastwood’s *For a Few Dollars More* is set in and around El Paso, but it was actually shot in the Tabernas Desert near Almería, Spain, and in Italy. Fort Bravo, also called Texas Hollywood, is a movie set town built in Almería in the 1960s that has served as a backdrop for many classic Western films.

Two films more true to Texas in landscape were *Giant*, shot mostly around Marfa, and *No Country for Old Men*, filmed around Marfa and Las Vegas, New Mexico. A 2015 miniseries called *Texas Rising* troubled some Texans for two reasons: It was shot almost entirely in Mexico and it depicted rugged mountain terrain near Victoria, where there are only coastal plains.

Movie Texas depicts a greater diversity of desert land than Texas actually has within it. To the world, we are Arizona, Utah and New Mexico, and we are Mexico, Italy and Spain. Mostly desert. ■

Slow Cooker

The handy appliance that comes through in so many ways

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My slow cooker punch is my favorite festive drink to serve when hosting for the holidays. This vibrant and bubbly beverage is brimming with holiday flavors. It's always a hit at parties.

Slow Cooker Holiday Punch

6 cups cranberry juice
4 cups apple juice
2 cups orange juice
1 cup grapefruit juice
4 cinnamon sticks
4 cups cranberries, divided use
1 liter ginger ale, chilled
Orange slices
Grapefruit slices

1. Add all juices to a 6-quart slow cooker.
2. Add cinnamon sticks and 2 cups cranberries. Cover and cook on low 4 hours.
3. Allow punch to cool, then pour into a punch bowl. Top with ginger ale.
4. Before guests arrive add orange slices, grapefruit slices and the remaining 2 cups cranberries.
5. Serve over ice.

SERVES 12

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mexican Christmas Eve Salad.





Crockpot Apple Pie Cinnamon Roll Casserole

SHELLEY JANIK
SAN BERNARD EC

Celebrate the holidays on the sweetest note with Janik's casserole. Cinnamon rolls and apple filling topped with a creamy brown sugar glaze are amazing for Christmas morning or even better after a holiday meal.

- 1½ cups canned apple pie filling**
- 2 tubes refrigerated cinnamon rolls (17.5 ounces each)**
- 2 eggs**
- ¼ cup heavy cream**
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar**
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**

1. Dice apples from apple pie filling. Coat the inside of a slow cooker with cooking spray.
2. Remove cinnamon rolls from tubes, place icing aside and cut each cinnamon roll into four pieces. Place half of the cinnamon roll pieces on bottom of slow cooker.
3. Spoon half the apple pie filling over cinnamon roll pieces. Top with remaining cinnamon roll pieces.
4. Whisk together eggs, cream, brown sugar, cinnamon and vanilla. Pour over cinnamon rolls.
5. Spoon the remaining apple pie filling on top. Cover and cook on low 2½–3 hours.
6. Spread the icing that came with the cinnamon rolls on top of the casserole and serve warm.

SERVES 8

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

Slow Cooker Cabbage Rolls

WENDY ZWIENER
SAN BERNARD EC



The tangy citrus tomato sauce here evokes the beauty of treasured holiday recipes that have been passed down through the years.

SERVES 6



- 12 cabbage leaves, removed from stem**
- 1 pound ground beef**
- 1 cup cooked white rice**
- 1 egg, beaten**
- ¼ cup milk**
- ¼ cup finely minced onion**
- 1¼ teaspoons salt**
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 1 can tomato sauce (8 ounces)**
- 1 tablespoon light brown sugar**
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice**

1. Cut out the thick vein from the bottom of each cabbage leaf, making a V-shaped notch.
2. Blanch leaves for a few minutes in boiling water until slightly softened, then separate leaves and set aside.
3. In a large bowl, combine ground beef, rice, egg, milk, onion, salt and pepper.
4. In a small saucepan over low heat, simmer tomato sauce, brown sugar, Worcestershire sauce and lemon juice. Stir to combine.
5. Place a cabbage leaf on a flat surface and place a tablespoon or more of the meat mixture in the center of the leaf.
6. Roll from the bottom of the cabbage leaf and tuck in the edges as you roll.
7. Continue until you use all leaves and meat.
8. Coat the inside of a slow cooker with cooking spray and place rolls seam side down into it. Pour the sauce mixture over the rolls, then cover and cook on low 6 hours.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

SPRING CAKES DUE DECEMBER 10

Some cakes just pair perfectly with a spring day. Send us your best spring cake recipe and you could win \$500. Submit your favorite online by December 10.





Easy BBQ Chicken Sliders

MELISSA ECKHOFF
COSERV

Looking for a quick and easy holiday appetizer or New Year's Eve bite? We've got you covered with Eckhoff's sliders. Shredded chicken bathed in a creamy sauce will take you into 2024 the right way.

- 4 boneless chicken breasts
- 1 bottle barbecue sauce (18 ounces)

- 1 can cream of chicken soup (10.5 ounces)
- 12 slider buns
- Sliced pickles

1. Coat the inside of a slow cooker with cooking spray and place chicken breasts into it.
2. In a bowl, stir together barbecue sauce and cream of chicken soup. Pour mixture over chicken.
3. Cover slow cooker and cook on low 6 hours.
4. Shred chicken with two forks and serve on slider buns, topped with sliced pickles.

MAKES 12 SLIDERS

TCP Want quick solutions to your slow cooker desires? We can help. Among the more than 1,000 recipes from Co-op Country in our archives, you'll find dozens that call for slow cookers. They're all on our website.

Quick Tips for Slow Cooking

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ

If you're feeding two, go for a 3-quart slow cooker. A 5-quart will feed a family of four, and a 6-quart slow cooker can feed a crowd or handle big batches.

Keep it closed. Opening the lid can cause the cooker to lose heat, adding to the cooking time.

Make cleanup a snap. Coat the inside with nonstick spray or use a liner for easy cleanup.

Enliven a dish by adding fresh herbs in the last 15 minutes of cooking time.

Sear meat before adding it to the slow cooker to deepen its flavor.



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HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Art and Parts

A Liberty Hill artist diverts discarded toys from the trash heap

BY CHET GARNER

YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD to play with toys. That's the lesson I learned standing next to an 8-foot banana made entirely of plastic dolls, space aliens and rebar. I had tripped to visit off-the-grid artist Terry "Tunes" Parks, 72, who created his own Texas-style island of misfit toys just north of Liberty Hill, outside Austin.

At first, I wasn't sure if I was headed in the right direction. Then I saw a fence line covered in sun-bleached Barbie dolls. This was the place.

I wandered into Parks' yard, which doubles as his public gallery. Dozens of sculptures cover the space, each comprising hundreds of tiny toys organized into larger-than-life shapes—guitars, pyramids and even an Easter Island head. Dolls commingled with gardening tools hang from tree branches. It might have been terrifying if it wasn't so playful.

Parks started creating around 2010, after he was diagnosed with cancer and doctors told him he didn't have much time to live. The art served as therapy, helping him make his recovery while working tirelessly beside his brother Scott. Both are self-admitted music nuts, which explains why most of the art pieces are inspired by Texas artists like Willie Nelson, Frank Zappa and psychedelic pioneers the 13th Floor Elevators.

Every week, visitors and the local mission resale shop bring Parks—a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative—boxes of unwanted toys that sit and wait for him to turn them into something bigger than the sum of their doll parts.

Parks' art isn't commissioned by highfalutin patrons and doesn't exist to fill big-city galleries. Instead, the sculptures serve a higher purpose: making us smile, scratch our heads and remember when we played with toys too. ■

ABOVE Terry "Tunes" Parks shows Chet a pyramid assembled with a mind-boggling array of toys.

TCP Join Chet as he discovers what old toys turn into. We have the video online. And see all his Explorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

DECEMBER

01

Burnet [1-3, 8-10] Main Street Bethlehem, (512) 756-4481, fbcburnet.org

02

Wimberley [2-26] Trail of Lights, (512) 847-6969, emilyann.org

07

Columbus Ladies Night Out, (979) 732-8385, columbus.texas.org

New Braunfels Christmas Market at Historic Old Town, (830) 629-2943, newbraunfelsconservation.org

08

Dallas Mistletoe Market at Preston Hollow Village, thebohohomemarket.com

Lake Jackson Easton Corbin, (979) 230-3156, brazosport.edu

Fort Worth [8-9] Connor King, (512) 817-9535, blcomedy.com

Fredericksburg [8-9] A Christmas Journey, (830) 997-2069, bethanyfbg.com

McKinney [8-9] Holidays at the Heard, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

Clute [8-10, 15-17] The Best Christmas Pageant Ever, (979) 265-7661, brazosport.org

09

Comanche Santa Comes to Town, (325) 356-3233, comanchechamber.org

Llano Snow Day, (325) 247-5354, llanostarrystarrynights.com

San Saba Sip N' Stroll and Lighted Christmas Parade,
(325) 372-5141,
sansabachamber.org

Sattler Canyon Lake Noon Lions Christmas Parade,
(806) 420-4824,
facebook.com/
canyonlakelakeoonlionsclub

Surfside Beach Nighttime Holiday Kites,
(979) 233-1531,
visitsurfsidebeachtx.org

15

Marble Falls Movie in the Park, (830) 693-4449,
visitmarblefalls.org

16

Brenham Dailey & Vincent,
(979) 337-7240,
thebarnhillcenter.com

Johnson City Jingle Jaunt 5K & Kids K, (830) 868-7111,
johnsoncitytx.org

Lake Jackson Bird Banding,
(979) 480-0999, gcbo.org

Surfside Beach Surfing Santas, (979) 233-1531,
visitsurfsidebeachtx.org

West Columbia Candlelight Christmas, (979) 345-4656,
thc.texas.gov

17

Stonewall Tree Lighting,
(830) 644-2252,
tpwd.texas.gov

JANUARY

01

Round Top Linda Patterson and Friends Concert,
(979) 249-3129,
festivalhill.org

TCP Submit Your Event

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



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Mailboxes

Readers certainly didn't mail it in this month, but some got boxed out by the competition. So gather 'round and let's see what's been delivered, as Texans show their colors and a little country flair.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 ROB DANIEL
TRI-COUNTY EC

"First responders often use mailboxes to hang gear on while in rehab after fighting fires."

2 DON BUGH
NAVASOTA VALLEY EC

"Tierra Linda Ranch community mailboxes in the Kerrville area at dusk."

3 VANDY MORGAN
BLUEBONNET EC

Texas wildflower mailbox.

4 JANIS HENDRIX
PEDERNALES EC

A mailbox mounted on a retired 1942 fire hydrant during the February freeze.



Upcoming Contests

DUE DEC 10 Pollinators

DUE JAN 10 Rides

DUE FEB 10 Food and Cooking



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Mailboxes photos from readers.



The Best Christmas Gift I Ever Gave

A simple offering made generations ago yields lifetime returns

BY W.A. MCCORMICK
ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID MOORE

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 8 or 10 years old, back in the 1950s, an old man moved into a little shack of a house about a quarter-mile from my family's little, very modest house. He was alone, and I worried about him.

Maybe my folks had mentioned that he was having hard times, but I don't remember for sure.

We had several big native pecan trees, and during the holidays we usually had an abundance of the delicious nuts.

One year when Christmas was coming up, the old man was in the back of my mind. I told my grandmother that I wanted to give him something for Christmas because otherwise he probably wouldn't get anything.

It was the first time in my life that I had thought about giving a gift, but I knew

how a gift could brighten my day. My grandmother suggested that I give the man a paper bag full of pecans, probably a pound or two.

That seemed so wrong to me. Gifts should be bright and shiny. But pecans were so common to me that they were like biscuits. The bag was just plain brown and didn't even have a ribbon.

Nevertheless, Grandma handed it to me and told me to go give it to the old man. I was almost embarrassed about the gift that seemed so unlike Christmas to me, but I did as Grandma said.

When I knocked on the door, the old man came, and I gave him the bag and told him I wanted him to have it for Christmas. He opened the bag and looked inside.

A big, beautiful smile spread across his face, and he told me that his Christmas wish for me was that I would have a "double header." I went back home puzzled about what a double header was until my grandfather explained that it was twice as much good as I might expect.

I learned later that the old man did not have any type of heat in that shack of his, and both his feet froze that winter. He died not long after that.

I have given a lot of gifts in my 76 years, but that one is at the top of my list of memorable gifts. I wish I (we) had done a lot more for a lonely, cold, probably hungry old man.

His wish for me has followed me all my life and kept me warm. ■

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.

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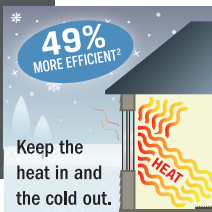
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