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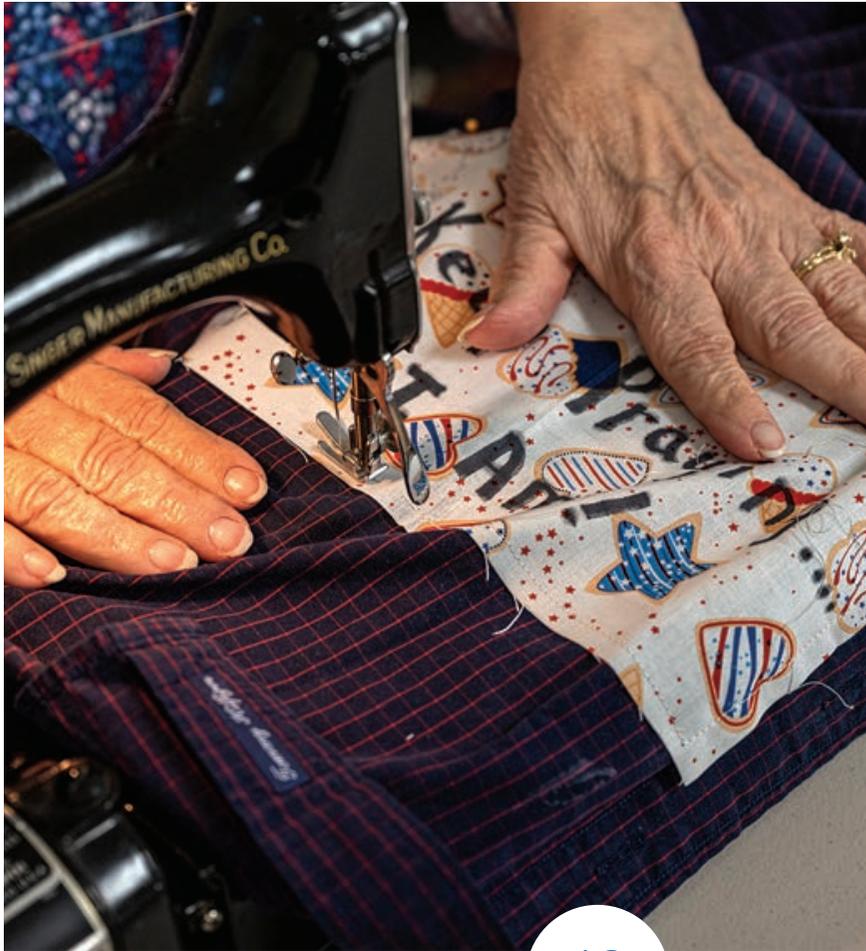
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## 08 Cast-Iron Comeback

Versatile, time-tested cookware is reclaiming its spot in home kitchens.

*Story and photos by Russell A. Graves*

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*By Laura Tolley  
Photos by Scott Van Osdol*

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#### ON THE COVER

Cast-iron pizza has the perfect crunch.  
*Photo by Russell A. Graves*

#### ABOVE

Sewing a pocket into the inside of a shirt for the Blessing Box Project.  
*Photo by Scott Van Osdol*

# Rural Reporters Making Waves

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**—March 8—is a global celebration of women's social, economic, cultural and political achievements. You can also mark the occasion March 28, when *Writing With Fire* airs on PBS.

The documentary, a selection of the World Cinema Documentary Competition at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival, profiles *Khabar Lahariya*, a newspaper in rural India run by an all-women newsroom. The paper, whose name translates to “waves of news,” employs journalists from Dalit, tribal, and Muslim communities, whose members have historically been marginalized.

Their coverage of rural issues, corruption and gender violence earned a Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation in 2021.

“[*Khabar Lahariya*] has broken barriers to establish women as journalists in small towns and villages where newsmakers have long been men, upper caste and well-connected to the political system,” the foundation wrote.



More than  
**200**

electric co-ops in the U.S. are developing or planning to deploy high-speed internet services for their members, giving them better access to tele-health services, online learning and remote work and attracting new families and businesses.

## Selena on Celluloid

*Selena*, the film about the Tejano music star from Lake Jackson, came out 25 years ago this month. Jennifer Lopez played Selena, below, in the movie, released March 21, 1997.



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

THE WOMAN I ADMIRE MOST IN HISTORY IS ...

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

Below are some of the responses to our January prompt: **This year I'm finally going to ...**

Build those raised garden beds for my wife. Or pay one of the grandkids while I watch and supervise.

RANDALL HALE  
FORT BELKNAP EC  
OLNEY

Travel down different Texas roads.

CHUCK BURGESS  
HEART OF TEXAS EC  
MILANO

Learn to let go of what I can't change.

BARBARA ELLIS  
VIA FACEBOOK

Quit smoking, drinking and cussing while fixing that leak.

JOE TREVINO JR.  
BARTLETT EC  
KILLEEN

Make no resolutions—just do the best I can each day.

LORA HORTON  
VIA FACEBOOK

To see more responses, read Currents online.



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Best Burgers

#### **FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS**

Morning Glory

#### **RECOMMENDED READING**

Texas Independence Day is March 2. A stolen stallion might have doomed Mexico during the revolution's decisive battle at San Jacinto in April 1836. Read *Old Whip: A Headstrong Texas Hero* from January 2009 for the full story.



# Burrowing Burros

**SCIENTISTS HAVE RECORDED** wild donkeys and horses digging wells in the Sonoran Desert in Arizona to reach groundwater to quench their thirst.

The animals use their hooves to carve out holes up to 6 feet deep, and researchers report in *Science* that the wells serve as oases that provide water for dozens of other species, including songbirds, deer and mountain lions.

“Wildflowers are the stuff of my heart!”

—LADY BIRD JOHNSON



DANA SMITH

**Dead Certain**

“No Monterey High School grad would be caught ‘dead’ in a letter sweater with an L on it. That was for Lubbock High, our crosstown rivals.”

JOYCE PHILLIPS  
PEDERNALES EC  
BUDA

**Dogs Changing Lives**

Patriot Paws in Rockwall raises and trains assistance dogs for disabled military veterans [*Furred Responders*, January 2022]. The dogs are trained at their kennels and in several men’s and women’s prisons. This organization has changed the lives of so many veterans and their families.

Lately they have started a program where they take some of their dogs and puppies to police departments (and any organization that requests) to help with stress relief.

Christine Davis  
Farmers EC  
Rockwall

I made the Chicken and Dumpling Soup [*Soups and Stews*, January 2022], and it is incredible. Well-deserved first-place winner.

CYNTHIA LEIGH  
AMAYA  
VIA FACEBOOK

**Slice of Life**

For my mother’s Christmas gift, I treated her to lunch at Rebecca Rather’s place in Fredericksburg, Emma + Ollie [*The Alchemy of Egg Whites*, November 2021]. Rebecca chatted with Mom and me and autographed my copy of her meringue recipe featured in the November issue. It was a wonderful Christmas gift for my 85-year-old mom.

Rhonna Carter  
Hamilton County EC  
Gatesville

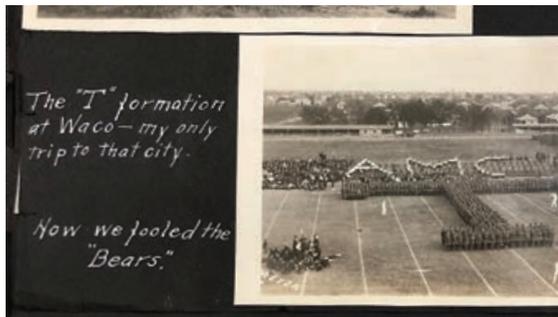
**Traveling Texas**

Before Bob and Kelli Phillips [*The Domino Effect*, December 2021], there was Frank X. Tolbert, who wrote a column in *The Dallas Morning News* every week about his travels in Texas called Tolbert’s Texas, which ran from 1946 till his death in 1984.

Don Pryor  
Bandera EC  
Boerne

**CORRECTION**

A photo with *Aggie Standouts* [January 2022] showing Texas A&M University’s Corps of Cadets’ block Aggie T formation was incorrectly identified. The 1920 photo was taken at a football game against Baylor University at the Cow Palace in Waco, not Kyle Field in College Station. Researchers at Texas A&M’s Cushing Memorial Library & Archives found the photo, right, in a 100-year-old scrapbook, confirming the location.



**TCP WRITE TO US**

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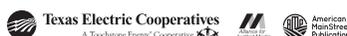
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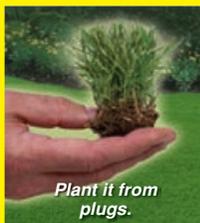
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# *Cast-Iron Comeback*

Versatile, time-tested  
cookware is reclaiming its  
spot among home chefs



## *From inside my home,*

I could smell the wood smoke wafting across the lawn. It's a delightful blend of post oak and some fruitwood, and just the aroma makes me hungry.

With my smoker keeping a steady temperature of 350 degrees, I preheat a seasoned, 9-inch cast-iron skillet. Because it's an all-metal piece of cookware, I don't have to worry about plastic handles or Teflon coatings getting ruined by the heat.

Soon I've placed some homemade dough, tomato sauce, cheese and pepperoni in the skillet and back into the smoker. The woodsmoke-infused pizza will taste great, and the crunch provided by the cast-iron pan will give the pizza the texture I'm after.

Fifteen minutes later I have (at least in my estimation) pizza perfection, and it was made possible by a piece of cast iron handed down through my family over a couple of generations.

Cast-iron cookware is the ultimate utilitarian piece for the home chef, and while it's been used for nearly 2,000 years in one iteration or another, the venerated cookware is making a comeback because of its versatility and durability.

OPPOSITE Cast iron gives cornbread a crust you can't get in a baking dish.  
ABOVE The cookware can be used on the stovetop or in the oven—paths to a perfect egg.

## Old Reliable

**C**ast iron is a combination of iron, steel and carbon alloys blended in a forge to make iron that's tough and resilient enough to last decades.

Once molten, the steel is poured into a mold of compressed sand, and when cooled, the sand is shaken loose to reveal the nearly finished pan. Once the pan goes through a process to trim off the excess metal and polishing, it's ready for seasoning and use.

The Chinese first used cast iron for cooking nearly 2,000 years ago, and over time the iron casting process has been used to build cannons, architectural elements like bridges, and art. The technology eventually made its way to the Americas.

Colonial Americans used cast iron extensively for cooking, and as American settlers moved west, the cookware made its way across the plains and mountains on the back of chuck wagons.

"The chuck wagon cook is part of our Western heritage," says Kent Rollins, a chuck wagon cook, educator and YouTube personality. Rollins has been a cowboy and cook all his life, so he's got the hard-earned bona fides to have the attention of nearly 2 million subscribers. "If cast iron was good enough for ol' Cookie to take on the trail, it's good enough for me. We have some old cast equipment that's close to 100 years old or older, and it still holds up. If you take care of it, it will never wear out."

As cowboys and cattle peppered the plains in the great cattle drives of the 1880s, the need for portable food preparation was paramount. Camp cooks used Dutch ovens to prepare stocks, stews and even bread. Dutch ovens are pots with a large, flat lid that allows for the even distribution of coals across the top, so that heat comes from both the top and the bottom of the vessel. That even heating is essential for creating bread and cobblers—a staple of chuck wagon cooks everywhere. It's the same oven that Rollins recommends to first-time cast-iron cooks.

He says that if you have a 12-inch skillet and a 12-inch Dutch oven, you can cook just about anything. New cast-



iron cooks should start with cornbread to learn to control the heat from the coals, Rollins advises. Once you've mastered cornbread, other dishes become simple.

The versatility of the Dutch oven makes it a valuable piece of cookware.

"You get what you pay for," Rollins advises. "I always look for cast iron that's made in the USA. It's a bit higher priced than cast iron made elsewhere, but it's a lifelong investment, and it will give you something back every time you cook out of it."

OPPOSITE William Graves, the author's brother, slow-cooks red beans in a cast-iron Dutch oven over a campfire. RIGHT New potatoes are seared before being roasted.

## Cooking Up a Story

The post-World War II era brought change to American kitchens. Pans made from newer and lighter materials and with nonstick coatings were appealing, pushing cast iron mostly out of favor.

But in the 21st century, cast iron has made a comeback, earning favor among professional and home chefs everywhere. Aside from its durability, cast iron heats more evenly and holds heat more efficiently than just about every other type of cookware. The simplicity of its design enhances the material's functionality.

In years past, the 9-inch frying pan and the Dutch oven were among the most common cast-iron pieces. But because of the resurgence, many manufacturers now offer skillets of all sizes, a variety of Dutch ovens, and myriad accessories and baking pans. As such, the demand for cast-iron cookware is still a niche of the total cookware market, but it's indeed gaining steam. Even small manufacturers like the Fredericksburg Cast Iron Co. see the potential for bringing a new pan to the marketplace.

"We initially introduced a 10-inch skillet with a smooth, hand-seasoned nonstick cooking surface, which is created using a handcrafted method of finishing and polishing," says Jay Mallinckrodt, founder of the boutique crafter of cast-iron skillets that was established in 2021. "This new approach resulted from the frustration of using so-called modern cookware that wore out quickly and a desire to avoid intimidating rough, coarse and sandpaperlike cast-iron surfaces that proliferate the ironware market. Our result is heavy-duty cast-iron cookware that is 100% made in Texas and can last for generations.

"Very few high-quality cooking products in the market today can be purchased for less than \$200," Mallinckrodt says. "A good cast-iron pan will not only cook your meal, but it will also bring families and friends together. That pan also becomes an heirloom piece and will last for generations."

Wild game chef Jesse Morris, who has cooked in high-end restaurants and hotels in Dallas, swears by cast iron. He advises that any protein you cook in cast iron benefits from the controlled crisping and searing that it provides. Beyond that, he says, cast iron adds to the story of a meal.

"There is an allure of cooking with well-made pans," Morris says. "Cooking is full of romance, and it tells a story. When you take the time to make something special and you're using a grandparent's old skillet or Dutch oven that has been well seasoned and made smooth from years of stirring, it helps add to that story." ■

 Enter online to win a skillet from Fredericksburg Cast Iron Co.



## Seasoning and Caring for Cast Iron

BY RUSSELL A. GRAVES

There's something about the flavor when you cook on cast iron that brings food like bacon and eggs alive. I also love cast-iron cornbread, which has a great crust on the bottom, and that brings a flavor that you can't replicate.

Before you cook on cast iron, there's one simple step required: Season the pan. You may wonder why. It's pretty simple: When you season a cast-iron pan, you help protect the metal, and add a little bit of nonstick properties to the cast iron. So as you use your pans over and over, the cookware becomes more and more seasoned.

To start the process, a good washing is in order. I use a stiff dishwashing pad and scrub it as best I can. You'll hear some people say that you shouldn't put soap and water on a cast-iron pan, and while that's true after they've been seasoned, when refurbishing a pan, you'll want to try to get all the dirt and grime off it.

After a good washing, place the pan on a stovetop set to medium heat to evaporate all the water. After a slow cooldown, wipe the pan with a towel to make sure all the moisture is gone.

Next, use some sort of cooking oil (I use shortening) and rub down the entire pan. While coating, preheat your oven to 350 degrees. When the pan is coated, place it in the oven on the middle rack and let it heat evenly for a couple of hours. Once the pan is cooled, you should have a properly seasoned pan. Regular use will continue the seasoning process, and the pan will darken over time.

To clean cast iron, simply wipe it down with a dry towel. If you need to scrub the pan, just reseason it in the oven.



POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

# HOPE IN♥A BOX



## A breast cancer survivor sends care packages of recovery aids to women all over the world

**T**he large, unadorned box that arrived on Kim Carpenter's doorstep contained just a few simple items—a big shirt with inside pockets, a long pillow, personal notes of encouragement. But it meant the world to her.

Carpenter had just been through several grueling months of chemotherapy for her breast cancer and was about to undergo a double mastectomy. She felt lost and confused.

"Then you see that box and open it. It's exciting because you know somebody cares enough to send you something that will be helpful," Carpenter says, choking back tears as she recalls that day in January 2021. "It is a blessing, even though it's just a pillow and a shirt and a few other things. It's hope in a box."

Carpenter, who lives in Brookshire, west of Houston, is one of more than 6,700 women who have received a care package from the Blessing Box Project, founded by breast cancer survivor Dawn Compton, a San Bernard Electric Cooperative member who lives in nearby Bellville. And the community of supporters is growing.

Compton's work is rooted in her own experience. She recalls crying all the way home from the doctor after learning she had breast cancer in March 2018. Through the tears, she prayed, asking for the strength to help others in their fights—though she wasn't exactly sure what that meant. She says she's always been a helper. Her motto: Do as much as we can for as many as we can for as long as we can and then rest.

"I was crying and I said: This is not my choice, so it's yours. I will do what I'm supposed to do," Compton says she told God. "I will open every door I'm supposed to go through. Put me in front of whoever needs me, who needs to hear my story."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Blessing Box Project founder Dawn Compton, who often gets help from volunteers. Gabby Smith irons for Blessing Box. Tinley Malota, Compton's granddaughter, and Tinley's aunt, Madi Compton, sew shirts. Belle Ary helps ready a shipment. Kim Carpenter, a recipient of a Blessing Box, sews for the cause.

To keep busy, Compton started knitting caps for women who lost their hair during chemotherapy. As she worked on each one, she prayed for the person who would wear it.

When she found out she would have to undergo a double mastectomy, she scoured the internet for information about what to do after the operation.

She found instructions for making a special shirt to wear and a pillow. The oversized men's shirt called for adding two pockets on the inside to hold lengthy drains that are attached to the breast removal site. The long pillow "hugs" the upper torso, providing comfort as the patient sleeps, rides in vehicles and does other activities.

"I just started out making a couple of pillows to keep my sanity," she says. "Now, it's my life."

Compton also found support through Facebook pages for women undergoing breast cancer treatment. After posting about the two shirts and pillow she made for herself, she got a private message from a Fort Worth woman asking if she would do the same for her. Compton did and sent it to the woman in a box. The woman thanked her online, which prompted several more requests.

Compton kept sewing, and the requests kept coming in. While unloading boxes one day at the post office, a friend asked her what she was doing. Compton explained, and the woman offered to help, as did others. Her first sewing group met in nearby Nelsonville.

"We thought we were knocking the world apart doing 50 boxes that day!" she says.

Her "pink sewing tribe" has since grown and meets on alternating Saturdays at churches in Bellville and Hempstead to make items for Blessing Boxes. On one Saturday, the women met to assemble contents for 125 boxes. They ended up filling 132.

"Everybody just does their own thing," Compton says. "I couldn't do this by myself anymore."

She gets help from beyond her sewing posse. Thrift stores donate collared men's button-down shirts. Volunteers in several other states make pillows and mail them to her, and an elderly woman in nearby Industry contributes about 30 handmade pillows a month. The owner of a dry cleaner has even pressed shirts for the project.

Supporters make other items for the boxes: One crafts pocket crosses with a short Bible verse, and another makes small prayer quilts. Compton also gets pens, socks, keychains and more. "I send out whatever comes in," she says.

Compton declines payment for the items, but she will accept postage costs if the recipient can cover it. Some pay more. People donate items, prompting Compton's daughter to create an Amazon wish list for donations.

Compton has shipped the boxes all over the United States, to Puerto Rico and to several other countries, including South Africa, Afghanistan and Australia.



#### HOW TO HELP

To send donations or find other ways to help the Blessing Box Project, go to [blessingboxproject.com](https://blessingboxproject.com).

#### TCP POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

To nominate a co-op member who makes a difference in your community, email details to [people@texascooppower.com](mailto:people@texascooppower.com).

“What has really struck me is the kindness I see,” she says. “People have no one, then they open their box and they are moved to tears because someone cares. It’s the difference between walking alone scared to death and knowing somebody is behind you saying you can do this.”

Carpenter felt cared for when she received her box.

After her surgery, it hurt to lower her arms all the way down to her sides. But the pillow eased her pain by wrapping around her front and tucking under her arms so she didn’t have to close them against her body. The shirt held the drains that she called annoying.

Carpenter also was moved by the personal messages written on the pillow and the pockets inside the shirt. The notes told her people were praying for her and that she was strong enough to make it through this ordeal. All Blessing Box shirts and pillows have similar messages.

Now, after chemo, surgery and radiation, Carpenter says she’s doing great and helps out when she can with Blessing Boxes—mostly stuffing pillows since she isn’t a seamstress.

“It’s neat to have a bunch of women together working to bless other ladies,” Carpenter says. “It’s amazing what Dawn has done with this project. She’s motivated; she’s hardworking.”

Compton is well known around Bellville for her passion for and commitment to the Blessing Box Project and other community activities, said John Spiess and Lari Samford, employees of San Bernard EC.

“She is extremely active and supportive of a lot of things in our community,” Samford says.

Spiess’ wife, daughter and granddaughter volunteer with the Blessing Box Project.

“Dawn is very much a strong Christian woman, and she puts that into her Blessing Box effort. It’s like a ministry [for her],” says Spiess, who has known Compton since they were in school together. “She was always real sweet, very humble and passionate about what she does. What you see is what you get—beautiful on the inside as well as the outside.” ■

**“People have no one, then they open their box and they are moved to tears because someone cares.”**



TOP Cancer survivor Susan Scott revels in the company of other volunteers while sewing pillows. ABOVE Erika Guerrero adds pillows to Blessing Boxes.

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**2022 American Silver Eagle:** The Silver Eagle is the single most popular coin in the world. 2022 represents the first full year of release of the Silver Eagle's new Eagles Landing reverse design, introduced midway through last year to honor the coin's 35th anniversary. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the U.S. Mint.

**2022 South African Krugerrand:** The Krugerrand continues to be the best-known, most respected numismatic coin brand in the world. 2022 is the 5th anniversary of the first silver Krugerrand. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the South African Mint.

**2022 China Silver Panda:** Since its first issue, the China Panda coin series has been one of the most widely collected series ever, highlighted by one-year-only designs. This 2022 Panda features its first-ever privy mark honoring the coin's 40th anniversary. Struck in 99.9% fine silver at the China Mint.

**2022 Australia Wedge Tailed Eagle:** Introduced in 2014, the Wedge-Tailed Eagle is the first-ever collaboration between U.S. Mint designer John Mercanti and a foreign mint. With a new design for 2022, it's struck in 99.9% fine silver at the Perth Mint.

**2022 Canada Maple Leaf:** Since 1988, the Silver Maple Leaf's elegant design has made it a highly sought-after bullion coin. The 2022 coin features anti-counterfeit security technology—radial lines and a microengraved maple leaf with the number "22". Struck in 99.99% fine silver at the Royal Canadian Mint.

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<sup>1</sup>Subject to availability, on a total purchase of 3 or more. To qualify for discount offer, initial contact for an appointment must be made and documented on or before 3/31/22 with the purchase then occurring on or before 4/10/22. 3% cash discount for payment in full by cash or check applied at time of sale. <sup>2</sup>No payments and deferred interest for 12 months available from third-party lenders to well qualified buyers on approved credit only. No Finance Charges will be assessed if promo balance is paid in full in 12 months. Products are marketed, sold and installed (but not manufactured) by Renewal by Andersen retailers, which are independently owned and operated under Central Texas Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Austin and San Antonio. North Texas Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Dallas/Fort Worth and West Texas. See complete information and entity identification at [www.rbaguidelines.com](http://www.rbaguidelines.com). ©2022 Andersen Corporation. ©2022 Lead Surge LLC. All rights reserved.



CEO

**HERBERT "TREY"  
GREBE III**

## Embracing Change To Stay Consistent

**IN TEXAS IN THE SPRING**, you can count on wildflowers. I am looking forward to seeing the blue, red, purple, yellow and pink blooms that will blanket our highway roadsides and fields in the coming months.

Those wildflowers always mark the changing of the season. Gone are the cold days and crockpot meals that mark the winter; the sun comes back out, days get longer, evenings are filled with the shouts of kids playing outside as school winds down, and summer is around the corner.

Seasons may change, but the fact that you can count on your cooperative doesn't change. That's one of the many things I love about working in this industry. During all seasons and over all the years, our employees stand ready to serve members, ready to respond to outages, and ready to face the challenges that lay ahead. Members saw that last spring when storms hit our service area one after another; our crews always stood at the ready and they never stopped until the last member had power restored.

The constant of the cooperative spirit has been around since 1938 and it is something that will not change, even when other things do. I recently saw a graphic that showed how Americans use electricity, and that has certainly changed since the '30s, as one would expect. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration data, last year the use of electricity in the U.S. was 13 times greater than in 1950. That makes sense; we have more gadgets that depend on electricity than ever before. We are seeing electric cars become more popular, and I think in the next 10 years, they will be in many garages in our service area.

In order to stay consistent and be ready to deliver the reliable service our members expect, we have to constantly prepare for change. We must always be looking ahead and thinking about not just how our members use electricity now, but how they will be using it in the next 10–20 years. Our line designers and construction crews have completed several projects over the last few years designed to prepare for future growth, and we will continue to initiate those projects in the coming years..

We also see change and growth in our communities, and Medina Electric Cooperative is here to support the economic development initiatives throughout our service area. We're proud to be able to offer grants to organizations in our service area that are working to improve or offer new services. Read more about the Community Empowerment Program on Page 20.

In a constantly changing world, you can count on Medina EC to make the necessary changes to meet the needs of our members and community, while staying committed to powering the lives our members with safe and reliable electricity.

Until next time,  
Trey Grebe

# Upcoming Petition Deadlines

Any members interested in running for one of the three board positions up for election in the fall can be placed on the ballot through the petition process. You can download a petition at [MedinaEC.org/Nominee](https://MedinaEC.org/Nominee). The board of directors represents the interests of members and governs the cooperative.

If you have questions about the process or need assistance, please contact us at [MyCoop@MedinaEC.org](mailto:MyCoop@MedinaEC.org) or call 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532).

## Petition Deadlines

Voting District 1: April 8  
Medina County

Voting District 2: April 7  
Edwards, Real, Kinney, Uvalde,  
Zavala, Frio and Atascosa counties

Voting District 3: April 11  
Dimmit, La Salle, McMullen, Webb,  
Duval, Zapata, Jim Hogg, Brooks  
and Starr counties

In compliance with the United States Department of Agriculture, in reference to assurance of nondiscrimination among beneficiaries of Rural Utilities Service programs, the Medina EC bylaws pertaining to nomination and election procedures for the election of board members can be found at all Medina EC offices and at [MedinaEC.org/CorpDoc](https://MedinaEC.org/CorpDoc). The section that primarily pertains to nomination and election procedures is Article 4 - Board of Directors.

Learn more and download a petition  
at [MedinaEC.org/Nominee](https://MedinaEC.org/Nominee).

Medina Electric  
Cooperative



### CONTACT US

Toll-Free 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532)

Email [Info@MedinaEC.org](mailto:Info@MedinaEC.org)

Web [MedinaEC.org](https://MedinaEC.org) - Chat Feature Available

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### Voting District 1

Larry Huesser, (830) 363-7651

Wayne W. Scholtz, (830) 426-1328

Ken Weynand, (830) 426-0762

#### Voting District 2

Jimmie Raines, (830) 591-8437

Chris Surles, (830) 965-5538

Kenneth White, (830) 232-6541

#### Voting District 3

Annette Sorrells, (361) 231-0173

J. L. Gonzalez, (956) 286-1863

Rodolfo H. Rodriguez, (210) 846-1092

#### CEO

Trey Grebe, 1-866-MEC-ELEC, ext. 1045

## Outage? Call us.

### TOLL-FREE

1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532)

Option 2: Report an outage

Option 3: Pay bill, get account balance

Option 5: Speak to a representative

### OFFICE LOCATIONS

**Bruni** 1300 FM 2050 N., Bruni 78344

**Dilley** 1718 W. FM 117, Dilley 78017

**Hondo** 237 Hwy. 173 N., Hondo 78861

**Rio Grande City** 601 N. FM 3167,  
Rio Grande City 78582

**Uvalde** 2604 Hwy. 90 E., Uvalde 78801

**Corporate Office** 2308 18th St., Hondo 78861

### VISIT US ONLINE

[MedinaEC.org](https://MedinaEC.org)



This institution is an equal-opportunity provider and employer.

Información sobre todos los programas y servicios que ofrece Medina Electric Cooperative están disponibles en español al llamarnos al 1-866-MEC-ELEC o visitando una de nuestras oficinas.

# How Could We Help Your Community?

\$5,500 in grants available

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Up to \$5,500 in grants will be awarded in local communities in 2022. Could your organization or community use any of that money for a special project?

Application deadline: April 1, 11:59 p.m.\*

Emphasis will be placed on projects that:

- >> Encourage economic diversity.
- >> Contribute to community health and development.
- >> Improve the quality or quantity of services essential for the development of viable communities.

Applicants do not need to be a member of or receive electricity from Medina EC to apply. They only need to provide services in one of the counties served by Medina EC, which are listed below.

*\*Technical support will not be available outside of normal business hours. Encountering technical issues while turning in the application on the last day will not be grounds for an extension.*

## COUNTIES WHERE GRANTS CAN BE AWARDED

Atascosa	Jim Hogg	Starr
Brooks	Kinney	Uvalde
Dimmit	La Salle	Webb
Duval	McMullen	Zapata
Edwards	Medina	Zavala
Frio	Real	

**View eligibility information and apply online at [MedinaEC.org/Grant](https://MedinaEC.org/Grant).**



**We Never Stop.**

Not everyone starts their day at the same time or in the same way. But no matter when or how, Medina EC is there to help you power every moment of it.

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## Co-op Connections Corner: Vehicle Parts, Repair and Sales

Whether you want to fix up an old car or buy a new one, these participating local business partners can help!

### **A & A Auto Parts—Cotulla, Pearsall and Dilley**

Cotulla: (830) 879-3553  
Dilley : (830) 965-1700  
Pearsall: (830) 334-2035  
10% off all available parts

### **Rio Motor Co.—Rio Grande City**

(956) 487-2596 | RioMotors.com  
\$500 off MSRP on any truck or car in stock

### **Dixon Automotive—Hondo**

(830) 741-2886 | DixonAutomotiveTX.com  
5% discount on parts and labor up to \$100

### **Hebbronville Machine Shop—Hebbronville**

(361) 527-4461 | HebbronvilleMachineShop.com  
5% discount after \$500 or more on labor on each invoice, when asked

### **Hilltop Automotive—Dilley**

(830) 963-1290  
10% off total labor cost, up to \$500

### **H-Town Automotive & Performance—Hondo**

(830) 426-4777 | HTownPerformance.com  
5% discount on parts and labor

### **Lone Star Radiator Co.—San Antonio**

(210) 732-7558 or 1-800-445-6449  
LoneStarRadiator.com  
5% off parts and service on auto, truck, ag and industrial

## Need a Rental Car?

If you need a rental car while yours is in the shop, these national Co-op Connections discounts are here to help you save.

### **AVIS Car Rental**

(800) 331-1212 | AVIS.com  
Discounts of up to 25% on rental cars using promo code A403890

### **Enterprise Rent-A-Car**

(855) 266-9565 | Enterprise.com  
10% off of the already-reduced internet rate; 5% discount when renting at non-airport locations nationwide. Use corporate class number: 16JP097 and PIN "NAT"

# Donations In Action: Little Libraries for Charlotte

Medina EC's community empowerment grant program selected the Charlotte Public Library as a 2021 fund recipients. The library used the grant of \$1,000 to install two Little Free Libraries in the community and fill them with books.

The little libraries are being enjoyed by the community, according to librarian Marianne McGinnis. "As the librarian, I am very grateful that the library was awarded the grant, improving the quality and quantity of this service towards education, recreational reading, and the ability to have access to books near the homes of the community."

Learn more about the  
**Community  
Empowerment  
Program**  
and how it could help  
your community with  
local needs on Page 20.



Here are some locations that are affiliated with Little Free Libraries in our service area. You can view full location details at [LittleFreeLibrary.org](http://LittleFreeLibrary.org). There may be other free libraries around; see about having them added to the website so others can find them. Visit these to grab or share some books!

## **LAREDO**

78041

3616 Josefina Drive  
406 Longshadow

78045

10202 International Blvd.  
Corner of Country Club Drive and  
Mize Drive

## **CHARLOTTE**

32 Eastlake Drive  
333 Madero Ave.  
173 S. Yule Ave.  
21 Barnes

## **RIO GRANDE CITY**

204 E. Nixon St.

## **ROMA**

3210 Old Escobares Road

## **GARCIASVILLE**

6456 FM 1430

## **UVALDE**

1 Friends Trail

## **CASTROVILLE**

1101 Fiorella St.

## **SAN ANTONIO**

78253

12260 Rockwall Mill  
Williams Grant in Alamo Ranch  
Alamo Ranch Orthodontics



## HVAC Tuneup Time

*Rebates available to members*

**SUMMER IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER**, and that means air conditioning units will be working overtime across our area of South Texas.

In preparing for warmer temperatures, it is a good idea to have your air conditioning system serviced to ensure it is in top working order and ready to operate like it should. Keep in mind that Medina EC offers a \$60 rebate for HVAC tuneups.

If time has caught up with your HVAC unit and it needs to be replaced, Medina EC also has rebates of \$200 and \$400 for that, depending on what you replace the system with. There is also a \$35 rebate for Energy Star-certified window units.

In 2021, Medina EC members received more than \$19,000 in rebates related to air conditioning efficiency changes and replacements.

However you keep cool this summer, there may be a rebate to help you out!

**LEARN ABOUT OTHER REBATES AVAILABLE**

**TO MEMBERS AT**

**[MEDINAEC.ORG/REBATES](https://MEDINAEC.ORG/REBATES)**

# Going the Extra Mile

Did you know electric cooperatives maintain more miles of power lines per consumer and acquire less revenue than other types of electric utilities?

Even though they serve fewer consumers and acquire less revenue per mile of line, electric co-ops always go the extra mile, maintaining a tried-and-true record of delivering safe, reliable electric service to the members they serve.





### DID YOU KNOW?

Lighting accounts for about 15% of an average home's electricity use, and the typical household can save about \$225 in energy costs per year by using LEDs.



## There's an App for That!

Managing your electric account isn't hard. In fact, it's gotten easier over the years and can be accessed simply by logging in to the SmartHub app. To access SmartHub on your phone or tablet, download the app from the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

Once it's downloaded, choose Medina EC as your service provider and enter your account information. When you're logged in, you will be able to access all the same account information you were able to from the desktop version.

Benefits of SmartHub include:

- ▶ **Account Information:** Manage your account details with up-to-date contact numbers, email addresses and mailing address.
- ▶ **Bill Management:** Pay your bill, see payment history and set up automatic payments.
- ▶ **Electricity Use:** See your daily use, compare to historical use, see weather data and more.
- ▶ **Notifications:** Sign up to receive notifications on your account for billing, outages, usage thresholds and more.
- ▶ **Outages:** Easily report a power outage impacting your meter. You can also sign up to receive email and text alerts when Medina EC registers your meter is out of power and when power is restored.

Learn more about SmartHub and all the ways it can help you manage your electric account at [MedinaEC.org/SH](https://MedinaEC.org/SH).

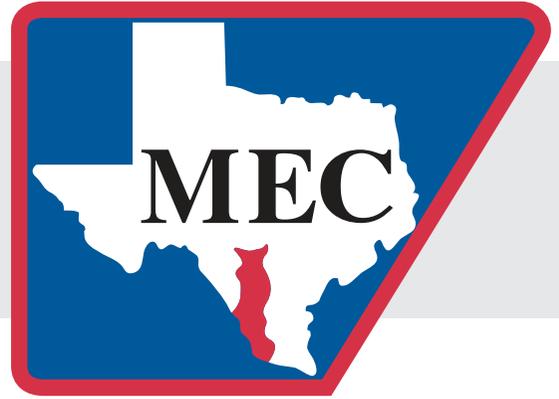


### POWER TIP

The Department of Energy recommends a temperature setting of 35–38 degrees for the fresh food compartment of a fridge and zero degrees for the freezer.

OKAN METIN | ISTOCK.COM

Medina EC is dedicated to serving our members with reliable, low-cost electricity. We work with various partners and banks to accomplish that. One of those is the Rural Utilities Service, which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Below is the nondiscrimination statement that Medina EC operates under as a participant in those programs.



## Nondiscrimination Statement

*In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.*

*Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the*

*Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.*

*To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:*

*(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;*

*(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or*

*(3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).*

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*

## Declaración de No a la Discriminación

*De acuerdo con la ley federal de derechos civiles y las reglamentaciones y políticas de derechos civiles del Departamento de Agricultura de Estados Unidos (U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA), se prohíbe al USDA, sus agencias, oficinas y empleados, e instituciones que participan o administran los programas del USDA, discriminar por motivos de raza, color, origen nacional, religión, género, identidad de género (incluidas las expresiones de género), orientación sexual, discapacidad, edad, estado civil, estado familiar/parental, ingresos derivados de un programa de asistencia pública, creencias políticas, o represalias por actividades previas sobre derechos civiles, en cualquier programa o actividad llevados a cabo o financiados por el USDA (no todas las bases se aplican a todos los programas). Las fechas límite para la presentación de remedios y denuncias varían según el programa o el incidente.*

*Las personas con discapacidades que requieran medios alternativos de comunicación para obtener información sobre el programa (por ej., Braille, letra grande, cinta de audio, lenguaje americano de señas, etc.) deberán comunicarse con la Agencia responsable o con el Centro TARGET del*

*USDA al (202) 720-2600 (voz y TTY) o comunicarse con el USDA a través del Servicio Federal de Transmisiones al (800) 877-8339. Asimismo, se puede disponer de información del programa en otros idiomas además de inglés.*

*Para presentar una denuncia por discriminación en el programa, complete el Formulario de denuncias por discriminación en el programa del USDA, AD-3027, que se encuentra en línea en [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), o en cualquier oficina del USDA, o escriba una carta dirigida al USDA e incluya en la carta toda la información solicitada en el formulario. Para solicitar una copia del formulario de denuncias, llame al (866) 632-9992. Envíe su formulario completado o su carta al USDA por los siguientes medios:*

*(1) correo: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;*

*(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; o*

*(3) correo electrónico: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).*

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*Happiness takes flight in shimmering abalone and gleaming sterling silver for just \$49!*

- Shimmering abalone in .925 sterling silver
- 1 1/3" drop & 1 1/4" wide Butterfly Pendant



## Abalone Butterfly Effect Collection

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- B. 18" sterling silver chain..... \$59 +s&p  
Butterfly Pendant & Chain ~~\$258†~~ ..... \$59 +s&p Save \$199
- C. Butterfly Earrings ~~\$199†~~..... \$59 +s&p Save \$140

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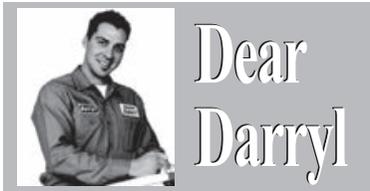
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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

# Clogged, Backed—up Septic System...Can anything Restore It?

**DEAR DARRYL:** My home is about 10 years old, and so is my septic system. I have always taken pride in keeping my home and property in top shape. In fact, my neighbors and I are always kidding each other about who keeps their home and yard nicest. Lately, however, I have had a horrible smell in my yard, and also in one of my bathrooms, coming from the shower drain. My grass is muddy and all the drains in my home are very slow.



My wife is on my back to make the bathroom stop smelling and as you can imagine, my neighbors are having a field day, kidding me about the mud pit and sewage stench in my yard. It's humiliating. I called a plumber buddy of mine, who recommended pumping (and maybe even replacing) my septic system. But at the potential cost of thousands of dollars, I hate to explore that option.

I tried the store bought, so called, Septic treatments out there, and they did Nothing to clear up my problem. Is there anything on the market I can pour or flush into my system that will restore it to normal, and keep it maintained?

*Clogged and Smelly – El Paso, TX*

**DEAR CLOGGED AND SMELLY:** As a reader of my column, I am sure you are aware that I have a great deal of experience in this particular field. You will be glad to know that there IS a septic solution that will solve your back-up and effectively restore your entire system from interior piping throughout the septic system and even unclog the drain field as well. **SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs** deliver your system the fast active bacteria and enzymes needed to liquefy solid waste and free the clogs causing your back-up.

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This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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# The Inside Track

Railroads scattered—and united—early communities across the state

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TRACI DABERKO

**THE EARLIEST TEXAS** towns took hold alongside protected bays (Galveston and Corpus Christi) and riverbanks (San Antonio and El Paso). But by the late 1800s, railroads were planting the seeds that raised towns. More than any other technology, trains ushered Texas into the industrial age.

The railroads got a slow start in Texas, but an attractive funding program allocated the railroad companies more than 10,000 acres of land and a \$6,000 loan for every mile of track.

Towns developed along railroads for many reasons—one being that every 20 miles or so, steam locomotives required water. So water depots were built as needed, regardless of whether a favorable place for a town to prosper was nearby.

The far West Texas town of Valentine is such a case. The stop for the water depot was given that name because a railroad crew arrived there on Valentine's Day 1882. Some say, however, that the town was named for John Valentine, a major stockholder in the railroad. Both could be true (a twofer, you might say). The town of 130 or so people still exists, and the post office does a booming business for, you guessed it, Valentine's Day.

Some towns sprang up haphazardly because a construction camp lasted long enough for communal roots to grow. Langtry, along the Mexico border, was such a place. A tent town developed where the railroad builders lived while the project was underway, and the town was named for George Langtry, a railroad engineer for the Southern Pacific.

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



But Judge Roy Bean, famous as the Law West of the Pecos, rewrote that history to suit his own narrative. He sold worldwide the fiction that he had named the town for Lillie Langtry, the British American actress. He was so successful in selling this myth that she stopped to visit the town shortly after Bean died.

Abilene was created by the construction of the Texas and Pacific Railway line, with cattlemen and developers collaborating to establish a cattle market similar to Abilene, Kansas (for which Abilene was named). They needed room to build the cattle market, so the railroad bypassed Buffalo Gap, a more established community, prompting many in Buffalo Gap to relocate, since the railroad lines were the lifeblood of commerce in those days. Alongside those tracks on the first day of lot selling, the First Presbyterian Church was founded, and that prophesied the reputation of Abilene as having more churches per capita than any other town in Texas, not to mention three Christian colleges.

In 1860 the Houston and Texas Central Railway built a line through East Texas and created a depot that would become College Station. The school that would become Texas A&M University opened its doors in 1876. The next year the U.S. Postal Service designated the town College Station because that was the name of the railroad passenger depot. The railroad is still there, bifurcating the enormous 5,200-acre campus that it once bordered only on the west side.

The age of railroad dominance in Texas development is gone now, but the Lone Star State still boasts an important claim: Texas holds more miles of railroad than any state in the union—10,539—which still move the state's commerce. ■

# Texas' Best

Turn this lineup of Lone Star icons into staples in your kitchen

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

So many things come to mind when one thinks of Texas food that it's hard to distill it into a few distinct dishes. Beyond that, each region puts its own spin on things, resulting in a wonderfully vibrant food culture from top to tip. Texas caviar is a dish that many folks have made their own since it first appeared in the 1940s. I add crisp bacon and avocado, though you can skip the bacon if you want to keep it vegetarian.

## Texas Caviar With Bacon and Avocado

### CAVIAR

- 1 can (15 ounces) black-eyed peas, rinsed and drained**
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, rinsed and drained**
- 1 cup corn kernels, thawed if frozen**
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced**
- ½ cup diced red onion**
- 1 cup halved grape tomatoes**
- 2 slices crisp-cooked bacon, chopped**
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro**
- 1 avocado, diced**

### DRESSING

- ½ cup olive oil**
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon lime juice**
- 1 teaspoon sugar**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon cumin**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**

**1. CAVIAR** In a large bowl, stir together black-eyed peas, beans, corn, bell pepper, onion, tomatoes, bacon and cilantro.

**2. DRESSING** In a small bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients. Pour half the dressing over salad and mix well. Add more dressing to taste.

**3.** Gently stir in diced avocado just before serving.

**SERVES 8**

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





## Pinto Beans and Jalapeño Sausage

SHARON CRISMAN-PARKER  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC  
SAN BERNARD EC

This hearty dish is perfect for showcasing locally made sausage. Crisman-Parker has been making this dish for more than 35 years and recommends the jalapeño sausage from Krolczyk Meat Market in Hempstead.

- 1 pound dry pinto beans**
- 2 slices bacon or salt pork**
- 1 teaspoon olive oil**
- ½ cup chopped onion**
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro**
- 1½ teaspoons minced garlic**
- ½ teaspoon cumin**
- 1 teaspoon garlic pepper**
- Pinch ground cayenne pepper**
- 4 tablespoons chili powder**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1 tablespoon pepper**
- 1 package smoked jalapeño sausage, sliced**

1. Soak beans 45 minutes–1 hour. Drain and rinse beans, then pour into a stockpot or Dutch oven. Add enough water to cover beans.
2. Add bacon and olive oil, and cook on low 15 minutes.
3. Add onion, cilantro, garlic, cumin, garlic pepper and cayenne. Cover and continue to cook on low 15 minutes, adding water if needed to keep beans submerged. Stir in chili powder, salt and pepper and continue to cook on low until beans begin to soften, adding water as needed. When beans are starting to

\$500 WINNER

## Texas Praline Sheet Cake

SHIRLEY SMITH  
PEDERNALES EC



The aroma of the cooked icing for this sheet cake is irresistible, so don't be surprised if you sneak a taste while spreading it onto the cake. Skipping the usual chocolate addition helps Texas pecans shine in this crowd-pleasing dessert.

SERVES 24



CAKE

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter**
- 1 cup water**
- 2½ cups flour**
- 1 cup loosely packed brown sugar**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- ½ cup buttermilk**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten**

ICING

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter**
- 2 cups loosely packed brown sugar**
- ½ cup half-and-half**
- 4 cups unsifted powdered sugar**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 cups pecans, toasted and chopped**

1. **CAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees and grease a deep 18-by-13-inch baking sheet or jelly roll pan.
2. In a small saucepan, combine butter and water and bring to a boil, then remove from heat.
3. In a large bowl, mix together flour, sugars and baking soda. Stir in buttermilk, vanilla and eggs; mixture will be thick and sticky. Carefully mix in the butter-water mixture and stir until smooth.
4. Pour batter onto prepared baking sheet and spread evenly to edges. Bake 20 minutes, until golden brown.
5. **ICING** In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, melt the butter and brown sugar, stirring to melt evenly. Boil 2 minutes. Stir in the half-and-half and bring back to a boil, then remove from heat. Whisk in powdered sugar until melted and icing is thick and creamy. Fold in vanilla and pecans. While cake and icing are still warm, pour icing on cake and spread to edges. Let cool before serving.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**BEST BURGERS** DUE MARCH 10

What's going on your grill this spring? Submit your recipes at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests) by March 10 for a chance to win \$500.



CONTINUED >

RECIPES CONTINUED

soften, after about 30 minutes, add the sausage.

4. Continue cooking, covered, on low until beans are tender. Serve with cornbread.

SERVES 6-8

### South Texas-Style Migas

CELESTE SMITH  
PEDERNALES EC

Smith's South Texas roots informed her recipe for migas, which she has been making for her family for years. Enjoy the dish on its own or tuck it into flour tortillas and serve with refried beans.

**Vegetable oil**

**1 green bell pepper, diced**

**1 small onion, diced**

**1 serrano or jalapeño pepper, seeded and diced**

**1 clove garlic, minced**

**3 large plum tomatoes, peeled**



**¼ cup chicken broth**

**1 teaspoon cumin**

**1 teaspoon salt, divided use**

**¼ teaspoon pepper**

**6 5-inch corn tortillas**

**4 eggs, lightly beaten**

**½ cup shredded cheddar cheese**

1. In a saucepan over medium heat, warm 1 teaspoon oil, then add bell pepper, onion, and serrano or jalapeño. Sauté 5 minutes, until onion is transparent, then add garlic and cook 1 minute more.

2. Pulse peeled tomatoes in a food processor until chunky but not watery, then add to the saucepan along with broth, cumin, ½ teaspoon salt and pepper. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer partially covered for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the sauce from heat and set aside.

3. Cut tortillas into 1-inch strips, then cut in half crosswise. Cover the bottom of a large skillet with about 1 inch of oil and heat over medium. Cook tortilla strips until crisp, 7-10 minutes, then place on paper towels to drain excess oil.

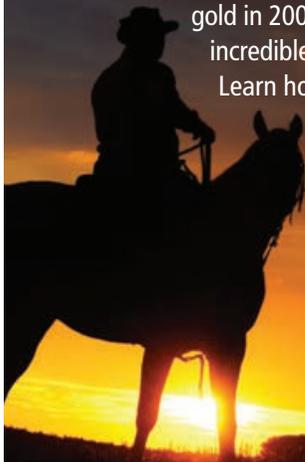
4. Drain all but 1 tablespoon of oil and add eggs to warm skillet. Cook without stirring until eggs begin to set on the bottom, then draw a spatula across the bottom to form large curds. Sprinkle with remaining salt and return tortilla strips to the pan. Stir well and cook until eggs are set but still moist. Remove from heat, top with the sauce and cheese and serve.

SERVES 2

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Chomping at the Trip

Beaumont's Gator Country gives travelers a taste of the wild side

BY CHET GARNER

**GROWING UP IN** Southeast Texas, I always had a fascination with alligators. Every time my family drove past a marsh (which was a lot), I would eagerly scan, hoping to see a pair of eyes peeking above the water. Occasionally I would spot one and nearly burst with giddy excitement.

With that early influence in mind, you can imagine my thrill when I discovered Gator Country Adventure Park—home to more than 450 alligators, crocodiles and other reptiles just outside Beaumont.

My adventure started with a walk across a bridge spanning a pond packed with more alligators than I could count and continued with exhibits featuring snakes and turtles and at least six outdoor habitats. The pond for large gators had residents that measured more than 12 feet long, including one named Kong.

But no gator in the park can hold a candle to Big Al and Big Tex—two creatures so intimidating they each get a personal pond. Big Al measures more than 13 feet long and weighs a half ton. He was the largest gator in captivity in America until the arrival of Big Tex, measuring an inch shy of 14 feet.

Like most of the gators here, Big Al and Big Tex were rescued after being deemed nuisances and a danger to the public. For owner Gary Saurage, the park is a place where alligators can be cared for and serve as tools to educate the public instead of being killed.

Even though I found a new level of love and respect for these prehistoric creatures, I couldn't leave without also tasting alligator meat (sourced from a farm, not the park). So I ordered a basket of fried gator bites from the snack bar and marveled at how powerful—and delicious—alligators truly are. ■

ABOVE Chet keeps Jana Saurage of Gator Country between him and Bruce.

**TCP** Watch Chet get giddy for gators in our video. And catch all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

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

## MARCH

01

**Canyon [1–19] Southwest Abstractions of Emil Bisttram**, (806) 651-2244, panhandleplains.org

**Austin [1–20] Daniel Johnston: I Live My Broken Dreams**, (512) 453-5312, thecontemporaryaustin.org

**Alpine [1–April 2] Texas as Art**, (432) 837-8145, museumofthebigbend.com

**Burnet [1–April 30] Birds, Bees & Butterflies**, (512) 334-2070, canyonoftheeagles.com

08

**Bandera [8–12] Fiber and Arts Week and Festival**, (949) 400-4225, banderafiberandarts.com

10

**Brenham Texas A&M Singing Cadets**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

11

**Grand Prairie No Cap Comedy Tour**, (972) 854-5050, texastrustcutheatre.com

12

**Burton Texas Ranger Day**, (979) 803-0393, burtonheritagesociety.org

17

**Canton [17–19] Van Zandt County Bluegrass Festival**, (214) 802-5999, facebook.com/vzbluegrass

18

**Round Top [18–19] Herb Society Pioneer Unit Annual Plant Sale**, (832) 867-9617, herbsocietypioneer.org/events

**Tolar [18-19] Ceramic Expo & Handcrafted Items,** (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

**Fredericksburg [18-20] Trade Days,** (210) 846-4094, fbgtradedays.com

19

**Fredericksburg Mud Dauber Festival & Chili Cook-Off,** (830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

**Lufkin Viva Momix,** (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

**McKinney [19-20] Collin County Master Gardeners Garden Show,** (214) 502-8276, ccmgatx.org/thegardenshow

**Woodville [19-20, 25-26, April 2] Tyler County Dogwood Festival,** (409) 283-2234, tylercountydogwoodfestival.org

24

**Corsicana The Ahn Trio,** (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

**Lufkin The Malpass Brothers,** (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

**Wimberley Moonlight Swing,** (281) 773-8874, wimberleyvalleybigband.org

**Beaumont [24-April 3] South Texas State Fair & Rodeo,** (409) 832-9991, beaumontcvb.com

25

**Brenham Michael Martin Murphey,** (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

**Georgetown [25-26] Tropical Garden Quilt Show,** (512) 658-6973, handcraftsunlimited.com

MORE EVENTS >

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45	\$36	\$54	\$89
50	\$40	\$60	\$99
55	\$45	\$68	\$112
60	\$57	\$85	\$141
65	\$68	\$102	\$170
70	\$87	\$129	\$215
75	\$113	\$169	\$282
80	\$157	\$235	\$391

## 10-Year Term Life

Monthly Premium

Age	\$100,000	\$250,000
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50	\$14	\$24
55	\$20	\$37
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65	\$44	\$102
70	\$87	\$178

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## Pick of the Month

### Texas Storytelling Festival

Denton, March 10-13  
(940) 380-9320  
tejasstorytelling.com

The Tejas Storytelling Association's signature event goes virtual this year. More than 50 storytellers will share ghost stories and Texas tales, and a liars contest and concerts are also on tap.

27

**Galveston The Queen's Cartoonists,**  
1-800-821-1894,  
thegrand.com

**Grand Prairie Ana Gabriel,** (972) 854-5050,  
texastrustcutheatre.com

**Lufkin David Phelps,**  
(936) 633-5454,  
angelinaarts.org

31

**Beaumont Music in the Gardens,** (409) 832-2134,  
mcfaddin-ward.org

**Port Aransas Texas Plastic Pollution Symposium,**  
(361) 749-3046,  
portaransas.org

## APRIL

01

**Galveston A Bronx Tale: Chazz Palminteri,**  
1-800-821-1894,  
thegrand.com

**McAllen Art Crawl,**  
(832) 202-4881,  
exploremcallen.com

02

**Corsicana Texas Country Boys,** (903) 874-7792,  
corsicanapalace.com

**Port Arthur [2-3] Cajun Heritage Fest,**  
(409) 835-2787,  
cajunheritagefest.com

03

**Abilene Dog Man: The Musical,** (325) 677-1161,  
cpasabilene.org

05

**Canyon [5-7] Week of the Young Child: Choose Your Class Adventures,**  
(806) 651-2244,  
panhandleplains.org

07

**Fort Worth [7-10] Main Street Fort Worth Arts Festival,** (817) 336-2787,  
mainstreetartsfest.org

### MARCH EVENTS CONTINUED

25

**Marshall [25-26] East Texas Square and Round Dance Association Festival,** (903) 922-3692,  
etsrda.com

**Burton [25-April 2] La Bahia Antique Show,**  
(979) 289-2684,  
labahiaantiques.com

26

**Burnet Hill Country Lawn and Garden Show,**  
(512) 756-3059,  
burnetcountyhighlandlakesmastergardener.org

**Fredericksburg Hill Country Indian Artifact Show,** (830) 329-2636,  
hillcountryindianartifacts.com

**Huntsville Herb Festival at the Wynne Home,**  
(936) 891-5024,  
texasthymeunit.org

**Lufkin Citizens at Last,** (936) 633-5454,  
angelinaarts.org

**College Station [26-27] Living History Weekend,**  
(979) 690-0501,  
americangimuseum.org

# The Texas Experience

Farming, wildlife, scenic views and music—there's a lot to love about Texas. Grab a chair, pour a glass of iced tea and take a look at how sweet life here is.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

**1 CANDACE PAULY**  
HAMILTON COUNTY EC

As Pauly and her husband bring native Texas species back to their ranch, they were subjected to a ragweed awakening.

**2 JULIANA WALTER**  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Greetings from a young, adorable longhorn in Salado.

**3 TRISH FERGUSON**  
HEART OF TEXAS EC

Sunset at Sotol Vista in Big Bend National Park, one of Texas' hidden treasures.

**4 SUE ROGERS**  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

"Fiddling Ann Leonard (sadly recently deceased) and banjo picker Sue Rogers playing some Texas tunes under the trees."



2



3

## Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAR 10 **Morning Glory**
- DUE APR 10 **Motorsports**
- DUE MAY 10 **Light and Shadow**



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

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for more Texas Experience photos from readers.



4



The author at Blanco State Park.

**TCP** Tell us about your flying leaps into the unknown: [letters@texascooppower.com](mailto:letters@texascooppower.com).

jacket and helmet.

I'm not an adrenaline junkie. I don't take unnecessary risks. But for me, living means doing things that make me a tad nervous. It's why I scuba dive, backpack and try new things. Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I look like an idiot, but I always feel my heart beat and my mind expand.

The go-for-it mindset stems from my upbringing. When I was a kid, my dad took me on pint-size adventures. We explored the woodsy canyon at the end of our street, hopped cedar fences to gaze at dinosaur tracks, took a long drive to scout out a Volkswagen-size boulder balanced on the side of the highway. My dad found wonder in the simplest things, a trait I admire.

A few years ago, after returning from a 15-day backpacking trip on California's John Muir Trail with my husband, who has also clung with me by a metal hook to an ocean reef while hundreds of hammerhead sharks schooled overhead, I declared it my year of adventure. For 12 months I did things that scared me—from jumping off a 10-meter platform into a swimming pool to rappelling down a 38-story building while dressed as Wonder Woman and running a naked (except for a cowboy hat and shoes) 5K.

Injecting adventure into everyday life doesn't have to be extreme. It might be as simple as exploring a new neighborhood or swimming in the dark. It just takes a little creativity.

Search out a park you've never visited. Eat a food you've never tasted. Get on your bicycle and start pedaling. You might end up with a scraped shin or a bruised ego. I've suffered both, hundreds of times over.

But I've also logged some of the most memorable experiences of my life, including that dip in churning water in the Grand Canyon. ■

## Just Add Adventure

Flying leaps into the unknown—above or underwater—are the spice of life

BY PAM LEBLANC  
PHOTO BY CHRIS LEBLANC

**FOR A NANOSECOND**, as I sailed over the side of an 18-foot rubber raft churning through a swirling rapid at the bottom of the Grand Canyon, I second-guessed a personal mantra I adopted a decade ago: Get your hair wet.

Maybe whitewater rafting through waves as big as school buses on a 15-day trip organized by friends wasn't such a good idea. Then I caught a rope on the side of the boat, managed to hoist myself ungracefully back onto the bobbing yellow vessel and saw that my pal Jimmy, who'd also been pitched out, was getting a kayak tow to shore. That's when my belief was reaffirmed.

Yes, it's way better to take a flying leap into the unknown than it is to sit on the sidelines and watch everybody else have fun—as long as you're wearing a life

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