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OF CENTRAL TEXAS

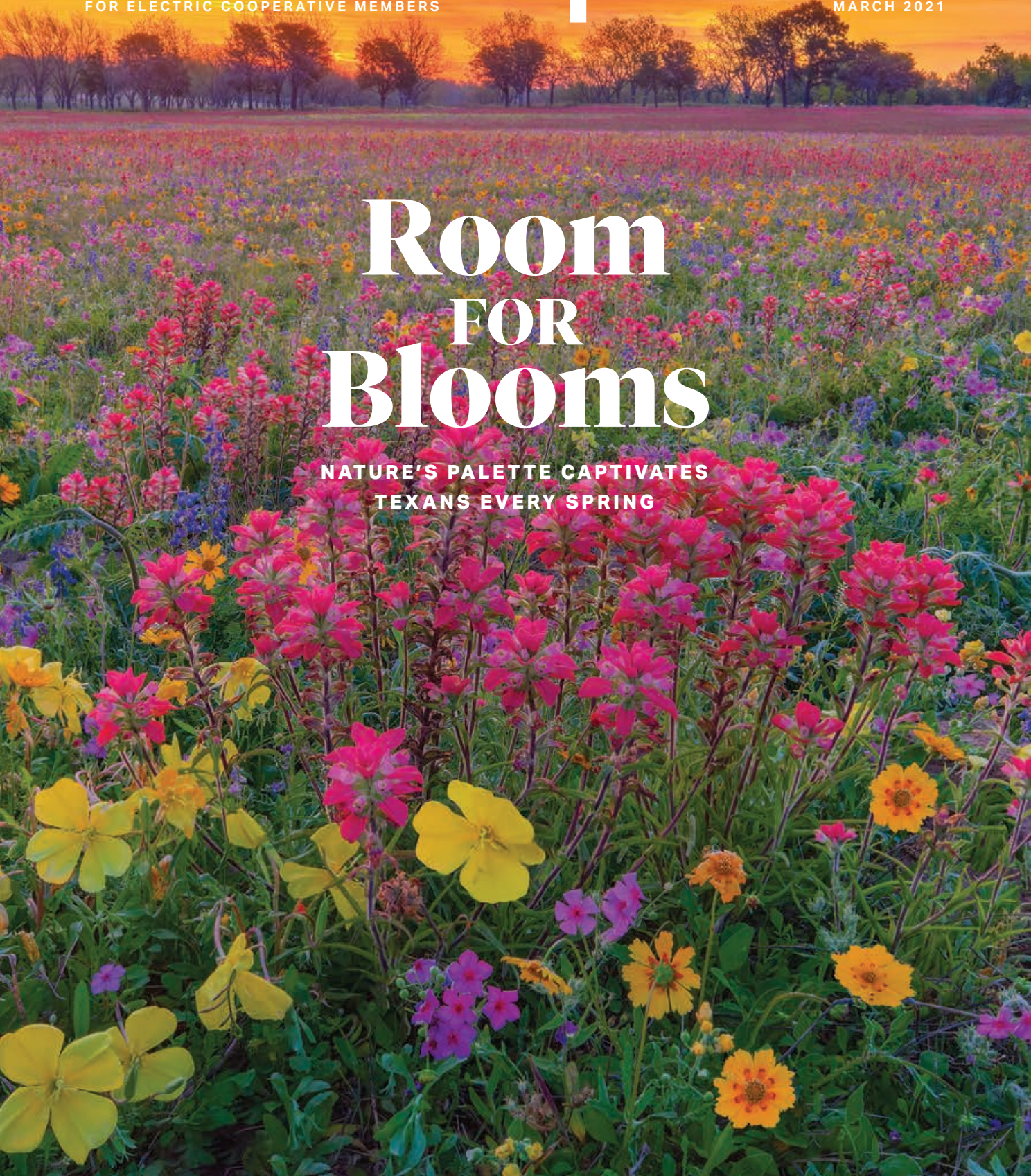
Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

MARCH 2021

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TEXANS EVERY SPRING



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March 2021



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Flower Power

Wildflowers proliferate in an explosion of color along the highways and byways of Texas each spring, inspiring artists to capture the state's wild beauty and luring travelers off the beaten path.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

ON THE COVER

A red patch of Indian paintbrush highlights a field of wildflowers near New Berlin.

ABOVE

A firewheel.

Photos by Rob Greebon

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Few and Far

By Eli Winter

Month of Tweets

OF THE 654 SPECIES of birds documented in Texas, over half are migratory. Millions of these will fly the Texas skies starting this month on their way to northern breeding grounds after wintering in Mexico and Central and South America.

Some species, such as the prothonotary warbler, below, and red-eyed vireo, will go no farther north than Texas, where they'll make their home until the fall, when they migrate south again.



Scout's Honor

Since the Boy Scouts of America created the Eagle Scout rank in 1911, about 2.6 million Americans have earned one of Scouting's highest honors. Until last year, all Eagle Scouts were boys.

When Abby Winkelman, whose family is a member of Sam Houston Electric Cooperative, became an Eagle Scout in October, when she was 14, she made history, becoming one of the first girls to reach the rank.

"I don't think I've ever set a goal this ambitious for myself, so I'm just really proud of myself that I met my goal," said Winkelman, of Troop 5131 in Austin, "and I planned and I got help from all my friends and all my community."



Hank the Cool Dog

Texas' coolest dog meets Texas' coolest character.

A new podcast series stars Matthew McConaughey as Hank the Cowdog, based on the long-running series of children's books written by Texan John R. Erickson, illustrated by Gerald L. Holmes and set in the Panhandle.

The podcast, which debuted in the fall, is available on all major podcast platforms.

“I will never forsake Texas and her cause. I am her son.”

—JOSÉ ANTONIO NAVARRO

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

THE SONG THAT GOT ME THROUGH A YEAR OF PANDEMIC IS ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our January prompt:

Life was better ...

When my skate key was hanging around my neck, my knees were scabbed and the wind was blowing my hair from my face.

JANICE F. CONWAY
TRINITY VALLEY EC
KEMP

Before COVID-19.

GARY GALLOWAY
TRI-COUNTY EC
WEATHERFORD

When we could reach out and touch someone, literally. I miss hugs and handshakes.

CARMEN LOCKSTEDT
VICTORIA EC
VICTORIA

When the only screen we had was in our door, and we could see through it.

PATRICIA RAPACKI
MIDSOUTH EC
MONTGOMERY

After I recovered from ovarian cancer.

SHERRI JEFFERY
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
MCKINNEY

To see more responses, read Currents online.



Drink to That?

USING HOUSTON as a model, researchers at Rice University have developed a plan to recycle wastewater economically and make it drinkable, which could reduce the need for surface water—from rivers, reservoirs and wells—by 28%.

“All the technologies needed to treat wastewater to drinking water quality are available,” Rice researcher Qilin Li said. “The issue is that today they’re still pretty expensive.”

This proposed system makes up for that by bringing down the cost of a city’s water supply. Recycled water doesn’t have to travel as far and is therefore cheaper.

Cheers.



TCP Contests and More

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RUSSELL A. GRAVES

Captured!

“Katmai National Park and Preserve holds a contest every year to name the fattest bear at Brooks Falls.”

JULIA FRANKENFIELD
MIDSOUTH EC
MONTGOMERY

No Fan of the Span

My wife drove across it with our teenage son in 1985 and could not drive back [*The Scariest Bridge in Texas*, January 2021]. It was so traumatizing for her that she has not been able to drive over any multilevel highway overpass, interstate or other even moderately high bridge since.

It should have a warning sign.

William Hamlin
Tri-County EC
Keller



Crossed it pulling a six-horse trailer with a truck full of squealing little girls [*The Scariest Bridge in Texas*, January 2021]. Not something I care to repeat.

KAY MOTLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

A World Opens

The Carnegie library of my hometown of Terrell did indeed fill a real need [*Literary Fortunes*, January 2021]. As a boy I was able to jump on my bike and spend time looking through the stacks and especially enjoying the reference room. The whole world opened for me.

Dan Wood Jr.
Trinity Valley EC
Terrell

Dialect in Danger

The Texas German dialect and culture are slowly dying out as they are not passed on to younger generations [*Burgs in a New Land*, December 2020]. Within the next 20 years, the Texas German dialect will become extinct after being spoken for close to 200 years.

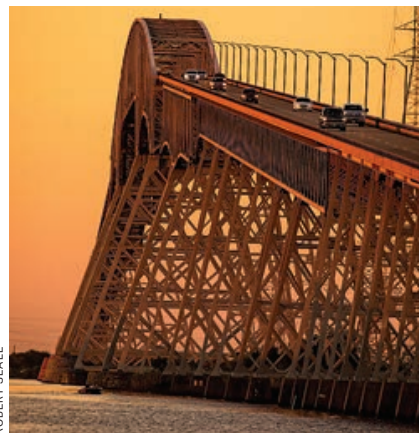
In 2001, I founded the Texas German Dialect Project at the University of Texas to record this unique dialect.

Hans Boas
Pedernales EC
Austin

Thank you for the article about the fear of crossing bridges and high overpasses. I am that person. I will go out of my way to avoid the flyovers in Houston and any other high or narrow bridge.

I no doubt annoy drivers behind me when I have no choice but to use one of these structures, and I crawl across it, white-knuckled, at 40 mph.

Linda Secrist
San Bernard EC
Magnolia



ROBERT SEALE

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

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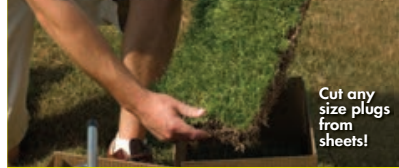


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SEASONAL SWAY OF COLORS
DRIVES TEXANS WILD

Flower POWER

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

NATURE'S PALETTE CAPTIVATES Texans every spring. Sapphire blue, lemony yellow, crimson red, golden orange, lavender purple and ivory white. We love our wildflowers so much that we'll drive great distances to see them. Frame their colors in countless photos. Designate official state titles in their honor. Celebrate their return with festivals, parades and dances. Spread their seeds across our yards, campuses and roadsides. Pen words, compose music and paint landscapes that hail their natural glory.

We also revere the Texans who've promoted our 5,000-plus species of wildflowers and native plants. Foremost was Lady Bird Johnson, who started her national highway cleanup campaign during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency and co-founded the National Wildflower Research Center in 1982. Now called the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, the 284-acre complex in Austin supports the Botanic Garden and Arboretum of Texas as well as cultivated gardens and wild natural areas.

Another wildflower hero is Carroll Abbott of Kerrville, a native plant expert who lobbied in 1981 to establish the fourth Saturday in April as Texas Wildflower Day. That same year he was instrumental in founding the Native Plant Society of Texas, which now boasts 34 chapters with 2,800 members.

Other wildflower advocates made a difference, too. San Antonio civic leader Sallie Ward Beretta launched a state-wide campaign in the 1920s to stop the bluebonnet from being overpicked. As president of the City Federation of Women's Clubs and the San Antonio Council of Girl Scouts, she recruited volunteers to gather seedpods in fields around the city. Then they shared the seeds with other cities across the state and nation.

Large or small, every effort to protect our wildflowers makes a difference. You can do your part: Please don't pick, trample or uproot bluebonnets or any other wildflowers. No law prohibits Texans from picking bluebonnets unless they're on private property or state park land, but any flower picked or damaged can't reseed for the next spring's bloom.

So welcome back, wildflowers. We look forward to yet another glorious show!



ROB GREEBON | IMAGESFROMTEXAS.COM



A field of bluebonnets in the southern Chisos Mountains welcomes the sun as it rises on Big Bend National Park.

WELL, I DO DECLARE!
OFFICIAL STATE DESIGNATIONS

Officially WILD

STATE FLOWER

Most U.S. states claim one official state flower. Not Texas. We have at least 16. In 1901 the bluebonnet (*Lupinus subcarnosus*) went up against the prickly pear and cotton boll for the right to be named state flower. Rep. John “Cactus Jack” Nance Garner of Uvalde lobbied for the cactus bloom. Other legislators argued that cotton had made Texas rich. In the end, the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America carried the day, and the bluebonnet won.

But floral dissent wasn’t over. Many didn’t like the bluebonnet choice. Of the state’s six bluebonnet species, *Lupinus subcarnosus* was the “least attractive,” opined botanist Howard S. Irwin in *Roadside Flowers of Texas*. So in 1971 state lawmakers amended legislation to include the more popular Texas bluebonnet (*Lupinus texensis*) in addition to *Lupinus subcarnosus* and all other varieties of bluebonnet as the official state flower.

Since then, horticulturalists have developed different colors of bluebonnets, such as white and maroon. To date, they’ve introduced at least 10 bluebonnet varieties. Thus, Texas has at least 16 official state flowers ... for now.



WILDFLOWER CAPITAL OF TEXAS

DeWitt County

Wildflower trails crisscross DeWitt County, northwest of Victoria, where more than 1,000 wildflower species have been documented. A 1999 resolution adopted by the Texas House recognized the county as the Wildflower Capital of Texas.

TEXAS WILDFLOWER DAY

Fourth Saturday in April

In April 1981 the Legislature declared the fourth Saturday of April as Texas Wildflower Day. The resolution asks the governor “to issue an appropriate proclamation annually” to encourage the proper observance of the special day.

BLUEBONNET CO-CAPITALS OF TEXAS

Burnet and Llano counties

Every spring visitors admire wildflowers along the Highland Lakes Bluebonnet Trail, which winds through Burnet and Llano counties in Central Texas. In 1981 the Legislature designated the pair as Bluebonnet Co-capitals of Texas.



EDDIE WHITE

STATE FLOWER SONG

Bluebonnets

Our state flower song, *Bluebonnets*, has roots in Washington County. Julia D. Booth of Chappell Hill wrote lyrics for the song, which was composed by piano teacher Lora C. Crockett. On February 8, 1933, Alice Clay Rountt of Chappell Hill, accompanied by Crockett on the piano, sang the tune for the Texas House. It was then adopted as the state flower song by the Legislature.

OFFICIAL BLUEBONNET FESTIVAL OF TEXAS

Chappell Hill Bluebonnet Festival

The Chappell Hill Historical Society hosted its first bluebonnet festival in 1964, calling it the Bluebonnet Antique Show. In 1983 the name changed to Chappell Hill Bluebonnet Festival. In 1997 the Legislature named the event, in the town east of Brenham, as the Official Bluebonnet Festival of Texas.

**WILDFLOWER SEEDING
BRIGHTENS ROAD TRIPS**

Take It ON THE ROAD

SINCE THE 1930s the Texas Department of Transportation has planted native flowers and grasses along state highways. In 1934 the agency directed staff not to mow until wildflowers had set seed, a policy that still guides mowing schedules.

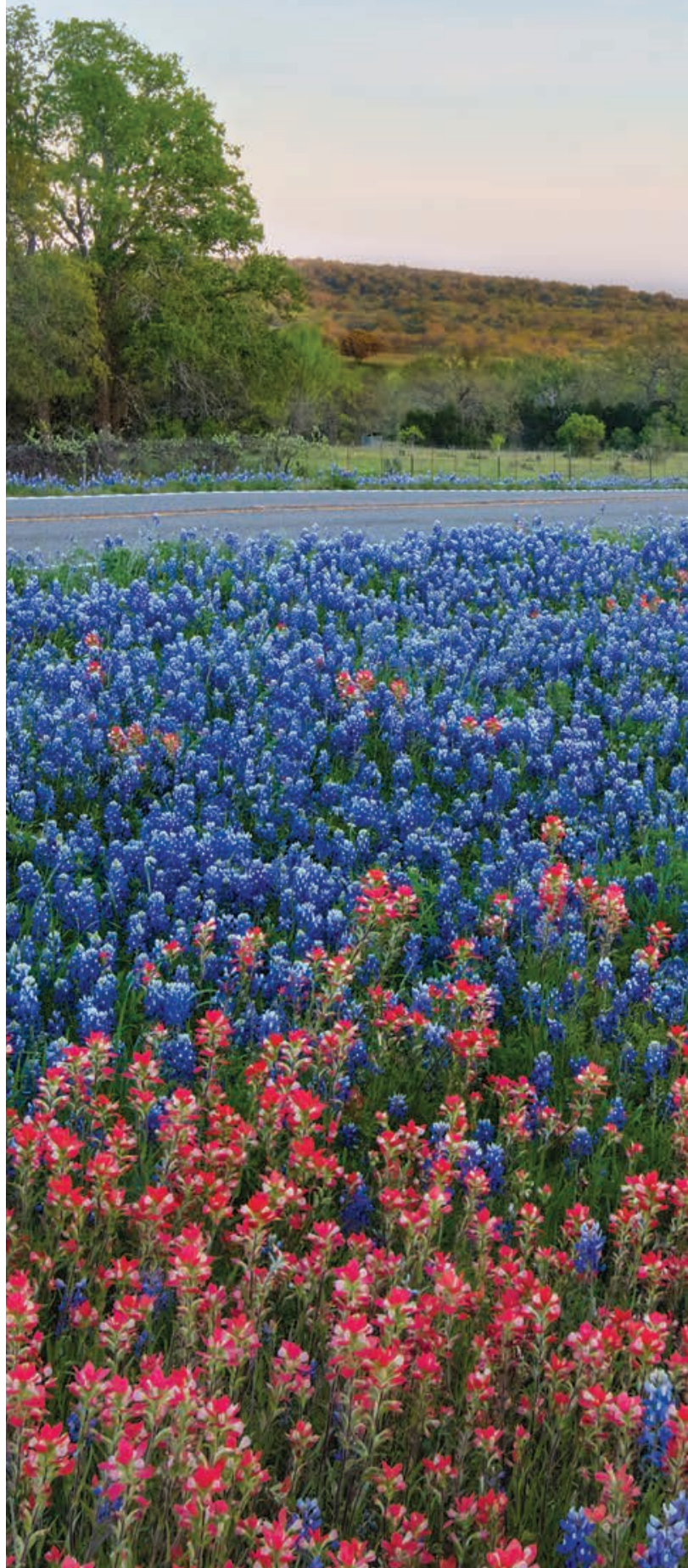
TxDOT's wildflower program has expanded in both scope and vision, and the department now maintains 800,000 acres of roadside along with 80 safety rest stops and 12 travel information centers. Every year TxDOT must reseed approximately 4,800 construction projects.

Enter native plants, which require less care, provide wildlife habitat and increase biodiversity. "Every fall we sow approximately 30,000 pounds of native flower and grass seed mixes," says Travis Jez, a TxDOT vegetation specialist. "Because monarch butterflies have become a species of major concern, we're also planting pollinator gardens and milkweeds, such as zizotes. What's cool is that all pollinators benefit."

No single seed source can supply the 15 tons that TxDOT sows annually. So Jez works with six Texas companies that specialize in producing seeds for native species. TxDOT also collaborates with Texas Native Seeds of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, a nonprofit program that develops commercial seed supplies of native plants for use in restoring habitats on private and public lands. The program supports six regional projects that select and grow plants endemic to their areas.

While you're searching for wildflowers, look out for bright green carpets along Texas roadsides. Those indicate that the areas have been hydroseeded with a slurry of seeds, mulch and water. "The process is used for spreading seeds and to control erosion," Jez explains. "The mulch also holds in water and helps the seedlings get started."

As for the green color, "It allows applicants to see where they've sprayed the slurry," Jez says.



ROB GREEBON | IMAGESFROMTEXAS.COM



Bluebonnets and Indian paintbrush accompany travelers along a stretch of Texas 16 in Gillespie County.

MARY MOTZ WILLS'
WILDFLOWER WATERCOLORS

Picture THIS

IN APRIL 1961 nature enthusiasts hurraed the publication of *Roadside Flowers of Texas*. The classic guide written by botanist Howard S. Irwin showcases 257 wildflower paintings by Mary Motz Wills, a prolific artist and amateur botanist whose work was exhibited nationally. Her attention to the smallest details led to floral watercolors that were, as one columnist noted, “botanically accurate as well as artistically superb.”

Wills attended formal art schools and began painting flowers in 1913 while recovering from an illness in Panama, where her husband, a U.S. Army colonel, was stationed. After his death in 1925, Wills moved to Georgia and then to Abilene, where she aspired to record as many Texas flowers and plants as she could.

At her home studio, Wills painted plants that she collected or were sent to her by friends. She sometimes woke at 4 a.m. or worked through the night to capture blooms in their most natural form. “Some flowers only bloom at night, so I stay up until I get them painted,” she told a newspaper reporter in 1958.

A stickler for accuracy, Wills often noted on her paintings the common and botanical name of plants and where they grew in the wild.

In all, Wills produced more than 2,000 Texas botanical paintings. Many of the plants that she painted “were endangered species in her day, and some have disappeared entirely since then,” writes Cecilia Steinfeldt in *Art for History’s Sake: The Texas Collection of the Witte Museum*.

Wills died at 86 in 1961. Today, many of her delicate watercolors are housed for safe-keeping in Austin’s Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, San Antonio’s Witte Museum and Abilene’s Grace Museum. ■

TCP WEB EXTRA Pick up more wildflower facts and win a book that can make you an expert.



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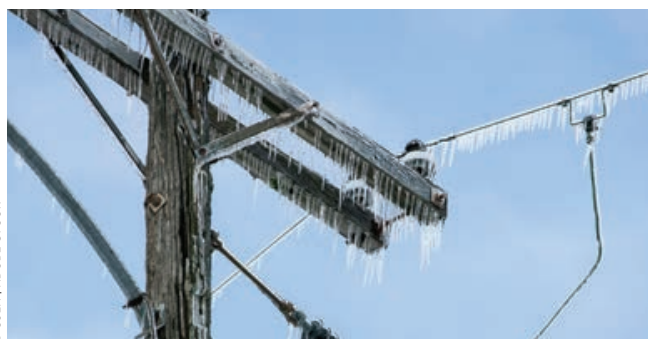


WHARTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE



MESSAGE FROM YOUR GENERAL MANAGER/CEO
GARY RAYBON

Winter Storm Impacts WCEC Members



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WE HAVE RECEIVED MANY INQUIRIES on how the winter storm and resulting ERCOT mandated rotating outages will affect our members' electricity bills. Unfortunately, there will be some affect and bills will more than likely be higher in th coming months. However, this is where being a member of an electric cooperative has its advantages.

WCEC is a distribution cooperative. This means we only distribute electricity; we do not produce it. We are a member of a generation and transmission cooperative, South Texas Electric Cooperative (STEC). STEC produces the electricity that we purchase for and distribute to our members.

Under normal circumstances, STEC produces or has fir contracts for the power to meet the needs of their distribution cooperatives. However, they are required to be a part of the statewide grid which is managed by the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). When STEC's generation ability is lower than the demand or if it is more economical to buy energy rather than run its own resources, they have the ability to purchase power from the statewide market. If STEC is capable of generating more than the Cooperative members need, they can sell the excess into the market. Even if STEC were not required to be a part of ERCOT, there are many advantages to

doing so. Being a part of the statewide grid ensures that any failures or issues in STEC's generation fleet can be covered b the market. The downside is that even though STEC had more than enough generation to serve their members during the freeze, they were required to participate in the rotating outages to keep the grid stable.

STEC's owned and contracted resources may very well be the saving grace for our members here at WCEC and those across STEC's service territory.

We do expect higher than normal power cost for our February wholesale power bill from STEC. As of February 22, 2021, STEC has not been able to estimate how much higher. We do know that during the freeze, STEC provided all the power needed to their members. This will insulate us from the high bills we are hearing about on the news. The higher-than-normal cost that we will see from STEC will be the result of exorbitant natural gas prices that STEC was paying during the event. During the freeze, natural gas costs rose as high as \$400.00 per MMBTU verses the normal \$3.00 per MMBTU. As a cooperative, we cannot absorb this spike in energy cost. However, through Power Cost Recovery Factor (PCRF), we can spread it out over the coming months.

PCRF is a part of WCEC's rate structure that is a direct refle - tion of the fluctuating cost of fuel required to run an electri generation plant. When fuel prices rise, it costs STEC more to produce power and those costs are passed through to WCEC members through the PCRF. Although WCEC's rates have not changed, the PCRF is always fluctuating. To minimize th impact of this charge on our members, every attempt is made to "level" the PCRF every month.

Rest assured WCEC leadership and the board of directors will be doing everything in their power to minimize the impact of this unprecedented event on our members. As we receive

“As we...begin to recover, know that WCEC will do all that we can to make any hardships felt by our members more bearable.”

concrete numbers for the wholesale power costs, we will keep our members informed of the long-term effects of this event

With that being said, the electricity bill that you will receive on or about March 1, will be higher as a direct reflection of increase energy use during the cold weather. The PCRFB has not been affected yet. As a matter of fact the PCRFB for this bill will be the exact same as the January 2021 and the February 2020 bills.

The average residential use over the last five Februaries has been 1,28 kWh per account. The 3-day freeze in January 2018 resulted in an average use increase of 36%. In comparison, most of our service territory experienced below freezing, often record-breaking, temperatures over a span of 8 days. This will result in higher-than-average bills.

WCEC offers many ways for our members to monitor their energy use on daily basis. The easiest way is to download our SmartHub app. Daily use can also be viewed through SmartHub on our website.

At this time, WCEC will be waiving all late fees and pausing all disconnects on delinquent accounts that are a result of the winter storm. Please keep in mind that we cannot forgive or waive your electricity bill. We will do all that we can to make payment arrangements or find help for those that may need it. Please call our office at 979-543-6271 to discuss your account with our staff if you will be unable to make a timely payment.

As a cooperative member, all of us at WCEC work for you. We are led by a board of directors that are elected by you. WCEC is a not-for-profit electrical cooperative. Our revenue goes directly into the improvement of our electrical system to keep our service reliable or back to our members in the form of capital credits.

As we move forward and begin to recover, know that WCEC will do all that we can to make any hardships felt by our members more bearable.

If you have any questions, our staff is more than happy to help you Monday – Friday from 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. at 979-543-6271. ■

WINTER STORM BILLING Q&A

Will my electric bill cost more?

Yes, the cost of electric bills will increase for two reasons:

kWh Consumption Has Increased

- ▶ Electric heating uses nearly double as much electricity as cooling.
- ▶ With extended periods of temperatures below 30 degrees and keeping a home at 60 degrees, the 30 degrees temperature difference will cause your electric heating to run significantly longer, this increases kWh consumption.
- ▶ Please visit MyWCEC.coop/SmartHub to view your daily kWh usage.

Rates Will Likely Increase, But Not Drastically

- ▶ Our power supply contracts were sufficient to meet our member's needs. We did not have to purchase the increased \$9,000/MWh wholesale power you may have heard about resulting from this winter storm event.
- ▶ Natural gas cost did rise and that will cause us some increase in our cost.
- ▶ We are still gathering information and don't have all of the details. As information becomes available, we will share with our members.

What if I cannot afford to pay my electric bill?

Please call our office at 979-543-6271 and we will work with you to arrange a payment plan. At this time, late payments are being waived and disconnections for non-payment due to the winter storm have been paused.

Visit MyWCEC.coop/PaymentAssist to view a list of social assistance agencies that might have funds to help with your electric bill.

Please see this month's Message From Your General Manager/CEO beginning on Page 19 for details. ■



Track Your Energy Use With SmartHub

Through WCEC's SmartHub app and online portal, you can see your current bill, your billing history, and view your actual energy use. This can help you see how your use is trending over time, which will allow you to take steps to lower your bill.

Find out more at MyWCEC.coop/SmartHub.



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How Your Electric Co-op Is Governed

WHARTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE functions under a unique business model. Like all co-ops, we are member-owned, governed by specific rules and principles, and committed to the Seven Cooperative Principles.

As a cooperative, WCEC is a nonprofit organization owned by those it serves—that's you!

Your membership means you are vested in the organization, and the money you pay for electrical service goes into the operation, maintenance and improvement of the electrical distribution infrastructure.

It's been that way since 1938, as laid out in our articles of incorporation. Additionally, WCEC follows the rules set forth in our bylaws, which provide a detailed description of how the cooperative functions and is structured.

Overseeing the operations of the cooperative is a board of directors. The board is made up of members who live in our community and use the electricity that we provide. The membership (that's you again!) elects them to their positions. Board members meet regularly to help ensure that the co-op meets the needs of its members, and they partake in training opportunities to stay up to date on co-op operations and industry information.

Board members are elected at WCEC's Annual Meeting of Members. Directors serve three-year terms with three seats up for election each year. Directors may serve up to nine consecutive years or three three-year terms. This year, nominations are being taken for Districts 3,6,9.

If you are interested in serving on the board and live in one of these districts, please contact Brenda Rodriguez at 979-543-6271.

Also guiding the smooth operation of the cooperative are a general manager and a staff of skilled professionals, including member service personnel, dispatchers, lineworkers, engineers, technicians and more.

It takes the entire team, board of directors and members to keep WCEC operating the way it was intended and providing safe and reliable electricity in our communities. ■

Retrofit Manufactured Homes for Efficiency

TAKING THE TIME to make your manufactured home more energy efficient can lower energy costs, improve comfort and increase resale value.

Before 1976, home design standards didn't take into account energy efficiency the same way today's building codes do. Here are some suggestions to make your manufactured home more energy efficient:

- ▶ Install energy-efficient windows and doors.
- ▶ Add insulation to the belly and walls.
- ▶ Seal drafts and ducts with caulk, metal tape or weatherstripping.
- ▶ Install insulated skirting.
- ▶ Install a belly wrap.
- ▶ Add insulation to the roof or install a roof cap.
- ▶ Consider a cool-roof coating or white roof.
- ▶ Service the furnace and replace the air filter.
- ▶ Repair loose ducts or joints with metal tape.
- ▶ Insulate the electric water heater tank and pipes. ■



DANIEL EITZEN | ISTOCK.COM

HOME TEAM SPOTLIGHT

Meet WCEC's Jayson McKeon

AT WCEC, WE PRIDE ourselves on outstanding member service and make every effort to play a key role in our community.

As our employees interact with you, our members, we want you to get to know them beyond their job title. Each month, we feature a TEAM member here.

This month's HOME TEAM SPOTLIGHT features Jayson McKeon.

Jayson has been a member of the WCEC HOME TEAM since 2019. He is an Apprentice Lineman in the second of the five phases of our Apprentice Lineman Training Program.

The cooperative's lineman training is a four-year program designed to teach the skills needed to safely and efficiently perform all types of electrical overhead and underground line work. It includes on-the-job training as well as off-premise classroom and hands-on training through Texas Electric Cooperatives.

Jayson is a Louise High School graduate and worked in the refrigeration industry for 16 years before coming to WCEC. However, he says electricity has always interested him.

"I can remember as a young boy seeing linemen out working on power lines and thinking it must be rewarding to have the training to work with thousands of volts safely," he says.

"As an apprentice, I feel this is the most crucial time in my career here. I know how important this training is to



being a successful Journeyman Lineman.

"The hazardous conditions we face requires knowledge and a watchful eye," he continues. "I love the work that I do, but more importantly, I appreciate my co-workers and the fact that we are like family. We trust each other when it comes to doing the job safely. That kind of trust creates a special brotherhood that I haven't had at any other job."

Jayson and his wife Mallory have two young sons, Jacob and John.

They enjoy their local community because it is small enough to know their neighbors including their families and, sometimes, even their pets.

In their spare time, they enjoy camping together.

"Showing my kids how to enjoy the outdoors is important to me," he says. "It's one of the best ways to clear your mind."

When asked who he would have lunch with out of anyone, alive or dead, he says, "My brother, Jeffery. We lost him in 2011 to a car accident, and it's still tough to not be able to pick up the phone to talk to him."

His dream vacation would be a trip to Ireland to take in the scenery and visit the old castles.

"A fresh pint of Guinness would be a must, too!" He says.

The best advice he's ever received is to focus not just on the present, but to work for the future as well. He strives to live up to this advice and hopes to someday be a Journeyman Lineman that younger apprentices can look up to and learn from.

He describes himself as loyal, hardworking and respectful. We couldn't agree more. We know that Jayson will continue to be a valuable member of the line crew, and are proud to have him on your WCEC HOME TEAM. ■



NORTONRSX | ISTOCK.COM

Stay Away From Scams That Promise Savings

AS INTEREST IN green energy programs grows, consumers are discovering that not every claim to energy efficiency is true.

Dishonest people are taking advantage of the movement's popularity to deceive others for their personal gain. Ploys include products that promise to work miracles, fake contractors who run away with customers' money, energy company impersonators and cybercrime.

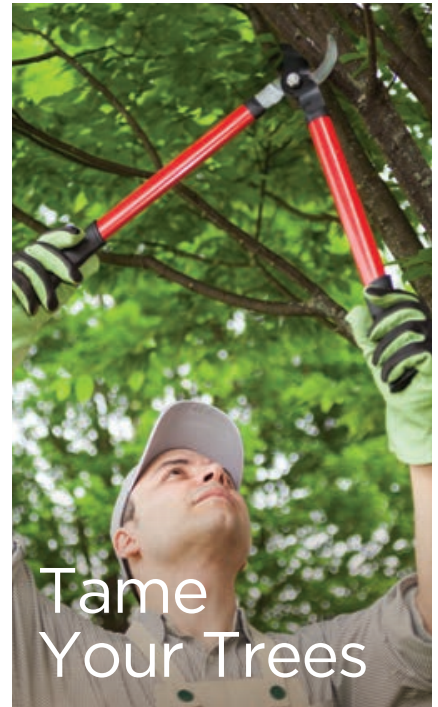
Several bogus products on the market today claim to reduce power usage. One such product is sometimes described as a "power saver" or "power factor corrector" that plugs into an electrical outlet or is hard-wired into an electrical panel. The nefarious manufacturers of these products claim that electricity use is lower when something is plugged into it. These simply don't work. Also beware of any device that requires tampering with an electric meter, which is dangerous and illegal.

Phony contractors might use a made-up license number to sell products and services such as solar panels and installation, or offer energy efficiency repairs. Be sure to look into the legitimacy of a company by contacting the state licensing board and checking the Better Business Bureau before signing any contracts or paying for any services.

Impostors posing as utility employees sometimes go door to door offering to do energy audits or make electricity repairs. They might try high-pressure tactics, make false promises or attempt to collect personal info. Be especially suspicious of pairs of workers: One might attempt to distract you while the other steals your valuables. Never let into your home anyone who claims to be with Wharton County Electric Cooperative without first checking with the co-op.

Phishing emails that appear to come from the U.S. Department of Energy might falsely promise a tax refund for green home improvements. Don't open the email or any attachment, and don't respond to any requests for information. The email could contain a computer virus or be an attempt to collect your personal information.

Remember, some of the best ways to save energy are simple behavioral changes—such as replacing incandescent lightbulbs with LEDs and using power strips—which don't require purchasing anything new or installing expensive equipment. ■



Tame Your Trees

MINERVA STUDIO | ISTOCK.COM

We love our trees, but when branches are too close to power lines, they can cause power outages, fire hazards and other safety concerns. Here are some rules to follow:

If a tree or a large branch is touching—or falls on—an electric line, call your electric cooperative immediately.

Never trim trees that grow close to power lines; that is a job for professionals. Call your electric cooperative for assistance and guidance.

Use extreme caution when doing any overhead trimming. Branches often fall in unexpected places.

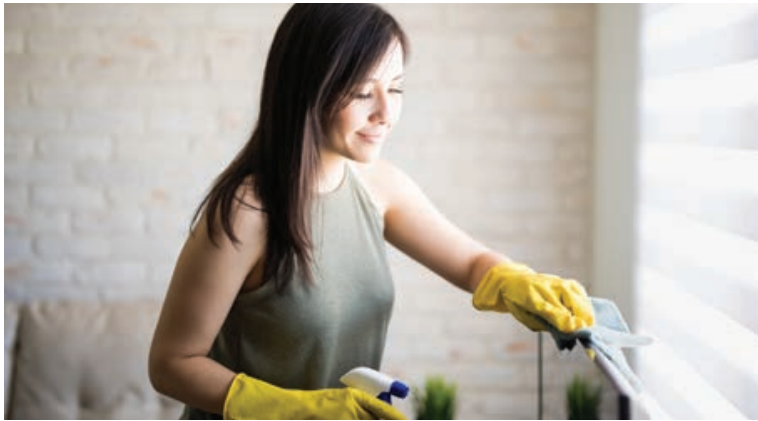
Don't allow children to climb trees or build treehouses close to power lines.

Plant appropriate distances from all power lines.

When planting a tree, consider how tall the tree will grow. At maturity, trees should be at least 10 feet away from power lines.

WCEC encourages you to always practice safety.

DIY Energy Efficiency Spring Cleaning Tips



ANTONIO DIAZ | ISTOCK.COM

Adding a few extra chores to your spring cleaning list can help save energy and money leading into air conditioning season. Keep these tips in mind.

Dust your lamps and light bulbs.

Replace burned-out incandescent bulbs with energy-efficient LEDs.

Clean the air filter. If it's over a month old, replace it. Replacing air filters allows your air conditioning system to run more efficiently.

Clean the air return vents. And make sure drapes and furniture aren't blocking the flow of air.

Vacuum your refrigerator's coils. The dust buildup can cause the fridge to run less efficiently.

Thoroughly dust your electronics. If they're not in use, unplug them. ■



SAVE THE DATE!

THE WHARTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE Annual Meeting of Members will be held on Wednesday, June 16, 2021.

Due to COVID-19, final details have not been determined at this time. As these details become available, they will be released here in Texas Co-op Power, in the El Campo Leader-News, on KULP 106.7 FM, and through our social media channels.

Find out more at MyWCEC.coop/AnnualMeeting.



RICK PATRICK

Susan's Sriracha Bacon Chicken Bites

4 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (6 ounces each or about 1½ pounds total)

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons fresh lime juice

2 tablespoons Sriracha sauce

½ teaspoon cumin

16 slices bacon

⅓ cup packed light brown sugar

1. Cut each chicken breast into large, bite-size (about 1-inch) chunks and put them in a 1-gallon zipper bag.

2. Stir together oil, lime juice, Sriracha sauce and cumin and pour over the chicken. Let marinate for about 1 hour.

3. Cut each bacon slice into 2 pieces and drape each piece over and around a chicken cube, securing with a toothpick. Arrange wraps on a flat surface and sprinkle evenly with brown sugar.

4. Spray top rack of a broiler pan with high-temperature grilling spray and arrange chicken wraps on top.

5. Bake 6 inches under the broiling element at 350 degrees for 25–28 minutes or until chicken is cooked through.

6. When chicken is cooked, set oven to broil and broil about 3–6 minutes, watching carefully all the while, until sugar starts to brown and edges of bacon are crisp.

Makes 32 appetizers.

TCP Find this and more delicious recipes online at TexasCoopPower.com.



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Scholarships Available In Lieu of Youth Tour

THE CANCELLATION OF THE 2021 Government-in-Action Youth Tour was a disappointment to all of us here at Wharton County Electric Cooperative. Youth Tour represents one of our most important investments in the future of the communities we serve.

In the spirit of serving our community and the youth of our membership, the WCEC Board of Directors has opted to award \$2,500 scholarships to three graduating high school seniors this year.

“We realize that losing the opportunity to take this trip of a lifetime is discouraging. Especially for students graduating this year that will not have the chance to apply next year,” WCEC GM/CEO Gary Raybon says.

“Awarding scholarships in lieu of the trip is our way of softening the blow so to speak. We still want to invest in the future of our cooperative and our communities.”

To be eligible for the scholarship, the student must be a graduating senior in 2021. The parent or legal guardian of the student must be an active residential member of Wharton County Electric Cooperative.

Applicants must submit a fully completed application as well as a 500-word essay or 5-7 minute video presentation covering the following topic: “Energy Conservation: What Can One Person Do?”

The application and full details are available at the WCEC Office El Campo and online at MyWCEC.coop/YouthTour. The deadline for applications is Friday, April 9, 2021. ■



Wharton County Electric Cooperative

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GENERAL MANAGER/CEO

Gary Raybon

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- DISTRICT 2: Patrick Kubala
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- DISTRICT 4: Rick Graff, Secretary-Treasurer
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Sunday, March 14

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Wednesday, March 17

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Wounded— Then Rejected

The first casualty of the Texas Revolution, a free Black man, had to fight for his residency in the new republic

BY MICHAEL HURD

SAMUEL MCCULLOCH JR. was biracial but considered a free Black man when, as a soldier with the Texian army, he was wounded during the Battle of Goliad on October 9, 1835, and considered the first casualty of the Texas Revolution. A musket ball shattered his right shoulder, and despite his injury and service, the postwar Texas government ordered him and all other free Blacks to leave.

Then, in a series of conflicting legislative moves, things got confusing. Could he stay, or did he have to go?

McCulloch was born in 1810 in South Carolina. His father was white, and his mother was Black, but no other records

of her status exist. McCulloch Sr. moved his son and three daughters, all considered free, to Texas, where they settled near the Gulf Coast in what is now Jackson County in May 1835.

The Battle of Goliad was the second skirmish of the revolution, coming one week after the brief skirmish known as the Battle of Gonzales and just four days after McCulloch joined the Texian army as a private with the 50-man Matagorda Volunteer Company. When the force attacked a Mexican army camp, McCulloch was first to enter the fort and the lone soldier wounded. The injury left his shoulder permanently disabled.

After the war McCulloch's residence status quickly began to twist and turn. Initially, the republic's constitution, adopted in September 1836, prohibited citizenship for "Africans and the descendants of Africans and Indians" and required all free Blacks to apply to the Congress for permanent residence. McCulloch made the required application for himself and his sisters in 1837, recounting his military service and stating that he had been "deprived of the privileges of citizenship by reason of an unfortunate admixture of African blood."

On June 5, 1837, the republic passed a law that permitted free Blacks to keep their residency if they had been living in Texas before the Republic's Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836.

With his petition still pending, McCulloch saw his residency status further imperiled on February 5, 1840. That's when an act was passed to prohibit the immigration of free Blacks and demand that all free Black residents vacate the republic within two years or be sold into slavery.

McCulloch filed a successful second petition, likely because of the Ashworth Act, passed December 12, 1840. This legislation provided that the Ashworth families, Black relatives in Jefferson County, could remain in Texas after influential whites intervened.

As a disabled veteran, McCulloch was eligible for a land grant and was awarded one league (4,428 acres) of land, two-thirds of which he chose to ranch and farm near Von Ormy.

Despite his land and his disability, McCulloch soldiered again, fighting in the battle of Plum Creek in 1840 against Comanches and serving as a spy during the Mexican invasion of San Antonio in 1842. He died in Von Ormy on November 2, 1893. ■

Tacos

Some of the most creative and complex flavors ever to meet a tortilla

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

This month, readers treat us to a variety of taco recipes, so naturally we crave salsa. We turn to Austin food advocate and community coordinator Héctor González, who has been sharing his recipes since moving from Mexico. "There are taquerías there that established their fame based on their salsas," González says. But, he says, you don't have to limit the versatile ingredient's use to a condiment—it is also the perfect base for cocktails. This salsa can easily be adapted to your tastes. Increase or decrease the jalapeño pepper or try a habanero if you want an extra kick.

Roasted Red Salsa

6 plum tomatoes
1 medium white onion, halved
3–5 cloves garlic
1–2 hot peppers, such as jalapeños, serranos or habaneros
Fresh cilantro (optional)
Salt, to taste

COOK'S TIP You can turn this salsa into a michelada. Press $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salsa through a fine mesh strainer into a pint glass. Add 1 tablespoon lime juice and 1 teaspoon salt, or more to taste, then slowly pour in 12 ounces of Mexican lager. Cheers!

1. Roast the tomatoes, onion, garlic and peppers on the stovetop or under a broiler. Turn vegetables as needed, blackening all over. Keep an eye on the garlic and peppers, as they will roast faster than the tomatoes.
2. Add roasted vegetables, and cilantro if you like, to a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. A couple of pinches of salt will bring the salsa's brightness to the fore. Taste and adjust seasoning to your liking. You can serve this salsa warm, or chill until ready to serve.

MAKES ABOUT 3 CUPS

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Butternut Squash Tacos With Black Beans.





Fajita Tacos With Chimichurri Sauce

KITTIELE POTTS
BOWIE-CASS EC

For her fajita tacos, Potts uses a zippy chimichurri sauce that pairs beautifully with sweet caramelized onions.

FILLING

- 32-ounce sirloin steak**
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce**
- 1 tablespoon salt**
- 1 tablespoon pepper**
- 1 teaspoon cumin**
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder**
- ½ teaspoon onion powder**
- ½ teaspoon paprika**

CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

- 1 cup parsley**
- 1 cup cilantro**
- ½ cup olive oil**
- ½ red onion**
- 20 green pitted olives**
- 4 cloves garlic**
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon capers**
- 1 teaspoon oregano**
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- ¼ teaspoon cumin**

CARAMELIZED ONIONS

- 4 onions**
- ¼ cup (½ stick) butter, melted**
- ⅓ cup olive oil**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper**

TO SERVE

Tortillas

COOK'S TIP The sauce is best made in advance to allow flavors to meld.

CONTINUED >

\$500 WINNER

Grilled Garden Harvest Tacos

CHERYL SCHULMAN
FAYETTE EC



These vegetarian tacos pack a surprising amount of flavor into each bite, thanks to the crisp slaw and cool avocado crème. If you can't find ancho chile powder, substitute regular chili powder and a pinch of ground cayenne.

MAKES 6 TACOS

FILLING

- 3 large carrots**
- 2 medium zucchini**
- 1 large sweet potato**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- 1 teaspoon ground ancho chile powder, or to taste**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 2 ears corn, shucked**

"BRING THE HEAT" SLAW

- 3 cups shredded green cabbage**
- ⅓ cup chopped cilantro**
- 1 small jalapeño pepper, chopped**
- ⅓ cup diced jicama**
- ½ cup chopped red bell pepper**
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**
- ½ teaspoon sugar**



AVOCADO CRÈME

- 1 large avocado**
- ½ cup Mexican crema**
- 2 teaspoons lime juice**

TO SERVE

- 12 corn tortillas**
- Crumbled cotija cheese**
- Pico de gallo**
- Lime wedges**

- 1. FILLING** Prepare grill to cook over medium-high heat.
- 2.** Peel carrots and cut in half lengthwise. Slice zucchini into strips ¼ inch thick. Peel sweet potato and dice into ¼-inch cubes. Toss all in olive oil, cumin, ancho chile powder and salt. Set aside.
- 3. SLAW** Mix cabbage, cilantro, jalapeño, jicama, bell pepper, vinegar, salt, pepper and sugar. Set aside.
- 4. CRÈME** Combine avocado, crema and lime juice in a blender and blend on low until smooth. Set aside.
- 5.** Place a sheet of foil on half of grill grates. Place carrots flat side down on foil along with sweet potato cubes. Place zucchini strips and corn directly on grill. Turn vegetables to char on all sides. Remove vegetables once they're well charred and tender all the way through, about 6 minutes total for the zucchini and 10 minutes for the carrots, corn and sweet potato. Let cool slightly, then slice zucchini and carrots into quarters and cut corn kernels off the cob.
- 6.** To assemble tacos, grill or warm the tortillas. Layer two tortillas, then top with grilled vegetables followed by slaw and avocado crème. Garnish with pico de gallo, cotija or lime juice.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

KIDS COOKING DUE MAR 10

Have your kids turned into sous-chefs? Share their kitchen creations with our readers. Enter at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests by March 10.



Focus on Texas

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Night Life

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Portraits

Deadline: April 10

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RECIPES CONTINUED

1. FILLING Place steak in a shallow baking dish. Combine vinegar, olive oil and Worcestershire sauce and pour over steak. Cover and refrigerate; let marinate at least 4 hours.

2. SAUCE Combine ingredients in a blender or food processor and pulse until ingredients are completely chopped but not liquefied. The sauce should be somewhat thick and chunky.

3. ONIONS Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Peel off the outer paper layer of the onions, leaving the ends on. Halve onions lengthwise from stem to root. Place the onions in a casserole dish cut-sides up. Combine melted butter, olive oil, sugar, salt and pepper. Drizzle onions generously with the mixture. Cover loosely with foil and bake 30 minutes. Flip onions over and bake an additional 25 minutes, or until onions are tender and caramelized.

4. When ready to cook steak, prepare grill for direct heat cooking. Combine salt, pepper, cumin, garlic powder, onion powder and paprika, and season steak on all sides. Grill to desired doneness, about 10 minutes per side for a medium sirloin. Let steak rest 5 minutes.

5. Slice steak thinly and layer on tortillas with caramelized onions and chimichurri sauce.

SERVES 8



Instant Pot Carnitas Tacos

MELALEE WINKLER
COSERV

These carnitas tacos are made in an Instant Pot for all of the flavor in half the time. Instead of frying, Winkler finishes the carnitas under the broiler to get the crispy edges carnitas are known for. If you have leftovers, save some of the cooking liquid for reheating.

6-7 pounds boneless pork butt shoulder

1 tablespoon salt

1 tablespoon dried Mexican oregano, crumbled

1 tablespoon smoked paprika

1 tablespoon cumin

1 teaspoon chipotle powder

½ teaspoon garlic powder

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 cup orange juice

¼ cup chicken stock

1 yellow onion, quartered

TO SERVE

Flour tortillas

Diced red onion

Sliced radishes

Chopped cilantro

Crumbled queso fresco

Lime wedges

COOK'S TIP If you don't have an Instant Pot, you can also cook this in a heavy, covered pot in the oven at 325 degrees for 3½ hours.

1. Cut the pork butt into six or seven chunks. Mix together the salt, oregano, paprika, cumin, and chipotle and garlic powders. Rub the pork with the spice mixture on all sides.

2. Set the Instant Pot to sauté setting high. Heat the oil in the pot and, working in batches, brown the pork on all sides. Remove the pork and deglaze the Instant Pot with the orange juice and chicken stock, scraping up the browned bits.

3. Place the quartered onion in the pot and turn off the Instant Pot. Place all of the pork on top of the onion. Put the lid on, making sure the valve is set to seal, and set the Instant Pot to pressure cook, high, 1 hour.

4. When the time is up, allow natural release for 15 minutes, then manual release. Remove pork, reserving some of the cooking liquid. Discard the onion.

5. Pull pork with two forks and spread on a baking sheet. Drizzle with a small amount of the cooking liquid and place under the broiler until the pork is slightly browned and crispy on the edges, 3-5 minutes. Serve with grilled flour tortillas, red onion, radish, cilantro, queso fresco and lime wedges.

SERVES 12

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Where Artistry Congregates

Czech and German painted churches in Central Texas are sparkling shrines

BY CHET GARNER

A **TOUR OF TEXAS** back roads takes you past prosaic scenes such as pastures full of grazing cows, profiles of spinning windmills and rural churches quietly awaiting their Sunday congregations. For most of these outlying houses of worship, a simple exterior foreshadows a modest sanctuary. That expectation changes in Fayette and Lee counties, where, concealed within unassuming facades, you'll find Old World decorative glory inside the region's painted churches.

I started my own churchgoing road trip with an apricot kolach because that's what you do when visiting Texas Czech country. I was on a mission to visit the area's five painted churches that are hidden in plain sight within the Czech and German communities that dot the map. My first stop was Dubina.

I pulled into a dirt parking lot and shrugged at what appeared to be an ordinary white building known as Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church. As soon as I stepped inside, I was transported to a world of sacred traditions and intricate religious art. From floor to ceiling, the room dazzled in bright colors and inlaid metals adorning the altars and statues of saints. It was clear that the Czech immigrants who built this church in the late 1800s took great pride in their work and sought to recreate the traditions and artistry of their European homeland here in Texas.

I spent the entire day driving, relying on my GPS so I didn't miss a turn down an obscure road in Fayette or Lee counties. From St. Paul Lutheran in Serbin to St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Ammannsville, each sanctuary had its own feel and history. In the ornately painted St. Mary Catholic Church in High Hill, known as the "Queen of the Painted Churches," the wooden columns looked just like marble. I felt transported to Europe without leaving Texas. ■

ABOVE Chet inside St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Ammannsville.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Chet's video from the painted churches in Fayette County and check out his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Some events may have been affected by COVID-19. Call or check an event's website for scheduling details.

MARCH

01

College Station [1-11] Territory: The Exhibition in a Box, (979) 458-0539, arch.tamu.edu/inside/services/wright-gallery

06

Bulverde [6, 13, 20, 27] Saturday Night Rodeo, (830) 980-2226, tejasrodeo.com

09

Houston Viano String Quartet, (713) 348-5400, chambermusichouston.org

11

Tyler [11-14] Texas Rose Spring Kickoff II Hunter/Jumper Horse Show, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

12

Shiner [12-13] Pink Chandelier Market Barn Sale, (361) 798-0573, facebook.com/pinkchandeliermarket

McKinney [12-14] Third Monday Trade Days, (972) 562-5466, tmttd.com

13

Huntsville [13-14] Rusty Chippy Vintage Hippy & Garden Show, (936) 661-2545, huntsvilleantiqueshow.com

14

Dallas [14-June 20] Building on the Boulevard: Celebrating 20 Years of the Meadows's New Home, (214) 768-2516, meadowsmuseumdallas.org

Dallas [14-June 20] Fossils to Film: The Best of SMU's Collections, (214) 768-2516, meadowsmuseumdallas.org

15

Fredericksburg [15-20]
Spring Break at the Pioneer Museum, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.net

16

Austin [16-20] South by Southwest Online, (512) 467-7979, sxsw.com

18

Brenham [18-21, 25-28]
The Absolute Brightness of Leonard Pelkey, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

19

Abilene [19-20] Outlaws and Legends Music Fest, (325) 660-8458, outlawsandlegends.com

Wichita Falls [19-20]
Cowboy True, (940) 767-2787, artscouncilwf.org/cowboy-true

Tyler [19-21] United States Dog Agility Association Agility Trials, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

Palestine [19-April 4]
Texas Dogwood Trails Celebration, (903) 723-3014, www.texasdogwoodtrails.com

20

Corpus Christi Lecture:
Kitchen Herbs, (361) 852-2100, stxbot.org

Irving Las Colinas Symphony Orchestra: Jonathan Jones, (972) 252-4800, lascolinassymphony.org

Luckenbach Mud Dauber Fest, (830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

Mesquite Eggcitement With the Bunny, (972) 216-6273, cityofmesquite.com/pard

MORE EVENTS >

TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for May by March 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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Hit the Road

Event Calendar

Fairs, festivals, food and family fun! Pick your region. Pick your month. Pick your event.

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Pick of the Month

Classic Car Stampede

Bellville, March 13
 (979) 865-3187
austincountycruisers.com

Austin County Cruisers is a small group of die-hard car enthusiasts who share a passion for the mixture of mechanics and art that creates a vehicle. Cars, trucks and motorcycles from 1976 and earlier will be on display.

MARCH EVENTS CONTINUED

Palestine Dogwood Festival, (903) 729-6066,
palestinechamber.org/dogwoodfestival

Belton [20-21] A Sami Show, (512) 441-7133,
samishow.com

New Braunfels [20-21] Old Gruene Market Days, (830) 629-5077,
gruenemarketdays.com

21 **Kerrville Celtic Angels Ireland**, (830) 896-9393,
caillouxtheater.com

Belton [21, 28, April 11, 18, 25] Healthy Kids Running Series, (254) 340-4577,
healthykidsrunningseries.org

26 **West [26-27] West, Central Texas Ceramic Expo & Handcrafted Items**, (254) 716-5227,
westceramicshow.com

Burton [26-April 3] La Bahia Antique Show and Sale, (979) 289-2684,
labahiaantiques.com

27

Abilene Triple Concerto: Beethoven at 250, (325) 677-6170,
abilenephilharmonic.org

Burnet Hill Country Lawn & Garden Show, (512) 756-9396,
burnetcountyhighlandlakesmastergardener.org

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

Sabinal [27-28] Wild Hog Festival and Craft Fair, (830) 486-8549,
sabinalwildhogfestival.com

San Antonio [27-May 9] Night of Artists, (210) 299-4499,
briscoemuseum.org/noa

APRIL

01

Levelland [1-3] American Business Club Pro Rodeo, (806) 777-1510,
abcrodeo.com

Karnack [1-24] Earth Day Flotilla, (903) 736-3063,
tinyurl.com/flotilla2021

Ennis [1-30] Bluebonnet Trails, (972) 878-4748,
bluebonnettrail.org

02

Jefferson [2-4] City-Wide Rummage Sale, (903) 665-2672,
jefferson-texas.com

03

Llano Fiddle Fest, (325) 247-5354,
facebook.com/llanofiddlefest

New Braunfels Jamestown Revival, (830) 964-3800,
whitewaterrocks.com

Palestine Easter Egg Express on the Texas State Railroad, (855) 632-7729,
texasstaterailroad.net

Diners

Diners sprinkled across the state offer cooking that tastes like home no matter where you travel. Here's what our members served up, and we're coming back for seconds!

GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

CHRIS MILLER
BLUEBONNET EC

A diner Miller stumbled upon during a road trip on Route 66.

REAGAN MAZY
SAM HOUSTON EC

Sunset at Ranch Hand Cafe in Cleveland.

SHELLY BORGFELD
FITZPATRICK
PEDERNALES EC

"We spent our anniversary in the charming town of Blanco and had a delightful experience at the Chess Club."

SANDRA DRAKE
BLUEBONNET EC

Drake's grandson at Mama's Daughters' Diner.



Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAR 10 **Night Life**
- DUE APR 10 **Portraits**
- DUE MAY 10 **Rust & Decay**

Enter online and review submission rules at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.

TCP WEB EXTRA See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.



Few and Far

Young musicians find out just how much luck and money Far West Texas requires

BY ELI WINTER
PHOTO BY WYATT MCSPADDEN

CAMERON KNOWLER AND I rang in Christmas next to a trailer in the Christmas Mountains. It was 2018, and we had just done a show at Terlingua's Starlight Theatre. For breakfast we'd eaten cowboy omelets with Catfish, a legendary river guide who punctuated slow bites with a groan—"Oh, merciful days!"

Later that night, toward the end of an 11-hour drive to Austin, we sat in an empty Kerrville IHOP for 45 minutes without being served and wolfed down fast food in a parking lot late at night.

That's how touring goes sometimes: No matter the crowd size, guarantee or delusions of grandeur, whether you play bars, basements or arenas, you spend a lot of time driving. Especially in far West Texas.

We were just 21 and 22 but already seasoned touring musicians. My music re-

volves around instrumentals for six-string, 12-string and Weissenborn acoustic guitars. Cameron's guitar and banjo playing draws influence from old-time and bluegrass musicians of the rural South.

This tour marked the first time we had performed together regularly, reinterpreting traditional folk songs and devising our own, and our Christmas Eve concert marked a halfway point, for which we'd traveled from Houston to the desert and back—a route we had looked forward to.

Growing up in Houston, I thought of Far West Texas as a region of stark beauty and mystery. I listened to *StarDate* on the radio and gave a presentation on Fort Davis in fourth grade. It seemed impossibly far.

We were surprised to have made it. On the way out of Lubbock, we stopped by Buddy Holly's grave. Holly toured similarly, and his plane use began from a desire to avoid freezing on a tour bus between shows in the rural Midwest. Our concerts, perhaps like his, were small—a nonprofit record store in Dallas, a backyard barn in Austin and a hotel bar in Marfa—but they didn't need to be big. Cameron thought of it like Hollywood, less charmed by the \$10 cacao nibs we attempted to snack on during long drives or the person who asked him before a gig if we were together, then asked, "Are you any good?"

Each day we made enough money for the next, aware of the luck that permeated our travels: playing to a packed house in a repopulated ghost town the night before Christmas, the night after playing for an attentive handful on the outskirts of Austin.

At the homecoming show in Houston, we cracked jokes about our travels, and I thought back to Catfish, as I often do. These days had been merciful indeed. ■

TEXAS MINT

We are excited to announce the release of the 2021 Texas Silver Round – Revolution Series. This is the second release of a four-year series commemorating the battles of the Texas Revolution. Each Texas Silver Round is one troy ounce .9999 fine silver.

The obverse of the high-quality mint strike features Texas' iconic lone star in the foreground. The smooth engraving of the star is framed by a textured topographical outline of the state of Texas. "TEXAS" arches proudly over the top of the round's obverse in large capital letters, with "Precious Metals" presented inversely along the opposite side. The round's mintage year is engraved in the bottom left of the round, just southwest of what would be the Rio Grande bordering Texas and Mexico.

The reverse of the 2021 release displays a scene from the famous Battle of the Alamo. It depicts two Texian soldiers including the American icon, Davy Crockett, attempting to fend off Mexican soldiers attempting to breach the walls of the Alamo.



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BATTLE OF GONZALES

first in the series ● ● ● ●

The stunning 2020 Texas Silver Round depicts a scene from the Battle of Gonzales, with three Texian revolutionaries defending the famous Gonzales cannon, while brandishing the Come And Take It Flag.

The Texas Silver Round can be purchased in a monster box produced exclusively for the Texas Mint. Packaged in 20 protective tubes of 25 rounds each, the monster box holds 500 1-ounce Texas Silver Rounds. Built from durable cold-rolled steel and finished with a matte black powder coat, the monster box lid features an orange cutout of the state of Texas. Each sealed monster box is secured with a unique serial number and a holographic seal to ensure maximum product protection.

The Texas Silver Round is also available to purchase in a similarly designed and secured mini-monster box, which contains 10 protective tubes of 25 rounds each for a total of 250 silver rounds.



BATTLE OF THE ALAMO

second in the series ● ● ● ●

The events of this famous battle took place on the days of February 23rd - March 6th, 1836. At the end of a 13-day siege, President General Antonio López de Santa Anna and his Mexican troops reclaimed the Alamo Mission, killing the Texian and immigrant occupiers.





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Qualification: Advertised price requires credit qualification and 24-month commitment. Upfront activation and/or receiver upgrade fees may apply based on credit qualification. Offer ends 7/14/21. 2-Year Commitment: Early termination fee of \$20/mo. remaining applies if you cancel early. Included in 2-year price guarantee at \$64.99 advertised price: America's Top 120 programming package, local channels, HD service fees, and Hopper Duo Smart DVR for 1 TV. Included in 2-year price guarantee for additional cost: Programming package upgrades (\$79.99 for AT120+, \$89.99 for AT200, \$99.99 for AT250), monthly fees for upgraded or additional receivers (\$5-\$7 per additional TV, receivers with additional functionality may be \$10-\$15). Regional Sports: RSN Surcharge up to \$3/mo. applies to AT120+ and higher packages and varies based on location. NOT included in 2-year price guarantee or advertised price (and subject to change): Taxes & surcharges, add-on programming (including premium channels), DISH Protect, and transactional fees. Premium Channels: 3 Mos. Free: After 3 mos., you will be billed \$30/mo. for Showtime, Starz, and DISH Movie Pack unless you call or go online to cancel. Remote: The DISH Voice Remote with the Google Assistant requires internet-connected Hopper, Joey, or Wally device. Customer must press Voice Remote button to activate feature. The Google Assistant Smart Home features require Google account and compatible devices. Google is a trademark of Google LLC. Other: Netflix streaming membership required. All packages, programming, features, and functionality and all prices and fees not included in price lock are subject to change without notice. After 6 mos., if selected, you will be billed \$9.99/mo. for DISH Protect Silver unless you call to cancel. After 2 years, then-current everyday prices for all services apply. For business customers, additional monthly fees may apply. Free standard professional installation only. Indiana C.P.D Reg. No. - 19-08615. ©2021 GoDISH.com. All rights reserved. Internet speeds, prices, and providers vary by customer address. \$40 price refers to widely available plan from multiple providers. Restrictions apply. Nationwide availability of 25 Mbps plan is subject to change without notice. The application of "Unlimited Data with no Hard Data Limits" varies by provider, but commonly mean that your access to the internet will not be stopped by going over a data limit, but that speeds may be lowered. Call for details. Internet not provided by DISH and will be billed separately.