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IN MINEOLA?

THERE'S NO KNIFE
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A PIONEERING
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FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

FEBRUARY 2024

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February 2024



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The Texas puzzle-makers helping folks while away the hours and fill their kitchen tables with beauty.

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Nasty Norther

THE COLDEST TEMPERATURE ever recorded in Texas happened in mid-February—but it wasn't during our recent icy winters.

On February 12, 1899, it dipped to minus 23 degrees in the Panhandle town of Tulia. This was during a norther that killed 40,000 cattle across the state overnight. In February 1933 thermometers also fell to minus 23 in Seminole in West Texas.

Will You ... ?

Many wedding experts refer to the time from Thanksgiving to Valentine's Day as "engagement season," with as many as 40% of proposals happening during these months.



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RECOMMENDED READING

National Women Physicians Day is February 3. Read *Dr. Sofie Herzog* in our archive and you'll meet a doc who cared for the people of Brazoria a century ago.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Campfires remind me of ...

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 December prompt: **Can't I have just one more ... ?**

Fishing trip with my dad.

RODNEY WHEELER
BLUEBONNET EC
LYTTON SPRINGS

Chance, officer.

SHELIA WORTHLEY
TRI-COUNTY EC
FORT WORTH

Hour of sleep.

MARY MION-WEBB
VIA FACEBOOK

Moment of peace and quiet.

DAVIE LEE GILES
COSERV
MCKINNEY

Martini.

SANDRA HOLT
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

DECEMBER 2023 How Texas Became a Desert

“Absent is my favorite John Wayne movie with a Texas storyline—*Red River*, loosely based on the creation of the legendary Chisholm Trail.”

BILL “COWBOY” LAMZA
SAN BERNARD EC
HEMPSTEAD



NICOLAS VIARD | DREAMSTIME.COM

More Desert Classics

This reminds me of a Davy Crockett movie starring Fess Parker [*How Texas Became a Desert*, December 2023]. When Crockett came from Tennessee to Texas, he would have passed through the Piney Woods of East Texas, right?

Well, in the movie, they get to the border, and Crockett says, “Well, there she is—Texas!” And they look out upon a mountainous desert land.

My wife and I almost fell on the floor laughing.

David Winkler
Pedernales EC
Dripping Springs

Another Somber Memory

I taught with Kathy Cox in 1963 [*A School Day Like No Other*, November 2023].

While we were glued to the TV, Father Baker came in and told us that they were taking all the kids into the church to pray for the president. The younger kids really didn’t comprehend what was

happening, but my sixth graders were pretty aware, and most of them were in tears.

Father came into the church a few minutes later to tell us that the president had died. After more prayers, the kids were all sent home early.

Diane Shalala Fritel
Wolford, North Dakota

Frankly, Almost a Texan

As someone who has followed Texas music for roughly 72 years, I never thought of Frank Zappa as having much to do with Texas [*Art and Parts*, December 2023]. I always pictured him as the ultimate California dude.

Joe Brannen
Sam Houston EC
Livingston

EDITOR’S NOTE It’s true Zappa wasn’t really a Texan, but in some circles he was considered an honorary Austinite because of his repeated appearances at the Armadillo World Headquarters in the 1970s.



STEPHANIE SHAFER

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

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BY CHRISTINE SWITZER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID MOORE

Later, Gators?

Finding everything else during a search for the elusive gators of the Mineola Nature Preserve

'WHERE are the alligators?" I can hear the frustration in my 8-year-old son's voice as we scan the serene water of Beaver Pond in the southwest portion of Aquatic Loop. This is our second visit to the Mineola Nature Preserve, and we've just learned that some of the ponds are home to alligators.

Fifteen minutes earlier, we had passed a slightly winded hiker on Beaver Pond Trail, an old logging path that harks back to the land's integral role in the East Texas timber belt a century ago.

The hiker smiled, greeted us and said his name was James. He chatted enthusiastically about the nearly 20-year-old preserve that spreads over close to 3,000 acres along the north banks of the Sabine River in Wood County, north of Tyler. James said he has been hiking at the preserve every week for a few years and loves this nature space.

"Most people don't know about this place," James said. He told us he thinks the preserve is one of the best nature areas in East Texas, with bird-watching and stargazing, catch-and-release ponds, plus many trails for horseback riding. Several hiking trails crisscross through the wetland areas around the ponds, and he said we might see wild animals at the preserve too, like beaver, deer and bobcats.

Then he asked, "Have you seen the alligators in the beaver pond?"



SOON we're leaning over the splintered railing of the wooden footbridge that spans Beaver Pond. I hear dragonflies and damselflies darting over the water and the occasional plip-plop of a fish leaping to catch one.

But no alligators in sight.

Once on the verge of extinction, the American alligator can now be found throughout the eastern third of Texas, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The reptile has made a dramatic comeback over the past 50 years and is now a protected game animal in Texas.

"There are a couple of large ones who hang out at the beaver pond," James told us. "They like to sleep a lot at the bottom of the pond, but I've seen them several times."

I wonder to myself if they look like floating logs in the middle of the pond. Or if they lurk in the shady areas around the bridge, with only nostrils visible above the water.

"I'll be right back!" I call to my husband and move toward the opposite side of the pond, past the warning signs admonishing in bright red letters: "Beware of Alligators." I take a few pictures of a lone white egret standing amid a clump of soft rush.

"Don't stand too close to the bank," my husband calls. "Alligators move fast. Faster than you think."

'MAMA, a snapping turtle!" My son points to a partially submerged log, its distinctive beak stretched into the sunshine.

Several months have passed since our previous visit, but we haven't forgotten our conversation with James, so we search once again for the resident alligators in Beaver Pond.

Late spring humidity presses in on us. We hear the buzz of cicadas, grasshoppers and bees among the coral honeysuckle, purple coneflower and blue larkspur. We give wide

berth to the soggy, loamy sands banking the pond, where spring rains have left the ground saturated.

Once on the bridge traversing the pond, we look out over turquoise water shimmering like a dark mirror in the afternoon sun. Giant cutgrass clusters around the bridge. In the center of the pond, we see the remains of abandoned railroad trestles from when trains transported East Texas lumber to far points in the state.

"I don't see any alligators," my son says. Unfortunately, neither do I.

"You should probably go around 3 or 4 in the afternoon," my friend Laura advises. She has heard my story about looking for the preserve's reptile residents, and she has responded in typical Texas Master Naturalist fashion. She has looked things up on the iNaturalist website.

"According to iNat," she continues, "most of the alligator sightings in the preserve have been mid-afternoon. Maybe you'll have more luck then."

Alligators are native to this part of the state, but I haven't seen one in the wild yet in the 10 years I've lived in North Texas. We plan another visit to the preserve, hoping we will finally glimpse the elusive crocodilian.

'OH, NO!' my son exclaims. "Not the alligators again!" With the steady increase of summer heat indices in East Texas, his enthusiasm for alligator hunting has definitely cooled.

We crunch over the gravel of the city-owned and -managed park's Rawhide Trail, under the welcome shade of thorny locust, willow oak and sugar hackberry trees, our faces shiny from the late June heat.

As we approach Beaver Pond, I hear the low, resonant bugle of a bullfrog and the cry of a hawk overhead. Summer blooms of climbing prairie roses and meadow pinks cluster alongside the path. Ahead of us, half a dozen monarchs the size of my palm scatter in a swirl of tangerine.

Leaning over the railing of the now-familiar bridge, we scan the tranquil, algae-laden water for any signs of an enormous reptile. A tiny green anole darts away from us on the splintered wood. We watch a great blue heron lift off in flight above our heads.

"No," I say. "Not the alligators." ■

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



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

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

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PUZZLING TIMES

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

These Texas puzzle-makers help folks while away the hours and fill their kitchen tables with beauty

GROWING UP, JB Manning remembers putting puzzles together with his grandmother at her home in Minnesota.

“She always had a puzzle spread out on the table,” he says. “She enjoyed working on them, and they became an activity that we all did with her.”

Jigsaw puzzles have been drawing people together for centuries. Most historians credit British mapmaker John Spilsbury for creating the first puzzles in the 1760s. He pasted hand-colored European maps onto thin mahogany



boards and cut them into pieces along political borders. His “dissected” maps were marketed as educational tools to teach children about geography.

In the 19th century, dissected puzzles evolved into jigsaw puzzles, named for the bladed tool used to cut the pieces. Only the wealthy could afford to buy the handcrafted wooden creations. But as manufacturing improved, makers began to utilize plywood and then sturdy cardboard, which reduced costs and enabled mass production. Interlocking pieces were introduced to keep puzzles together.

Fast-forward to the COVID-19 pandemic, when game-makers reported in April 2020 that puzzle sales nationwide skyrocketed more than 300%. Stuck at home, people took to their kitchen tables to pass the time and relieve stress.

In Texas, two small companies have cut out their own niches with special touches that make their puzzles stand out from the ordinary.

Outside San Marcos, in Wimberley, Manning—who owns the Wimberley Puzzle Co.—often worked long hours during

the pandemic to make and ship 100 puzzles a day. Orders have since returned to a daily average of 15 to 20 puzzles. The more relaxed pace suits Manning, who quit a stressful corporate job in Houston in 2011.

He then began traveling through national parks with his digital Nikon camera. While crisscrossing states in 2014, he bought a postcard, wrote on it, cut it up and mailed it in an envelope.

“Puzzle postcards were my original idea,” says Manning, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. “But I decided they’d be hard to sell. I got the idea about puzzles while I was sitting on an outcrop that overlooked a waterfall at Glacier

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE A signature of JB Manning’s puzzles is including pieces with whimsical shapes—and he signs a piece in every order. A buck-shaped piece stands out in a field of bluebonnets. A computerized laser cutter navigates the myriad shapes of Manning’s creation. It also cuts the pieces for his plywood boxes.

JIGSAW PUZZLES

have been drawing people together for centuries. Most historians credit British mapmaker John Spilsbury for creating the first puzzles in the 1760s.

National Park. I decided I'd use my own photos of places that people know, have been to or want to go."

He moved to Wimberley in 2017 and set up his workshop. The Wimberley Puzzle Co. released its first puzzles, made of sturdy cardboard and packaged in cardboard boxes, early the next year. They featured such iconic Texas scenes as wildflowers along the Willow City Loop near Fredericksburg, Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park, and Fischer Dance Hall between San Antonio and Austin.

That fall, Manning bought a travel trailer and set up a mobile workshop. He continued on the road, taking photos while making and shipping his products.

When the pandemic closed parks, Manning returned to Wimberley. He couldn't find cardboard when supply chains slowed to a crawl in 2021. So he transitioned to Baltic birch plywood to make his puzzles and matching boxes with sliding lids.

Today his computerized equipment includes a large-format printer and a laser cutter. The wooden puzzles, which range from 130 pieces up to 1,000, are usually made to order. His nine-page online catalog has grown to include striking scenes (and animals) from other states, national parks, Route 66 and even Africa, where he traveled in 2014.

From the start, Manning's puzzles have included whimsical pieces that help tell the puzzle image's story. For instance, his best-selling Bluebonnet Sunset, photographed near Navasota, between Houston and College Station, features pieces shaped like a butterfly, dove, bee, live oak and flowers. As a special touch, he always signs a piece, such as one shaped like Texas.

Manning tucks a folded envelope inside each box with information about his company and how customers can order a lost piece. He also includes a small wooden easel for displaying the box lid or glued puzzle as desktop art.

FINE ART of a different kind inspired siblings Ericka Chambers of Little Elm and William Jones of Sachse—towns in the Metroplex—to tap into their roots and launch their own puzzle company.

"We grew up doing puzzles together as a family," says Chambers, a CoServ member. "But we had a hard time finding diversity in puzzle images. Then, when I was pregnant, I wanted to decorate my nursery around a puzzle. But there were very few to choose from."

A painting of a Black woman by artist Kwanzaa Edwards of San Antonio sparked an idea. The vibrant colors and fanciful imagery intrigued Chambers, and she suggested making a puzzle of one of Edwards' paintings. "William thought that was a great business idea," Chambers says.

Thus was born Puzzles of Color, which exclusively licenses and features artwork created by the siblings' favorite Black artists as well as Native American, Latino

and Asian American artists. In fall 2020, they partnered with a company to print the artwork and another to mount the pieces on cardboard.

At night, Chambers, then a product manager for Capital One, and Jones, a freelance graphic designer, would cut the boards on a roller die cutter in Chambers' garage. Then they boxed up the puzzles. Their parents and spouses helped, too. They still do.

A big break came in January 2021, when a local news report on the company aired nationwide. Orders shot up so much that all production had to be outsourced.

Since then, Puzzles of Color has steadily grown, both in sales and merchandise. Puzzles are available online and at special events. "They're in some boutique stores and museums, too," Chambers says. "Last February, Target carried our puzzles during Black History Month. We're working to be there year-round."

So far they've licensed with nearly 30 artists from across the country and also Kenya to create puzzles that range from kid-friendly 20- and 60-piece jigsaws up to 1,000 pieces.



ABOVE William Jones breaks up a puzzle after a die cutter did its work. OPPOSITE Nearly 30 artists illustrate the puzzles that siblings Ericka Chambers, left, and Jones have in stock.



Among their first puzzles was Edwards’ dreamy depiction of a Black woman called *To Be Loved*. Paul Kellam of Jacksonville, Florida, depicts a Black family gathered near a Christmas tree and Kwanzaa table in his *Comfort & Joy*. Steph Littlebird of Las Vegas created *Wapato Woman*, a portrait of a powerful Native American woman.

Puzzles of Color boxes tell the company’s story and those of the featured artists.

“We also interview all our artists in a podcast so we can share their methods and how they got into art,” Chambers

says. “Each puzzle has a musical playlist on Spotify with songs connected to the artist’s inspiration and what music they’re into. So as people are doing a puzzle, they can get into the artist’s mindset.

“We’ve had people tell us they don’t do puzzles,” she adds. “But they’re so enamored with the art that the experience of putting our puzzles together gives them a feeling of being an artist. And that’s cool!” ■

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The Role of the Board of Directors

Tri-County Electric Cooperative's board members are community-minded individuals with a variety of skill sets. Our board is made up of business owners, executives, and farmers who are well-rounded in their experience and expertise to bring a wealth of knowledge to the co-op. This wide background helps directors to collectively make informed decisions on long-term priorities and investments. Each director lives right here in the co-op's service area and is active in our communities.

Serving on Tri-County Electric Co-op's board means you're making a difference locally, using your individual talents and perspective to guide big decisions about the co-op that in turn benefit the larger community. The board establishes strategic values for the co-op that serve as an ethics and compliance foundation to guide organizational behavior, decisions, and direction. 8002252701

In carrying out their duties, directors are bound by fiduciary duties: duty of care; duty of loyalty; duty of candor; and duty of obedience.

- **Duty of Care:** A director should exercise a degree of care that includes holding or acquiring knowledge and skills necessary to govern the co-op's business affairs, attending and engaging during regular and special meetings of the board, and exercising independent judgment.
- **Duty of Loyalty:** A director should act in good faith and in the best interests of the co-op and its members by placing the co-op interests over personal interests, acting as a good steward and prevent wasting of co-op assets, and holding confidentiality of co-op information.
- **Duty of Candor:** A director should reveal all information or interests they may have or bear upon action being considered by the board.
- **Duty of Obedience:** A director should study and adhere to all obligations under state, federal, and local laws, and regulations, as well as all co-op governing documents.

This year, members of districts 3, 6 and 8 who are interested and eligible to run for the board may apply for nomination. We have two paths to the ballot, which increases the transparency and integrity of the election. Learn more about this year's director nomination cycle, including important application dates, on the next page. 800913025

DISTRICT 4 RUN-OFF ELECTION

In 2023, members voted on director districts 1, 2 and 4. Since none of the District 4 candidates on the ballot received the majority of the votes in September, a run-off election was called between the top two candidates in December: Incumbent Jerry Walden and Nomination Candidate David Miller.

Survey and Ballot Systems, our third-party election service, provided our election results. Nomination Candidate David Miller received 50.8% of the vote and was elected as the director of district 4 to serve a three-year term ending 2026. Tri-County Electric Co-op congratulates Mr. Miller and thanks Mr. Walden for his years of service to the membership by serving on the board. Mr. Walden faithfully served the members for 24 years through times of extreme growth, both on our system and in our communities.

A total of 18,652 members voted in the election. All members were able to vote in the run-off election, regardless of your director district, and received a \$10 bill credit on January 4, 2024 for participating. Voting closed on Wednesday, December 20, 2023, and results of the run-off election were announced during a membership meeting on Wednesday, January 3, 2024. A recording of the meeting is available at tcectexas.com/director-elections. 800978926



**DAVID
MILLER**
DISTRICT 4

David Miller is a lifelong resident of North Texas who carries tenured experience in municipal government and with non-profit organizations. He started his career in law enforcement in the mid-1980s as a patrol officer and is currently the City Administrator and Director of Public Safety for the City of Springtown. In addition to his work in municipal government, Miller has held numerous leadership roles for a myriad of local, state, and national professional organizations.

Outside of these efforts, David, along with his wife, Teresa, operate a therapeutic equine facility for children and adults with physical, intellectual, education and emotional disabilities, veterans, and those recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. The Millers established Stars and Strides in 2012 after being inspired by their daughter, Courtney, who experienced immense growth using equine-assisted therapy to overcome the challenges of her disability, Kabuki syndrome.

The Millers have been residents of Parker County for more than 18 years, and are longtime members of Northside Baptist Church where he serves as a bible teacher.

2024 Director Nominations

Applications are open for Director Districts 3, 6 and 8

The electric cooperative model is strong thanks to the seven cooperative principles and the tie to the local communities we serve. Your co-op is not run and operated by executives who seek to make the biggest profit for their far-off investors. Tri-County Electric Cooperative is owned and governed by local members of the co-op. The nine-member board of directors serves as the governing and regulatory body and is composed of members from throughout the service territory. The nine director seats represent each area of our diverse membership, including four urban districts, four suburban districts and one rural district.

Each year, one-third of the board seats are elected by the entire membership, approximately 108,000 members strong. This year, director districts 3, 6 and 8 will be on the ballot in September. District maps are available at tcectexas.com/director-elections.

- District 3, suburban district
- District 6, suburban district
- District 8, urban district

Members who reside in these districts, are interested in serving their co-op, and meet the director qualifications outlined in the cooperative's bylaws may submit a director nomination application packet. Tri-County Electric Co-op offers two paths to the ballot: through the Committee on Nominations & Qualifications or through member petition. Members are encouraged to review the following documents to understand the cooperative's director nomination process, director election process, and director qualifications:

- The director election webpage, tcectexas.com/director-elections
- Tri-County Electric Cooperative's Bylaws, specifically Article 4
- Tri-County Electric Cooperative's Election Policy & Procedures

NOMINATION BY COMMITTEE

Members interested in seeking nomination through the Committee on Nominations & Qualifications must submit a complete nomination application packet by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 13, 2024. A complete director nomination application packet must include all items listed on the application checklist. The Committee on Nominations & Qualifications will accept and review all applications for nomination by committee and recommend a slate of candidates to the board of directors. 800667112

NOMINATION BY PETITION

Members interested in seeking nomination through member petition must submit a complete nomination application packet by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, April 10, 2024. A complete director nomination application packet must include all items listed on the application checklist. The co-op's attorney will accept and review all applications for nomination by petition and recommend a slate of candidates to the board of directors.

Members can find all director nomination and election details, the director nomination application packets, the co-op's bylaws, and the co-op's Election Policy & Procedures online at tcectexas.com/director-elections.

COMMITTEE ON NOMINATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS

Meeting Notice
Monday, March 18
5 p.m.

The Committee on Nominations and Qualifications will meet at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, March 18, 2024, at the co-op's Aledo office to accept and review applications from director candidates seeking nomination through the committee for districts 3, 6 and 8. The committee will recommend a slate of candidates to the board of directors and report the recommendation to the membership in the June *Texas Co-op Power* magazine.



System upgrade coming soon to your account

IMPORTANT CHANGES!

tcectexas.com/MyTriCountyTX



WHAT'S CHANGING?



MyTriCountyTX will replace the current online member portal. All members will need to register. Your current credentials will no longer be valid. Registration opens March 4.



Update Payment Information: If your account is currently set up on autodraft with your credit card, you will need to enroll in Auto Pay in **MyTriCountyTX** to continue automatic payments. If you are enrolled in draft with your checking or savings account, you will not be impacted and payments will continue to process automatically.



New Bill Layout: March billing statements will have a new and improved look, including an account overview on the front and detailed account information on the back to better manage your energy use.



Download MyTriCountyTX: The new **MyTriCountyTX** mobile app will be available March 4 for download in your app store. Don't forget to remove TCEC Connect from your phone.



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NEW!

SOLAR PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Tri-County Electric Co-op is rolling out a new solar program. As part of this process, last year we thoroughly re-evaluated our solar program, which included member feedback through an online survey and in-person at town hall events. We also employed an independent consultant to conduct a cost-of-service study that specifically analyzed solar member accounts. Member feedback, rate impact information, and a comparison of other surrounding utility programs were all taken into consideration by cooperative staff and the board of directors as the new solar program was thoughtfully designed. Last month, we held a town hall meeting to announce and present the program details. If you missed the town hall, information is available on our website at tcectexas.com/solar.

Our team of trusted energy advisors are ready to answer questions and work with you on which program may work best for your household. 800971150

Please note that current members or new members that join our solar program before March 1, 2024, will have the option to use the current program terms or choose the new program terms. Members applying for our solar program after March 1, 2024, will automatically be placed on the new program terms.

New Solar Rate Structure and Program Details

Members interested in installing solar and apply after March 1, 2024, will adopt the new program terms.

- New Rate Structure – for applications received after March 1, 2024.
 - Members will receive credit for all exported energy at avoided cost, which will be calculated monthly.
 - Members will pay for all purchased kWh at retail rate.
 - Members will pay the Brazos Financing Rider on all purchased kWh.
 - Minimum monthly bill: \$30 (includes a \$18 Customer Service Charge and \$12 DG Charge).
- Members can bank unused credits from month to month with no cap on dollars.
 - Unused credits will be processed in the form of payment to the member each year by March 31.
- Array capped at 50 kW AC.

THINKING ABOUT SOLAR?

As your trusted energy advisor, we are here to help you through the decision process to provide information to help you find a solution that may work best for your household.

Follow these steps before you invest in solar:

Step 1: Research

Contact our team of trusted energy advisors to answer questions and work with you on which program may work best for your household. Additionally, we will provide detailed information on how the solar rate works to ensure all your questions are answered up front.

Step 2: Analysis

Look at various solar companies and installers, including recent reviews. We recommend getting quotes from at least three installers before signing a contract and have a resource to help you ask the right questions.



Step 3: Decision

Once your review the energy analysis and vet installers, it is time to decide if solar is right for your household.



Current Solar Rate Structure and Program Details

Current solar members can decide to keep their grandfathered one-for-one rate or switch to a new, straightforward structure with a buyback program for all energy exported to the grid. The choice is yours, and our team of trusted energy advisors are ready to answer questions and work with you on which program may work best for your household. 800914605

- Grandfathered Rate Structure – for current solar members or members who apply by March 1, 2024.
 - Buyback at a one-for-one up to net zero at the retail rate.
 - Minimum monthly bill: \$30 (includes a \$18 Customer Service Charge and \$12 DG Charge).
- Members will pay the Brazos Financing Rider on all purchased kWh.
- The grandfathered rate will apply to the current system ONLY.
 - Members have until March 1, 2024, to submit applications for interconnection under the grandfathered rate.
 - Members must obtain Permission to Operate (PTO) by September 1, 2024, or will be billed on the new rate.
 - If changes or additions are made after March 1, 2024, the member's account will be billed on the new rate.
- The grandfathered rate is non-transferable and will terminate upon final billing.
- The grandfathered rate begins March 2024 and expires after 10 years.
- Members can switch to the new rate at any time.
 - Members cannot switch back to the grandfathered rate after switching to the new rate.
- Array capped at 50 kW AC.

Step 4: Choose an Installer

Using your data, choose an installer that works best for you. During the process, please direct your installer to our solar webpage for all information and resources to help you have a smooth installation process. Visit tcectexas.com/solar.

Step 5: Complete DG Application

The Distributed Generation (DG) application can be submitted by your installer and includes all information the solar team needs to ensure the solar system is designed and installed according to electrical standards. Before the application is reviewed, a \$500 application fee must be paid. Learn more about the steps included in the application process by viewing our application process flow chart.



Step 6: Permission to Operate

Once the system is installed and all necessary information and documents are submitted, Tri-County Electric Co-op will provide Permission to Operate, or PTO.

HAVE A QUESTION?

Email our solar team at
distributedgeneration
@tcectexas.com

or call
817.444.3201

OFFICES CLOSED

FOR PRESIDENTS' DAY

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19



Tri-County Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

CONTACT US

200 Bailey Ranch Road
Aledo, TX 76008
Phone 817-444-3201
Web tcectexas.com

Board of Directors

Max Waddell, District 9 - Chairman
John Killough, District 6 - Vice Chairman
Margaret Koprek, District 2 - Secretary/Treasurer
Kevin Ingle, District 1
David Miller, District 4
Steve V. Harris, District 5
Sommer Portwood, District 7
Michael Sivertsen, District 8

24/7

Outage Reporting

For information and to report outages, please contact us.

Online: oms.tcectexas.com
App: TCEC Connect
Phone: 817-444-3201
Text: OUTAGE to 25069

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

AVAILABLE FOR COLLEGE AND TRADE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

\$4,000
\$2,000



ABOUT TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC CO-OP

Tri-County Electric Co-op owns and maintains more than 10,000 miles of line to provide electric service to more than 106,000 members in Archer, Baylor, Denton, Foard, Haskell, Hood, Jack, King, Knox, Palo Pinto, Parker, Stonewall, Tarrant, Throckmorton, Wilbarger, and Wise counties.

OFFICE LOCATIONS

Aledo
200 Bailey Ranch Road, Aledo 76008

Azle
600 NW Parkway, Azle 76020

Granbury
1623 Weatherford Highway, Granbury 76048

Keller
4900 Keller-Hicks Road, Fort Worth 76244

Seymour
419 N. Main, Seymour 76380

IT PAYS TO STAY INFORMED

Find your account number in pages 16-23 of *Texas Co-op Power*, and you will receive a \$20 credit on your electric bill. Simply contact one of the offices listed above and make them aware of your discovery!

VISIT US ONLINE

tcectexas.com
[Facebook.com/TCECTexas](https://www.facebook.com/TCECTexas)



Four Ways an Energy Audit Can Benefit You

The Home Energy Audit Program is here to help members determine the overall efficiency of your home and ways to save energy. Here are the main benefits of having an energy audit:

1. An audit can help identify where most of your energy use is going and ways to use energy more efficiently to save money.
2. It can determine if appliances and heating/cooling equipment are properly sized for your home.
3. An audit can provide a one-on-one, personalized experience with our Energy Solutions team to understand your energy use, home habits and ways to save. 800672746
4. You receive a detailed report to help you identify immediate ways to lower your electric use.

As your trusted energy advisor, we believe that savings and efficiency are within reach for all – and we want to help get you there.

**Learn more about the Home
Energy Audit Program
and sign up for an audit at
tcectexas.com/audit.**



BEST BETS FOR WINTER SAVINGS

Energy consumption spikes during winter months as we spend more time indoors and heating systems work overtime. You can reduce demand and strain on the electric grid by conserving during peak energy times. Reducing energy use can also help lower your energy bills.

Here are six ways to maximize savings:

1. Unplug when possible. Turn off and unplug unnecessary lights and electronics when you aren't using them. 800801071
2. Maintain heating equipment. Maintain your heating system by replacing dirty or clogged filters. Scheduling an annual inspection of your HVAC system helps to keep you up to date on maintenance and potentially identify issues before they arise.
3. Eliminate drafts and air leaks. Seal air leaks and drafts around windows and exterior doors.
4. Use appliances wisely. Run large appliances like clothes washers, dryers, and dishwashers during non-peak hours.
5. Lower the thermostat. Home heating accounts for a large portion of energy consumption. Adjust your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting, 68 degrees or lower.
6. Cover up. Area rugs are an easy, cost-effective solution to cold floors. Adding area rugs to hard-surface flooring can add warmth to any room and keep your feet cozy on cold winter days.

See the Forest Through the Trees

Mighty Conifer Knife at an Impossible Price!



What Stauer Clients Are
Saying About Our Knives



"Outstanding knife of high quality
and a great price. I now have a
number of your great cutlery in
my growing collection!"

— Robert F., Richardson, TX

We know you. You're not interested in everyday, run-of-the-mill, common cutlery. You want something with a story, a unique feature that you can brag about. We've got just the thing for you. Our *Mighty Conifer Knife* is a unique tool with a Damascus steel blade and a handle crafted from an enhanced and stabilized natural pinecone. While our competitors are charging hundreds for similar knives, we're offering the Mighty Conifer for JUST \$99! That's what we call our Stauer Impossible Price.

JOIN MORE THAN 389,000 SHARP
PEOPLE WHO COLLECT STAUER KNIVES

Each pinecone — and therefore, each knife — has its own unique characteristics. And the back of the handle features hand tooling, a further demonstration of each piece's individual nature.

The blade is nothing to scoff at either. Constructed of Damascus steel, a modern reworking of the legendary steel forged by ancient swordsmiths, this nearly 5-inch blade features 256 layers of steel that have been folded on top of each other to increase its durability. Our competitors are charging hundreds for boring, run-of-the-mill knives with no features worth bragging about. We're asking JUST \$99 for a knife unlike any you've seen before!

With its full-tang construction and high-quality genuine leather sheath, the Mighty Conifer Knife is the perfect blade for the

person who wants to stand out. **CALL NOW!** If you're one of the first 700 587 callers for this ad, we'll throw in a pair of *Stauer 8x21 Compact Binoculars* — a \$99 value — **ABSOLUTELY FREE!** Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back!

Knife Specifications:

- 9 1/2" overall length. Full-tang construction
- Damascus steel blade and natural pinecone handle
- Genuine leather sheath

Mighty Conifer Knife

~~\$299~~ \$99* + S&P **Save \$200**

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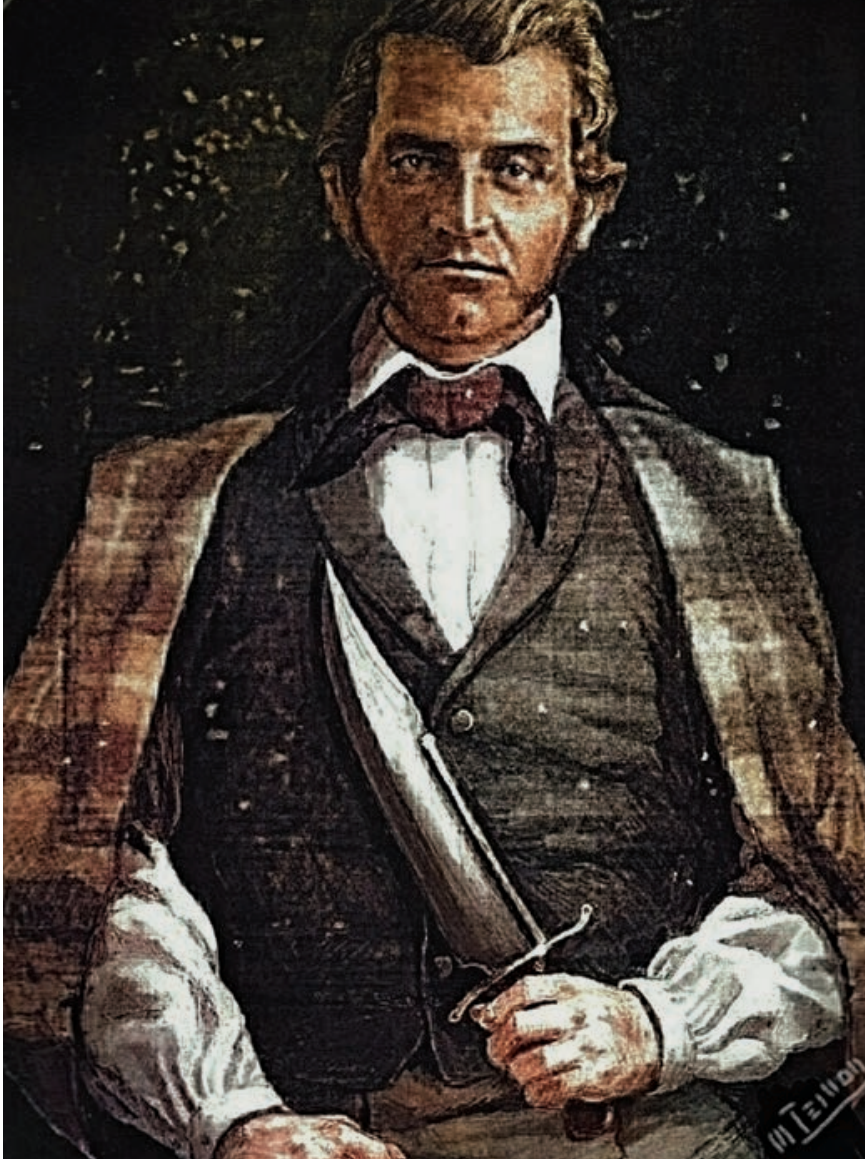


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A Cut Above

No knife influenced the world like Jim Bowie's behemoth

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY MARK LEMON

A RELATIVELY NEW phenomenon in modern society is the rise of social media influencers, personalities skilled at persuading followers to pay attention or even buy things. But how many of today's influencers will still be known in 200 years?

How many can compare to the lasting magic of Jim Bowie?

Many assume Bowie became famous defending the Alamo in 1836. In truth, he was already quite famous 10 years before—as a knife fighter and designer, frontiersman, and all-round world-class badass. He was truly a “man’s man” by any standard.

His world-renowned Bowie knife was probably first made at the direction of his brother, Rezin Bowie. But later versions with Jim’s modifications became the enduring design.

Jim Bowie used the earlier knife in a bloody skirmish called the Sandbar Fight, when Jim was nearly killed by two assailants who shot him on a Mississippi River sandbar in 1827. One man stabbed Bowie with a cane sword, but the sword bent when it hit Bowie’s sternum, giving him a moment to spring upon his attacker with his huge knife, killing him. Bowie then badly wounded the second assailant.

You see, in those days, you wanted to

take a knife to a gun fight because guns were notoriously unreliable. Bowie miraculously survived, and the account of the Sandbar Fight went global, thanks to a journalist who witnessed it. Bowie and his blade were thus immortalized.

What made the knife stand out was its size. The original was almost a foot long, but the subsequent model was even longer—and razor sharp. About one-third of the top of the knife, the clip point, was honed to a fine edge—so it cut both ways.

Its lethality became legendary. The *Red River Herald* of Natchitoches, Louisiana, wrote that after the Sandbar Fight, “all the steel in the country, it seemed, was being converted into Bowie knives.” That’s influence!

When Bowie arrived at the Alamo nine years later, with his notoriety on the rise and his famous knife at his side, even Davy Crockett was impressed. He said the sight of a Bowie knife “makes you queasy ... especially before breakfast.”

Bowie’s last stand at the Alamo elevated his fame. It was widely claimed, at least what I heard as a kid, that he took out 10 Mexican soldiers with his knife in close-quarters combat. This is improbable given that Bowie was critically ill from typhoid fever, but a good legend will kill probability any day of the week.

I do like what Bowie’s mama said when she learned of his death: “I’ll wager no wounds were found in his back.”

Soon after, various versions of the Bowie knife began to be made by blacksmiths. Texas Rangers carried them. The Marines had their own version. In popular films, Rambo never left home without his and neither did Crocodile Dundee.

It’s as famous as the Swiss Army knife or Buck knife. Given the ubiquity of Bowie’s blade in the world today—nearly 188 years after his death—I’d say Bowie is a greater influencer than any social media star you can name. ■

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



Chocolate

Think outside the box with these delectable delights

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This twist on a traditional tres leches cake begins with a boxed cake mix. And when one of the tres leches—three milks—poured over the warm cake is chocolate, you know you're in for sinfully sweet goodness.

Quick and Easy Chocolate Tres Leches Cake

CAKE

- 1 package white cake mix (14.25 ounces)**
- 3 eggs, room temperature**
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter, room temperature**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 ounces)**
- 1 can evaporated milk (12 ounces)**
- 1 cup chocolate milk**

TOPPING

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream**
- 3 tablespoons powdered sugar**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips**

- 1. CAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
- 2.** In a bowl, beat together cake mix, eggs, milk, butter, vanilla and cinnamon until smooth.
- 3.** Pour into prepared baking pan. Bake 25–30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
- 4.** Cool in pan 10 minutes.
- 5.** Use a fork to pierce holes in cake. Slowly pour the sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk and chocolate milk over the cake.
- 6.** Allow cake to cool completely. Cover and chill overnight in the refrigerator.
- 7. TOPPING** In another bowl, beat whipping cream, powdered sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy.
- 8.** Spread over cake and top with chocolate chips.

SERVES 12

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mole Braised Brisket.





Marlene's Chocolate Doughnuts

TINA WEBB
BLUEBONNET EC

Making homemade chocolate doughnuts is easier than you think. Webb's recipe, passed down through generations, begins with a batter that comes together in a snap.

- 1½ teaspoons distilled white vinegar**
- 1 cup milk**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- 3 cups flour**
- 1 cup sugar, plus 4 tablespoons for dusting**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 3 teaspoons baking powder**
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided use**
- 2 eggs**
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter, melted**
- 1½ ounces unsweetened chocolate (1½ squares), melted**
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract**
- 1 cup vegetable oil**

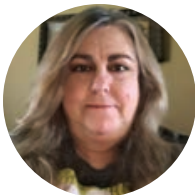
1. In a bowl, combine vinegar and milk and stir in baking soda to dissolve.
2. In another bowl, sift together flour, 1 cup sugar, salt, baking powder and 1 teaspoon cinnamon.
3. Stir in milk mixture, eggs, butter, chocolate and vanilla.
4. Roll out dough to ½-inch thickness on a floured surface, adding additional flour if dough seems too moist.
5. Cut dough into doughnuts using a doughnut cutter.

CONTINUED >

\$500 WINNER

Hershey Bar Chocolate Cake

KAREN HOLMES
JASPER-NEWTON EC



This customer favorite at the tearoom for which Holmes baked became her husband's requested birthday cake each year. Rich, gooey cake layers sandwiched between thick, fluffy icing is a chocolate lover's dream.

SERVES 12



CAKE

- 2 cups flour**
- ½ cup sugar**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder**
- 3 eggs**
- ½ cup buttermilk**
- 1 cup water**
- 1 cup vegetable oil**
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract**

FROSTING

- 1 package cream cheese (8 ounces), room temperature**
- 2 cups sugar**
- 1 cup powdered sugar**
- 1 container whipped topping (12 ounces)**
- 4-ounce chocolate bar, chopped**
- ½ cup chopped pecans**

1. **CAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with nonstick spray.
2. In a bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking soda, salt and cocoa powder.
3. In another bowl, whisk together eggs, buttermilk, water, oil and vanilla.
4. Pour wet ingredients over dry ingredients. Mix well for about 2 minutes.
5. Divide batter evenly between cake pans. Bake 30 minutes.
6. Let cakes cool and remove from pans.
7. **FROSTING** In another bowl, cream together cream cheese, sugar and powdered sugar.
8. Fold in whipped topping.
9. Spread half the frosting over one cake. Top with second cake and spread remaining frosting over top.
10. Decorate with chopped chocolate and pecans.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

FROZEN TREATS DUE FEBRUARY 10

We all know it won't be too long before we're trying to beat the heat. Share your favorite recipes for cold desserts—ice creams, popsicles and beyond—for a chance to win \$500. Go online and submit your favorite by February 10.



RECIPES CONTINUED

6. Heat oil to medium-high in a medium skillet and fry doughnuts until golden-brown on both sides.
7. In a small bowl, combine 4 tablespoons sugar and remaining 1 teaspoon cinnamon and dust over hot doughnuts.

MAKES ABOUT 24-30 DOUGHNUTS

Chocolate Cobbler

LINDA J. MOORE
SOUTH PLAINS EC

Moore says she prefers dark chocolate cocoa powder in the batter of this family favorite, which comes out of the oven fudgy and brownielike.

BATTER

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- 4 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder



- 2 cups flour
 - 2 teaspoons baking powder
 - 1/4 teaspoon salt
 - 1 cup milk
 - 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- TOPPING
- 2 cups sugar
 - 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
 - 3 cups boiling water
 - Whipped topping (optional)
 - Unsweetened cocoa powder (optional)

1. BATTER Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Melt butter in oven in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish, removing from oven once butter has melted.
3. In a bowl, stir together sugar, cocoa powder, flour, baking powder, salt, milk and vanilla. Spoon mixture over melted butter, but do not stir.
4. TOPPING In another bowl, stir together sugar and cocoa powder and sprinkle over batter in pan.
5. Pour boiling water over all, but do not stir. Bake until top has set, 35-40 minutes.
6. Allow cobbler to cool 15 minutes. Serve with whipped topping and dust with cocoa powder, if desired.

SERVES 8

Not enough chocolate? You'll find many more recipes in our online archive. Just search "chocolate."

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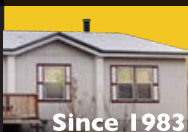
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Texas' Heartbeat

San Felipe de Austin was home for the first Texans 200 years ago

BY CHET GARNER

IT WAS EARLY MORNING, and I was flying down Interstate 10 with my radio on full blast, a fresh cup of coffee in my hand and the air conditioning cranked. Needless to say, it was a far cry from the way the first pioneers traveled through this same stretch of Texas in the 1820s to settle one of our most important towns.

I needed to connect with my past and so I set my GPS for the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site in Sealy.

Nestled on the banks of the Brazos River, this charming site was once the headquarters for Stephen F. Austin's colony and is now a fascinating glimpse into the lives of early Texans. I stepped into the museum and was amazed at the interactive exhibits, artifacts and displays that told the story of how Austin led 297 families—the Old Three Hundred—here and established the unofficial capital of Texas. This act of courage earned Austin the title of the Father of Texas.

For more than a decade, San Felipe was a major hub, and everyone important to the Texas Revolution passed through here.

I walked the timeline of how the town grew exponentially but was then abandoned and burned to the ground in a moment of fear known as the Runaway Scrape in 1836. Until recently, visitors had to use their imagination to envision the bustling townscape. But today, visitors can step inside meticulously recreated buildings, including a cabin and Austin's empresario office. Fully costumed reenactors transported me back 200 years.

Visiting San Felipe gave me a new appreciation for the lifestyle and struggle of Texans. Whether you're a history enthusiast, a nature lover or simply need to be reminded of how thankful you are for modern conveniences, this is a must-see destination. ■

ABOVE Chet, right, with Bryan McAuley, manager at the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site.

TCP Join Chet as he sees life as the Old Three Hundred did. And see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

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

FEBRUARY

07

Laredo [7–10] Birding Festival, (956) 718-1063, laredobirdingfestival.org

08

Brenham [8–11, 15–18, 22–25] The Crucible, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

09

Boerne [9–10] Chocolate Walk, (830) 248-1635, ci.boerne.tx.us

Fredericksburg [9–11, 16–18, 23–25] How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, (830) 997-3588, fredericksburgtheater.org

10

Amarillo Triosarachops Devours, (806) 376-8782, amarillosymphony.org

Round Top Valentine's Concert and Bybee Library Fundraiser and Reception, (979) 249-3129, festivalhill.org

Surfside Beach Marathon and Half Marathon, surfsidebeachmarathon.com

Bay City [10, 16–18, 23–29, March 1–2] Matagorda County Fair, (979) 245-2454, matagordacountyfair.com

15

Alpine [15–17] Lone Star Cowboy Poetry Gathering, (432) 216-2167, lonestarcowboypoetry.com

16

Brenham [16–17] Texas Trails Quilt Show, friendshipquiltguild.weebly.com

Waller [16–17] Chili When It's Chilly Cook-Off, chiliwhenitschilly.org

17

Lake Jackson A Celebration of American Black Composers, (979) 265-7661, bcfas.org

San Felipe Nature Talks: Invasives and Exotics, (512) 461-4780, tpwd.texas.gov

19

Brenham [19-24] Fortnightly Club Annual Used Book Sale, (979) 830-5665, visitbrenhamtexas.com

23

Luling [23-24] American Legion Post 177 Chili and BBQ Cook-Off, (512) 554-5389, facebook.com/legion177

24

Victoria Tchaikovsky Spectacular, (361) 576-4500, victoriasymphony.com

26

Decatur [26-March 3] Wise County Youth Fair, wcyouthfair.org

29

Brownsville [29-March 2] Charro Days, (956) 542-4245, charrodaysfiesta.com

MARCH

01

San Angelo [1-2] Brews, Ewes & BBQ; (325) 655-2345; facebook.com/brewsewesbbq

02

Huntsville Texas Independence Day and Gen. Sam Houston's Birthday Celebration, (936) 291-9726, huntsvilletexas.com

TCP Submit Your Event

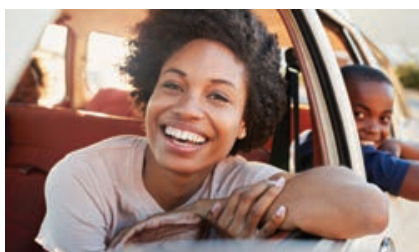
We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your May event by March 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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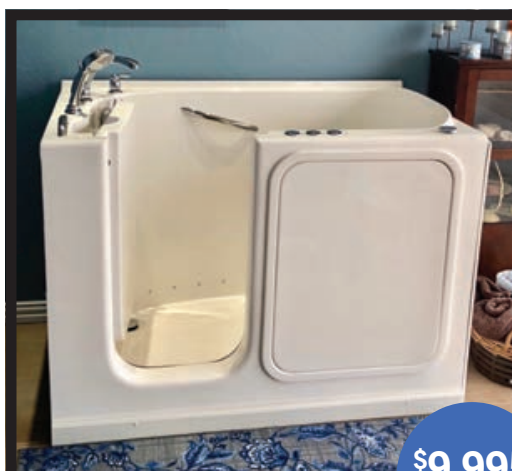
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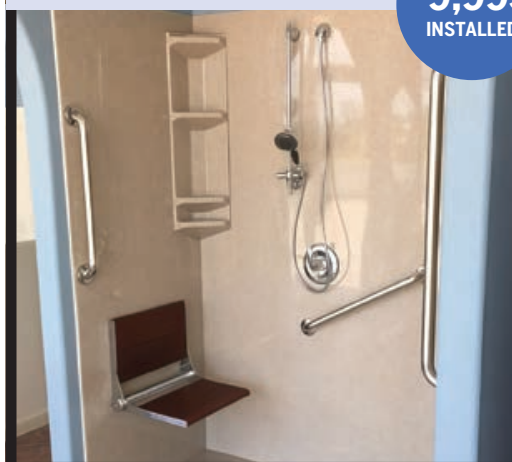


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Vibrant Color

The sun rises, and the world becomes alive with color. As we marvel at hues both artificial and natural, some photographers are fortunate enough to capture the moment with vivid clarity. Come along as we wind down the back trails to see what catches the eye.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 KRISTEN BROWN
PEDERNALES EC

A grackle finds something to eat on the trail at Brushy Creek Park in Cedar Park.

2 MARK HOLLY
BANDERA EC

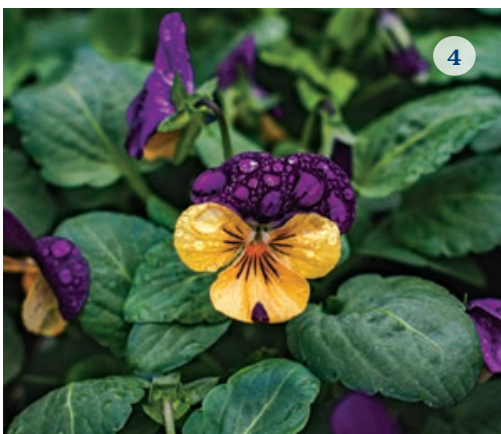
An iconic San Antonio holiday scene on the Riverwalk.

3 DANNY VIVIAN
NUECES EC

"A fiery sunrise on a summer morning on Mustang Beach, the most beautiful sunrise spot in Texas."

4 ALLISON MORROW
WOOD COUNTY EC

A horned violet.



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DUE FEB 10 Food and Cooking
DUE MAR 10 Shells and Scales
DUE APR 10 Textures



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



Progress by Design

Beverly L. Greene framed a future for architects like her

BY ARIANNA CANNON
ILLUSTRATION BY
JOHN JAY CABUAY

I KNEW AT A YOUNG AGE that I wanted to change the world.

What I didn't know was how to go about doing it or even who I was to think that I could change the world. I did know that I was drawn to architecture. Maybe that would be my purpose, the mode by which I would change the world.

But less than 100 years ago, I couldn't have pursued that purpose.

Beverly L. Greene needed to come along first. In 1942, she became the first known female African American licensed architect in the U.S. In a field dominated by white men, she stayed true to herself and pursued a path into the unknown.

She earned a degree in architectural engineering, overcame preconceived notions—even being forced to move to New York due to a lack of opportunities

for a Black female architect in Chicago—and persisted.

"I wish that young [Black] women would think about this field," she said in an interview. "I wish some others would try it."

I answered that rallying call by enrolling as an architecture student at Texas Tech University in 2021, knowing full well that despite the many years that have passed since Greene's historic achievements, the playing field is still not level.

While history was made in 2020 as the number of licensed female Black architects reached 500, the national registrar reported that just 0.5% of licensed architects were Black women. Not even 1% of architects look like me.

But if Greene could achieve all that she did—including working on the UNESCO headquarters in Paris—during segregation and a world war, then the only limitations on the legacy I create are me.

It's possible that pursuing architecture will have no effect on a global scale, and it's possible that I'll face criticism and setbacks. It's even highly likely that I will fail in this field, which has a higher dropout rate than engineering and medicine.

If learning about Greene taught me anything, it's that success in life is oftentimes transient and short-lived, but your effect on others—your creations, all those beautiful gifts—those outlive you.

So if someone asked me today what I want my life or my career to look like, I won't tell them that I want to help people in an unconventional but impactful way. I won't tell them that I want to create bonds through and with the built environment. I won't even tell them that I want to design a world in which everyone has access to safe, sustainable and affordable shelter.

Instead I'll tell them this: I want to be remembered like Beverly L. Greene because I helped shape the future for those who came after me. ■

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