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Texas Coop Power

FOR TRI-COUNTY EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2023

Brenham Is Smokin'

Here's the scoop:
The barbecue there
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**TRI-COUNTY
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18

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April 2023



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How passionate artists help each other turn gourds into richly embellished works of art.

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Barbecue joints in Brenham, a town famous for ice cream, are attracting crowds of their own.

*By Anna Mazurek
Photos by Wyatt McSpadden*

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Matt Lowery is proud of how the ribs at LJ's BBQ stack up.
Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

ABOVE

The Hallettsville home of Blanche and Roy Cavarretta hoards their gourds.
Photo by Julia Robinson

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Rising Stars

WE SALUTE a select group of Texas co-op employees this Lineworker Appreciation Day, April 10. Apprentices from Pedernales Electric Cooperative in Johnson City dominated at two competitions in 2022 that spotlighted and promoted lineworker skills and safe work practices.

PEC's Phillip Stapp finished first among 96 apprentices at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo in July, claiming the top prize for the co-op for the fourth consecutive rodeo. Co-workers Crispen Davis placed third and Cole Compton fifth. Then, at the International Lineman's Rodeo in October in Kansas, PEC's Zackery Gough, below, beat out 365 competitors to claim first place. Davis was close behind in second place, and Stapp was 14th.



“The hardest thing in the world to understand is income taxes.”

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

FINISH THIS SENTENCE I DROVE ALL NIGHT TO ...

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 February prompt: **Rainy days make me ...**

Get in the kitchen and make soup or dumplings and do some baking.

ELAINE GARNER
VIA FACEBOOK

Want to curl up with a cozy blanket and a good book.

MARGIE HARGROVE
BOWIE-CASS EC
DAINGERFIELD

Glad I'm retired from delivering mail so I can sit on my porch and enjoy it.

TANIS WILLIAMS
WOOD COUNTY EC
FRUITVALE

Want to make oatmeal, hot cocoa, tomato soup and grilled cheese.

KIMBERLEY BAILEY RIGGS
VIA FACEBOOK

Remember when it was dry and I promised not to curse rainy days.

MARK BROWNING
SAN HOUSTON EC
GOODRICH

Visit our website to see more responses.



April 8 National Empanada Day

Writer Vianney Rodriguez shared that empanadas were among her favorite types of pan dulce in *Sweet Memories*, from December 2020.

Funny How Time Slips Away

Willie Nelson, the musical genius from the Hill Country who has won 10 Grammys, written more than 2,500 songs and turned plenty of others' tunes into hits of his own, turns 90 on April 29.

Here are the favorite songs of TCP's writers and editors:

Chris Burrows: *City of New Orleans*

Alex Dal Santo: *On the Road Again*

Travis Hill: *Hello Walls*

Jessica Ridge: *Pancho and Lefty*

Tom Widlowski: *Seven Spanish Angels*

TCP Watch Willie perform each of these songs on our website.



Holy Smokes!

SEEMS ONLY FITTING that the world's longest barbecue marathon took place in Texas.

Pitmasters from Panther City BBQ in Fort Worth grilled for 40 hours, 49 minutes and 17 seconds July 13–15, 2022, to set the record. Chris Magallanes, above, and two others cooked 450 pounds of hamburgers, 300 pounds each of tablitras (beef short ribs) and fajitas, and 100 pounds each of onions and peppers.

The food was donated to the community, including to first responders and a hospital.

TCP Contests and More

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Caught Cuisine

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EDWARD ROWLAND
CECA
EASTLAND COUNTY

Kitty Hawk’s Mark

My first carrier landing in an A-7 Corsair aboard the USS Kitty Hawk was in November 1968, and my last landing after 130 combat missions in Southeast Asia was August 16, 1969 [*Breaking Up*, February 2023]. There’s nothing like your first carrier deployment, especially if it’s to a combat zone.

Mike Scott
Tri-County EC
Granbury

It’s heartwarming to know that 95% of her will be recycled and that her armor will be incorporated into a new U.S. ship [*Breaking Up*, February 2023].

DAVID HURLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

We just booked a guided trip through the ship channel [at right]. Our guide told us a few things about the retired carrier, but you filled in all the blanks.

Randy Carroll
Wood County EC
Winnsboro



COURTESY RANDY CARROLL

Honoring the 442nd

My parents—U.S. citizens—were among those who lost their assets and possessions when all those of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast were ordered into internment camps without due process and without any evidence of a crime [*Rescue of the Lost Battalion*, February 2023].

Two of my uncles served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Thank you for remembering the loyalty, valor and tremendous sacrifice of the Japanese Americans of the 442nd.

Jeanne Makihara
Guadalupe Valley EC
Cibolo

Indianola Relocated

After the destruction of Indianola by hurricanes and subsequent fires, many of the homes were dismantled and moved to nearby Cuero and Victoria for a safer location [*Important Entry*, February 2023]. A search of the internet reveals addresses where visitors can see these old homes in a restored setting.

Jeri Porter
Pedernales EC
Fischer

TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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Fruits of Their Labor



How passionate artists
turn gourds into richly
embellished works of art

FROM LEFT Michael Ford's pieces sometimes incorporate multiple gourds. Ford, a former graphic artist for the Texas Department of Transportation, has been turning gourds into art since 2013.

With one hand, Wimberley artist Michael Ford grips what looks like a glossy beige birdhouse shaped like an hourglass and etched with black tendrils. Then he gives it a shake. *Boom, boom—BOOM.* The deep rumbles startle passersby at the Lone Star Gourd Festival in Fredericksburg. Like me, they're dumbfounded.

"This is a thunder gourd," says Ford, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. When shaken, a spring vibrates a drumhead, creating ominous notes that emanate through holes in the gourd.

"It's very functional. If your company stays too long, just duck into a hallway with your gourd," Ford says, grinning, then shakes it again, setting off more thunderous booms. "Then tell your guests, 'Uh-oh, storm's coming. Better leave while you can!'"

Ford's joking, of course. But he's dead serious about the art form that he calls his passion—much like his fellow gourd artists all over Texas. Using an array of techniques, they create bowls, holiday décor, birdhouses, masks, sculptures, jewelry, lamps and miniature hobbit homes, to name



a few examples. There are simple designs, like painted gourds, and richly embellished pieces that can sell for thousands of dollars.

But wait—what is a gourd? Is it just a smooth pumpkin? Well, close. Gourds and pumpkins, along with squash, melons and cucumbers, are members of Cucurbitaceae, a plant family that produces hard-shelled fruits that humans have used for food, ornaments and utensils over thousands of years. Experts believe gourds are the only plants that have been grown around the world since prehistoric days.

Historians in Peru have unearthed ancient gourd fragments associated with early humans. For generations, Peruvian artist Ana Poma and her neighbors in Cochas Chico have passed down the tradition of carving and burning intricate designs onto gourds as a way of storytelling. “Families teach their children,” says Poma, a vendor and teacher at the Fredericksburg festival. “I learned as a child from my mother, uncles and grandparents.”

For some artists, though, not just any gourd will do. Forget using our thin-skinned Texas natives, such as buf-

falo and balsam gourds. Instead, many artists prefer hard-shelled and decorative gourds available in endless shapes, sizes and thicknesses. Thicker shells (three-eighths of an inch thick or more) are sturdier for carving and burning. Standard gourd shapes, designated by the American Gourd Society, include cannonball, basketball, martin house, dipper, club and banana.

Many artists order their gourds from professional growers, such as the Wurtz Gourd Farm in Arizona and the Welburn Gourd Farm in Southern California. Some grow their own. John and Rickie Newell, Central Texas EC members near Llano, grow gourds. At the festival, Rickie—an artist who displays her work at the Llano Art Guild and Gallery—has a bin piled high with gourds for sale, ranging from 50 cents to \$12. Typically, gourds are priced according to their widest diameter. Those that have been cleaned on the outside and/or had their seeds and pulp scraped out cost more.

“We plant our gourds around April 15,” Rickie says. “Then we harvest when they’re dead in the field from October up to Christmas and dry them in a metal cage.”



Get a Gourd Look

See for yourself at Central Texas shows this year.

Southwest Gourd & Fiber Fine Art Show,
May 18–July 1,
Kerrville

Lone Star Gourd Festival,
Sept. 29–30,
Fredericksburg

Hill Country Collectables,
year-round,
Wimberley



Choosing a gourd is just the first step for many artists, and gourd shows are an ideal place to learn about the craft and expand skill sets. This Texas show is one of a handful of annual events held across the U.S. that attract hobbyists and professionals alike. Artists and vendors welcome questions, and many sell basic supplies. The Texas Gourd Society, the nonprofit organization that sponsors and organizes the annual Lone Star Gourd Festival at the Gillespie County Fairgrounds, is also a resource for crafters. Across Texas, the society has regional chapters called “patches.”

“We learn techniques from each other, like leather stitching,” says Sherry Nelson, a member of the Guadalupe Gourd Patch in Kerrville. “In the gourd world, though, you never copy someone’s work. Instead, you can use their technique as an inspiration to create something new.”

On her gourds, Nelson, a Central Texas EC member, uses various methods, such as burning; carving; painting; applying alcohol dyes; and attaching horns, beads and cactus fibers. “Pyrography is my favorite,” she says. “I can draw with my wood burner for hours. It’s very relaxing.”

Like many gourd artists, Roy and Blanche Cavarretta, who live in Hallettsville and are members of San Bernard EC, started out by growing gourds and turning them into birdhouses. Then, while traveling in New Mexico, they viewed a gourd art exhibit at an art festival. “We had no idea so many things could be done with them,” Roy recalls. “It set us on a

CLOCKWISE FROM IMMEDIATELY ABOVE Roy Cavarretta’s Standing Tall, Jill Robinson’s Chasing Dreams and a James Medders spiraling piece. Rickie Newell continues work on her angel with wings. Robinson’s Green Goddess. Blanche and Roy Cavarretta’s hobby has them “on a journey we never could have imagined.”



journey we never could have imagined. There's not a day goes by that we're not working on a gourd."

That was 11 years ago. The Cavarrettas still grow gourds. They've also become master gourd artists who've won countless awards. "At art shows, you enter at the novice level," Roy explains. "When you win at that level, you advance to intermediate, then advanced and master."

Together, the couple market their work as Gravel Road Arts. On her urn-style gourds, Blanche primarily uses pyrography, transparent dyes and a weaving stitch called closed coiling. Flowers, hummingbirds, dragonflies and inlaid gemstones adorn many of her pieces. Similarly, Roy uses pyrography and dyes along with chip carving using a gouge. His designs lean toward contemporary and Southwestern themes, such as his Spirit Doll that won Best of Show at the Fredericksburg festival.

The People's Choice award went to Chasing Dreams, a large kettle gourd intricately crafted by Austin's Jill Robinson. "I use a lot of random techniques," she says of her striking designs. "On this one, I used enameling, wood-burning, stipple carving and alcohol inks along with real cactus fibers and carved cactus fibers."

Visit with Robinson and other gourd artists, and you'll quickly pick up on their camaraderie and deep love for the craft. When artist James Medders of Morgan Mill lost the use of his left hand, Roy Cavarretta rigged a carving vise

that could hold a gourd in place for his friend. Soon Medders, a United Cooperative Services member, was back to woodburning, carving and painting on his gourds. Using a method called pine needle coiling, he also stitches longleaf pine needles into elaborate designs.

"Once I got started in gourd art eight years ago, I had a passion," says Medders, who has also won awards. "Why? I don't know. I just do. Sometimes my wife tells me, 'Put that gourd down! We've got somewhere to go.'"

Meanwhile, across the exhibit hall at the festival, a hands-on art area called the Imagination Station beckons newbies of any age. From a big pile of gourds, I choose a little one cut open like a bowl. Then I plunk down at a table with metallic paints, rhinestones, a paintbrush and a sponge.

"One of our goals is to pass on gourd art to young people so it won't die out," says Rona Thornton of Austin, who's overseeing the area. "I take the Imagination Station to garden clubs, schools and military bases. It's fun to see people who think they're not artistic create their own piece."

That would be me—I'm definitely no artist. But wait! Before long, my plain gourd has transformed into a sparkly urn. Wow, I *am* an artist.

Thornton smiles. "Anything's possible with a gourd," she says. ■

TCP See more gourds in this story on our website.



Barbecue joints in Brenham, a town famous for ice cream, are attracting crowds of their own



MAKE NO BONES

Leonard Botello IV always wanted to have a roadside barbecue shack. So when a hole-in-the-wall barbecue restaurant 3 miles west of downtown Brenham on U.S. 290 went up for sale, Botello bought the 1,200-square-foot red metal building.

He grew up in a family of restaurateurs in Lake Jackson and initially swore he'd never follow the same path. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a biology degree in 2013. But after a visit to Austin's La Barbecue, Botello was blown away by the simplicity of the barbecue. Right away he started experimenting with his uncle's pit and later drove to Ohio to pick up his first offset smoker, a \$4,000 Craigslist purchase.

"It's like one big science project every single day because everything's completely different," Botello says. "Every cow is different. Every piece of wood is different. The weather is different."

He opened Truth Barbeque in July 2015 and added a covered patio next to his roadside barbecue shack on the outskirts of Brenham.

While Brenham is best known as the home of Blue Bell Creameries, there's more to the city's culinary scene than ice cream. The small town, population 18,000, has a handful of barbecue restaurants that are building impressive résumés. Two of these spots—Truth Barbeque and LJ's BBQ—are just a mile and a half apart, and both made *Texas Monthly's* list of the 50 Best BBQ Joints in 2021.

At either place, the owners and pitmasters could be stationed behind the counter slicing up the Texas trinity—brisket, sausage and ribs—each cooked with their own personal style and accompanied by an array of delectable sides. Brenham's location, halfway between Austin and Houston, makes it an easy day trip or weekend destination for barbecue. Come hungry and be prepared to loosen your belt.



OPPOSITE FROM TOP The staff at LJ's BBQ and a spread at the restaurant. ABOVE Preparing servings of LJ's ketchup-based sauce, which balances sweetness with apple cider and white vinegars.

HONORING MAMAW

LJ'S STARTED in an unlikely place—the backroom of a downtown liquor store, where Matt Lowery, his cousin Leah Cook and her husband, Corey Cook, were selling lunches on a table at a side entrance in 2016. Pitmasters Lowery and Corey Cook were preparing the food at Leah's parents' house.

The trio moved their business to the current brick-and-mortar location, a concrete building with a red metal awning on West Main Street in 2017. Most days the parking lot is full and one of the three pitmasters—Lowery, Cook and Josh Jalomo, who joined the team in 2020—is behind the counter chopping brisket for one of their signature side dishes: brisket mac and cheese.

"It's just mac and cheese with chopped brisket on top," Corey Cook says. "It's no more simple than that. It's one of the most popular items."

The idea for the restaurant was hatched when Lowery began cooking barbecue and doing small catering gigs in 2014, when he was in graduate school at the University of Houston, studying hotel and restaurant management. After graduation, he was visiting the Cooks in Brenham when they began brainstorming an idea for a business. In 2015 they started doing pop-ups before moving to the backroom of the liquor store.

The trio decided to name the restaurant for their grandmother, Laura Jean, who lived in Brenham.

"One day, Leah said, 'How about we call it LJ's after our mamaw?' " Lowery says. "It just seemed like a good way to pay homage to her and had a great story."

LJ's main focus is locally sourced ingredients, from the post oak they burn to the collard greens they serve. "We get our collard greens from a local farmer here that's about 5 miles away from our restaurant," says Lowery about their twice-weekly deliveries from Whitehurst Farm. "The greens you order here at LJ's literally are in the ground no more than 24 to 48 hours before."

The brisket is seasoned with a salt and pepper rub. "It's simple, but it's done well," Lowery says. All the meat is cooked on one of four smokers—one 1,000-gallon and three 500-gallon offsets tucked behind the restaurant. In addition to brisket, sausage and ribs, LJ's also serves up pulled pork and turkey. All the meats pair well with their ketchup-based sauce that Cook calls the "perfect balance" of sweet mixed with apple cider and white vinegars. Peach cobbler and banana pudding are the stars of the dessert menu.

With so many options, deciding what to order can be tough. Lowery suggests starting with a three-meat plate, piled high with brisket, ribs and sausage.

"Obviously, the turkey is the hidden gem," Cook says. "But the first thing that you want to try are those."



to kind of complement the meat,” Botello explains.

His most popular sides are collards, corn pudding and potato tot casserole, a family recipe. But save room for the triple-layer cakes for dessert—each slice weighs a pound. Using another Botello family recipe, head baker Kiki Wilkins makes 12 rotating varieties of cake, including triple-chocolate, carrot, strawberry, tres leches and banana caramel.

Truth debuted on *Texas Monthly*’s list in 2017, earning the No. 10 spot. But getting there wasn’t easy.

“I remember cooking three briskets a day and then nobody showing up,” Botello says. He initially chose Brenham to avoid being drowned out in bigger markets like Austin and Houston. Truth gained traction quickly, partially thanks to its photogenic plating that made Botello’s barbecue ripe for social media. In 2019 he opened a second location, in Houston.

Success hasn’t changed how Botello does business. He’s still behind the counter cutting meat, and his dad is often at the register. “I like to be hands-on [and] talk to customers,” explains Botello, who always ensures sauce bottles are clean and facing the correct way. “I like to be approachable.”

Botello enjoys the questions and interactions. “When

they ask you questions, your brain starts to work a lot harder,” he says. “And you realize how much information you have locked up here that you’re just doing [by] second nature. So it’s good for them, and it’s good for me.”

He teaches barbecue classes one Sunday a month, inspired by the openness of Wayne Mueller, a third-generation pitmaster and the owner of Louie Mueller Barbecue in nearby Taylor. One day, while Botello was eating, Mueller sat down beside him and started sharing his knowledge unprompted, including his temperature for cooking meat—often a secret in the barbecue world.

“Even though these are trade secrets, I could give them to you,” explains Botello. “But it’s like Jimi Hendrix or Stevie Ray Vaughan teaching somebody how to play a guitar. They’re never going to be able to recreate that no matter how many answers you give them.” ■

FROM TOP A sampling from the menu at Truth Barbeque. Owner Leonard Botello IV, left, is often found behind the counter cutting meat as his father works the register.



MOMENT OF TRUTH

AT TRUTH BARBEQUE, Botello’s Central Texas-style preparation consists of a simple rub made in-house and post oak to smoke the meat. To expand his skills and menu, Botello also serves up a rotating menu of less conventional dishes—smoked boudin, pastrami brisket and Carolina whole hog, a popular Saturday-only menu item. The meats are accompanied by a choice of three sauces: a traditional tomato base, tangy mustard or white barbecue. The latter two are his tribute to Carolina-style barbecue. “Our sauces are a smidge more vinegary than most sauces, but it’s just

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**DARRYL
SCHRIVER**

PRESIDENT/
CHIEF
EXECUTIVE
OFFICER

SPRINGING TOWARD SAVINGS

EACH APRIL, we take the time to honor and celebrate the linemen who work around the clock to ensure you have safe, reliable power. Tri-County Electric Co-op employs 99 apprentice linemen, linemen, journeyman linemen, project coordinators and line superintendents that work through the rain, snow, sleet, wind, and heat to power your homes and businesses. Without these gentlemen, we would not be able to fulfill the basic requirements of an electric co-op. The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association declared the second Monday in April as Lineman Appreciation Day to ensure electric co-op linemen are properly celebrated on a workday. Please help us thank a lineman on April 10.

In addition to these brave men, we have 47 exceptional ladies and gentlemen in our Member Service department that work for you. They take your phone calls and emails when you have questions, and they are the bright, shining faces when you visit our offices. They have been there for you, especially over the challenging months since Winter Storm Uri. 7000003002

Here at Tri-County Electric Cooperative we work every day to take care of you, our members. As a member-owned organization, we understand that we would not be here if it weren't for you. While every business should have the end consumer at the top of mind, that is not always the case – profit and greed often take over. Since we are a not-for-profit electric utility, any margins remaining at the end of the budget year are allocated back to you, the member-owners. We work to make sure our operational costs are low and act as good stewards of your money rather than focusing on profit margin. That is the power of the co-op difference.

If you have been following my columns you know that as of March 1, Tri-County Electric Co-op can buy power on the ERCOT market outside of Brazos. This power supply freedom was a result of Brazos filing for chapter 11 bankruptcy in March 2021. We signed an agreement with Constellation Energy Group to purchase power from ERCOT and expect to see a reduction in power costs. The power contract will work the same as before – we will purchase power to meet your energy needs and then will be billed accordingly. The rate will remain at 14.425 cents/kWh, and we will use the power cost recovery factor as a mechanism to true-up your bill based on final power costs.

Many of you have asked when the bill relief will come. On March billing statements, we were able to set PCRf at a negative 1 cent/kWh, reducing overall power costs. Additionally, I am glad to report that this month, on April billing statements, you should see additional rate relief. Please keep in mind that your bill amount is driven by the amount of electricity you use, and we encourage you to visit our website for energy-saving tips. 800712277

We are doing everything we can to lower your costs. Tri-County Electric Co-op only keeps 2.425 cents/kWh and the base customer charge. The remainder of the bill goes to power costs. The average residential member uses 1,500 kWh per month. In January and February, approximately 77% of the total bill went to power costs. The negative 1 cent PCRf in March brought power costs down some, but still not enough. In April, we are expecting PCRf to be at least negative 2 cents/kWh. We expect additional power cost savings to come, but it truly depends on the amount of energy we must purchase each month. Just like you, I am a Tri-County Electric Co-op member and feel the same financial constraints due to the higher power costs. I believe these changes to our power supply contracts and the operational adjustments will bring much needed relief. We are in this together.

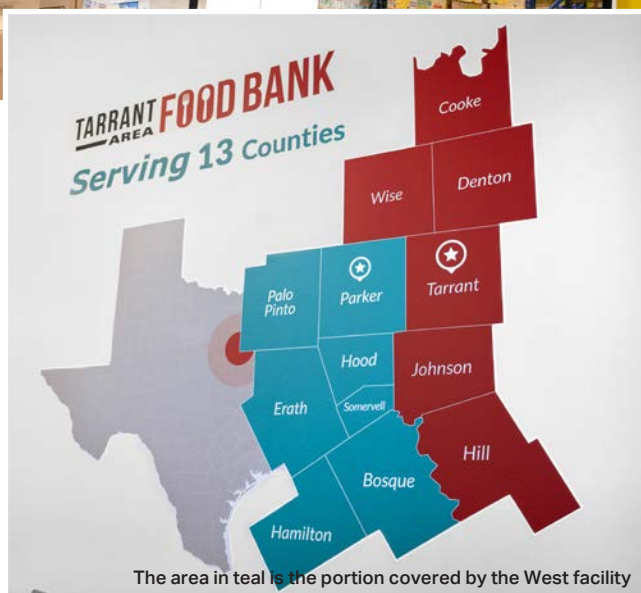




FOOD, EDUCATION & MORE

Tarrant Area Food Bank boosts rural outreach with West facility

BY BOB BUCKEL, COMMUNICATIONS CONTENT SPECIALIST



Michael Polydoroff, marketing and communications director for Tarrant Area Food Bank, made no effort to hide his enthusiasm as he joined branch manager Steve Martin and regional engagement coordinator Lauren Burge to conduct a walking tour of Tarrant Area Food Bank West. The facility, on the south side of I-20 seven miles west of Weatherford, is in the heart of Tri-County Electric Cooperative's original service area.

The Food Bank, based in Fort Worth, celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2022. It serves about a million meals a week through a network of more than 330 pantries and food distribution programs in 13 counties. But like any great organization, it is constantly striving to get better.

Two years ago, that quest drew them westward.

"During the pandemic, when we were looking at the need, we narrowed it down to the rural areas," said Martin. "We were doing a really good job of taking care of everyone in the Tarrant area, but we were not doing a good job of taking care of everyone in Parker County and the surrounding counties."

TAFB West opened in November 2021. It delivers food to about 250 families a week on-site, and supplies more than 70 churches, food pantries and senior centers that feed the hungry in Bosque, Erath, Hamilton, Hood, Parker, Palo Pinto and Somervell counties. At the core of that service is the mission: "Empowering our communities to alleviate hunger by providing food, education and resources."

The 28,000-square-foot West warehouse has offices, an upstairs boardroom that is available to the public, a kitchen, meeting rooms and elbow room for plenty of volunteers. There are thousands of feet of shelves for canned and packaged goods, a shipping dock, a "market" and a garden. An 8,000-square-foot walk-in cooler is kept at 36 degrees, and a 4,000-square-foot freezer maintains a bone-chilling 2 degrees below zero.

"Our service area is about the size of Rhode Island," Martin said. 800784434

The West facility gets food from the main warehouse in Fort Worth and distributes more than a half-million pounds each month. Nothing stays on the shelves more than 30 days.

Proud partners

Numbers are impressive, but the Food Bank's focus is on people – those they serve, those who support them, and those who volunteer.

TAFB's network of corporate partners reads like the Fortune 500 – Lockheed-Martin, ExxonMobil, XTO, Amazon, Walmart, H-E-B, Kroger and other grocers, Texas Health Resources, Baylor Scott & White, JPS Health System and other hospitals. Many of those companies' employees volunteer, and thousands of individual donors also support the mission. 9590500002

That mission includes constantly seeking new ways to serve. Recently, TAFB West partnered with the Parker County Hospital District to put food on every ambulance.

"They were telling us that sometimes they go to people's houses, and the people have absolutely nothing," Martin said. "Now, they can give them a box of food and information."

Connecting those folks with resources can lead to better health, Burge said.

Most food bank clients are not homeless and destitute. More often, they are low-wage earners and their families, senior citizens living on fixed incomes, victims of family



Items stay on the shelves less than 30 days



The 'Mission Market' gives clients a place to shop



The busy office encourages involvement



Banners in the warehouse remind volunteers of the cause

disabled, the under-employed and the temporarily and long-term unemployed. More than one-third are children.

"If you have to make choices between paying your utility bill and buying food, getting medical care or paying the rent, we try to take that burden away," Polydoroff said.

Grocery shopping

A key feature of TAFB West is Mission Market, where people can come in and shop.

"They can get as much as they want except for the protein and eggs – we have to limit those," Martin said. "We have a system so they can get online and order, and we'll pull the order. They can let us know what time they want to pick up and we'll just put it in their car."

Polydoroff noted the quality of merchandise is high.

"There's really some gorgeous stuff here," he said. "We try and give people fresh, nutritious things they can use to make a meal. It's a dignified experience."

Last summer, Martin thought the number of people served would drop after a Thursday night mobile distribution in the

parking lot had to be moved inside because volunteers were getting sick from the heat. Instead, the numbers went up.

“It was because of the shopping experience,” he said. “They come in and choose what they want. It’s not just a box of food that someone else put together.”

“That’s why I say this is the food bank of the future,” Polydoroff added. “This model does not exist in other food banks.”

Hands-on classes

TAFB West’s spacious, modern kitchen is stocked with pots, pans and other equipment donated by Weatherford restaurant owners John and Jenn Shepherd – but their involvement goes beyond that. The plan is for John to do live cooking presentations (think “Iron Chef”) where he grabs items from the Mission Market and prepares a healthy meal on a budget.

Captured on video, the program can be shown on television monitors in Mission Market.

The Food Bank also does “Cooking Matters” presentations in the kitchen, and takes them on the road to cancer centers, senior centers and assisted living facilities. They get a group together, buy \$20 or \$25 worth of food, and teach them how to cook a healthy meal.

“We’ll either give them a gift certificate for \$25 so they can go out and get the food for the recipe, or we’ll have the stuff here and just hand them a bag and they can go home and prepare it,” Martin said. 2916001

“It’s a great program,” Polydoroff added. “It’s a brand in and of itself. We don’t own it, but we have our own staff that runs it in high-need areas.”

Another educational outreach is the “RED Bus” (Resources. Education. Delivered.). The mobile food pantry delivers food while also providing resource assistance and nutrition education to communities with high levels of food insecurity. TAFB West’s RED Bus is sponsored by H-E-B and the Parker County Hospital District. Two other vehicles work out of



The Food Bank grows its own fresh produce, too

Arlington and Fort Worth, targeting “food deserts” where grocery stores are scarce.

Partner agencies, nonprofit organizations hosting a special event, health fairs, nonprofit expos and back-to-school fairs are among those eligible for a visit from the RED Bus.

A garden spot

Another innovative feature of TAFB West is outside: a two-level garden facing I-20. Rock-lined raised beds are equipped with drip irrigation and tended by volunteers. During a December tour, cold-weather crops like kale, Swiss chard, romaine lettuce and artichokes were still thriving. In its first full season last year, it generated more than 800 pounds of produce.

Martin said they’re aiming much higher this year.

“The garden is another food-bank-of-the-future concept,” Polydoroff said. In 2021 alone, TAFB assisted in the establishment of 14 new community gardens in the Tarrant County area, and almost 40 percent of the food it distributes is a fresh fruit or a vegetable.

One thing that doesn’t change is need. Around 15 percent

of the people in Tarrant, Parker and the surrounding counties face food insecurity every day. As long as unemployment, illness and natural disasters impact people in North Texas, Tarrant Area Food Bank will be there, working to lift that burden.

“What you put in your body makes you who you are,” Martin said. “Food is health.”



Steve Martin (third from left) manages TAFB West with a small staff, and lots of volunteers

LINEMAN

APPRECIATION DAY

APRIL 10, 2023

JASON FORBIS

Project Manager/Journeyman Lineman

Call him the “comeback kid.”

Jason Forbis was born in Azle, but moved to Olney as a four-year-old and grew up there. He’s back in Azle now, working as a project manager for Tri-County Electric Co-op.

He joined the U.S. Army in 2002 and did – not one, but two tours of duty in Iraq. Along the way, he met some guys who knew the lineman trade.

“That sounded like something I’d be interested in,” he said. After he left the Army, he applied “all over the place,” and Tri-County Electric Co-op offered him a job in Keller.

“They trained me up and got me rolling,” he said. After four-and-a-half years, he took a job with United Co-op in Burleson, where he advanced to journeyman and took on more responsibility.

After eight years, he and Ashton were ready to start a family, and Burleson no longer looked like the small town they’d wanted to raise their children in. He made a call, and in November 2021, Jason came back for a second – hopefully final – tour at Tri-County Electric Co-op.

Last February, daughter Kodi Ann joined big brother Krew. In November, the family moved to Peaster.

With all that’s been going on at home, Jason has a new appreciation for the “family-friendly atmosphere” at Tri-County Electric Co-op. He’s glad to be back.

“Everybody gets along and has a good time,” he said. “It’s really laid-back, but at the same time we get jobs turned out. We get the work done and have fun while we’re doing it. 800664245

“It makes coming to work pretty easy when you can do that.”

Worth coming back for? Definitely.



CODY JONES

Second-Class Lineman

Cody Jones grew up in Seymour and went to work at the Waggoner Ranch when he was 21. He spent 17 years in the saddle before signing on as a lineman.

A haircut brought him to Tri-County Electric Co-op.

“When they sold the ranch, I couldn’t see myself staying there,” he said. “I was going to work in the oilfield, down to Pleasanton. So I went to get a haircut.”

His hairstylist was Connie Woods, whose husband, Royce, is a longtime co-op employee. When he told her he was going to have to be away from his family, she mentioned Tri-County Electric Co-op was hiring and urged him to put in an application. After she finished, he walked across the street for a visit.

He put a résumé together and turned it in. A month later, he got a call.

“They told me they were going to send me an offer,” he said. “That was probably one of the best days of my life, right there.”

In just over five years, he’s worked his way up to second-class lineman, working toward journeyman. Co-workers have mentored him along the way.

“It’s a challenge, and I like that,” he said. “I think the biggest part is just having a can-do attitude. I’ve never heard a lineman say, ‘I can’t do that.’”

Cody’s wife, Ashley, is an RN with a master’s in healthcare administration. Their son, Hagen, 21, works in the oilfield, and daughter Savanna, 19, is at college earning a degree in nursing.

He’s happy to be back with his family, and in the co-op family.

“When I left the ranch, I wasn’t sure I was going to find anything I loved like I did that,” he said. “But it’s been awesome. I’ve been here five years and I haven’t looked back.”





COLTON ANDERSEN

Journeyman Lineman

Colton Andersen, an Army veteran and a veteran lineman, learned his skills working for a contractor. He came to Tri-County Electric Co-op in 2019, and now leads a crew, working out of the Keller office.

He continues to learn every day.

"I've been able to teach these guys quite a bit, and they've been able to teach me a lot," he said. "This group of guys is good. Nobody gets at each other if they don't know something – it's just, I'll teach you and you teach me. We all feed off of it. 800729793

"Coming from the military into line work, it's almost the same – the structure and the brotherhood you have," he said. "It's guys who want to be outside, hands-on. You're showing up every day and you're looking out for each other."

Colton and Britany, his high school sweetheart, have four children, ages 11, 10, three and one. He grew up in Utah, but moved to Texas to follow his wife's dad and uncle into line work. He hasn't looked back.

Last September, he joined a group of Tri-County Electric Co-op linemen on a mission to Florida, restoring power after Hurricane Ian devastated coastal communities there.

"It's cool to see everybody just waiting on you, so glad to see you, and to get everybody's power back on," he said. "It was a good feeling."

"Becoming a part of Tri-County's family has been a blessing for me and my family," he added. "Being a lineman is a career that not everybody can do, or is willing to do. It's a different breed in itself.

"But people depend on us, and I'm proud to be a part of that."

JUSTIN SWANN

Journeyman Lineman

Justin Swann likes big jobs – like bringing power to a new subdivision. But when he left Granbury's electric utility in December 2011 and came to Tri-County Electric Co-op, he was less than a year removed from mowing lawns.

"I didn't know anything," he laughed. "'Don't touch that!' and 'Don't touch that!' I could set a pole, but that was about it."

Project coordinator Jimmy Villa kept after him, though.

"He'd bring me an application every day," Swann said. "Finally, I called him and said, 'Alright, I'll try it.' I've been here 11 years and loved every minute of it."

Justin is a Tolar Rattler, like his older daughter Riley and several fellow employees. But wife Sandy and the younger kids, Ryan and Dallas, live in Priddy – south of Comanche. He's there on weekends, but during the week he lives in a travel trailer.

Still, he has his brothers – the Granbury line crew.

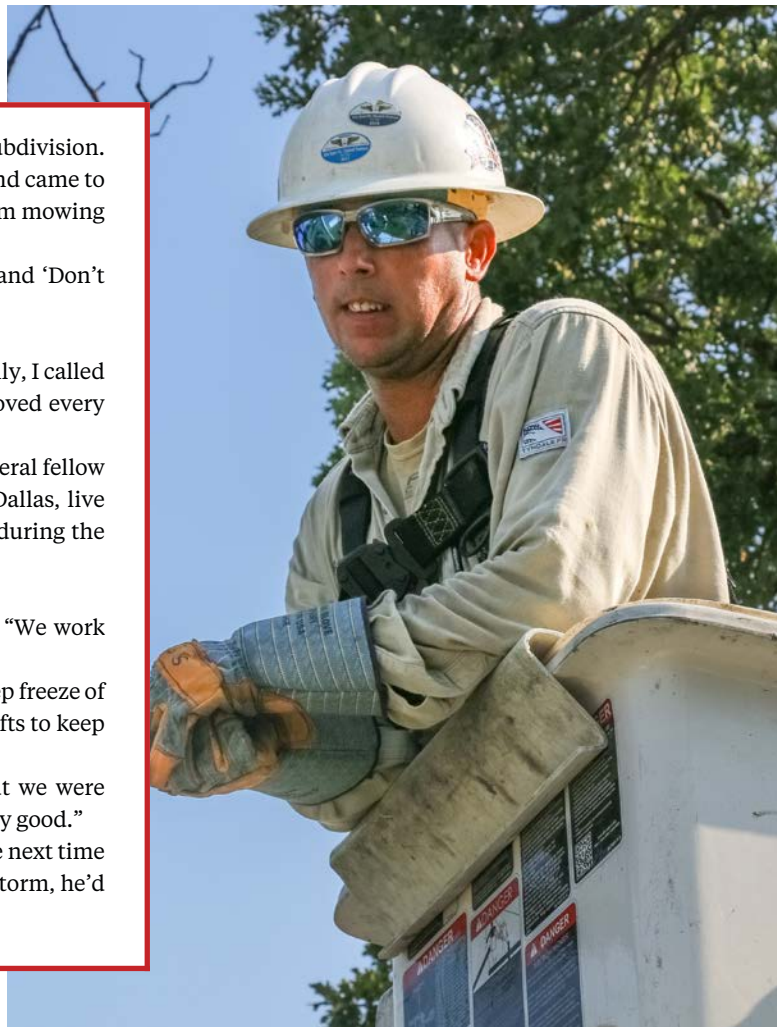
"You could call any of those guys my best friend," he said. "We work hard, but we have some fun, too."

The "brotherhood" of linemen is important to him. In the deep freeze of February 2021, Swann was one of those who pulled 16-hour shifts to keep Tri-County Electric Co-op members' power on.

"Your feet got cold and your hands got cold," he said. "But we were prepared for it. Just drive slow and be careful. We kept up pretty good."

Whatever the job, Justin is happy to take his shift. In fact, the next time Tri-County Electric Co-op sends a crew to help rebuild after a storm, he'd like very much to be part of that effort.

Big jobs are right up his alley.



ARBOR DAY

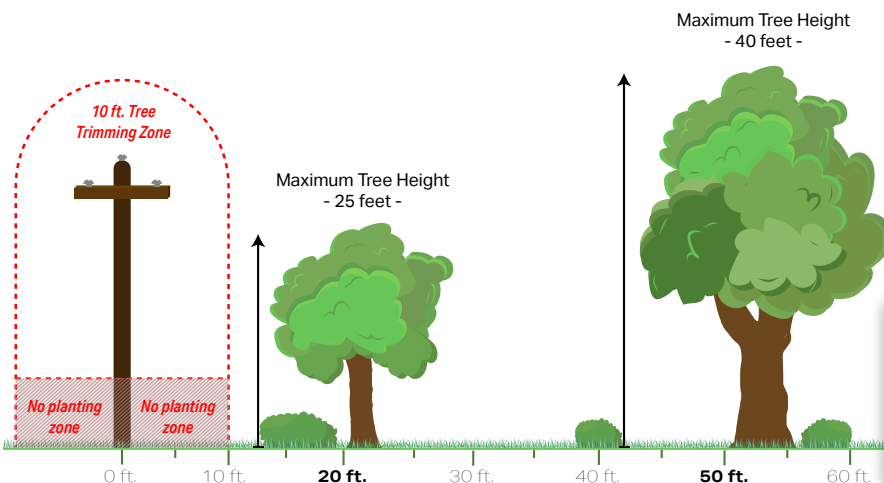
On hot, sunny days, our instinct is to find shade. When outdoors, the best, and often first, place we look for a cool spot is under a tree. Trees provide more than just shade, however. In fact, Arbor Day – the tree planting holiday – was proposed by J. Sterling Morton and enacted in Nebraska in 1872 primarily for agricultural purposes – and his personal love for trees.

As pioneers made their way into Nebraska, they noticed how sparse the pastures were. Though the soil was fit for farming, pioneers understood they would need to plant trees to help keep it in place. Additionally, pioneers used wood to build and fuel their homes.

Today, we continue to appreciate the different types of trees planted and available to be planted. The purpose of Arbor Day is to encourage communities to plant trees with the understanding that they will thrive – providing us with clean air, shade, natural beauty, and resources for wildlife. 800892537

In the electric utility industry, trees are an important factor in reliable power. Often, trees grow where power lines and poles exist, and are kept pruned to ensure branches do not fall on lines, causing outages. Tri-County Electric Cooperative is proactive with vegetation services, ensuring lines are clear of branches for faster restoration, safety for our linemen, and improved power reliability. Always request a tree trim from Tri-County Electric Co-op, and never attempt to trim on your own if power lines are nearby. Our vegetation management is a complimentary benefit to you, our member-owners.

To learn more about Arbor Day, visit arborday.org.



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GRAPE SALAD

BY LINDA CAMPBELL
BOYD

- 2 lbs. red, seedless grapes
- 2 lbs. green, seedless grapes
- 8 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup sour cream
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup pecan pieces, broken

1. Clean and dry grapes. Remove from stems and place in bowl.
2. Beat cream cheese until smooth. Add the vanilla, sugar, and sour cream. Stir until well mixed.
3. Pour cream cheese mixture over grapes and fold until all grapes are coated.
4. Sprinkle brown sugar and pecans on top.

ENJOY!



Photo via Delish

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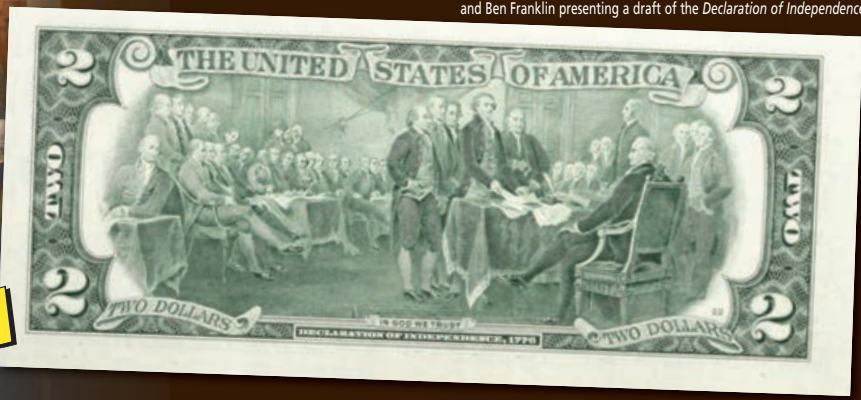
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This knife boasts a full tang blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to Gear Patrol, a full tang blade is key, saying "A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."

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Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the craftsmanship. If you don't feel like we cut you a fair deal, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the sale price. But we believe that once you wrap your fingers around the **River Canyon's** handle, you'll be ready to carve your own niche into the wild frontier.



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Grounded in Mystery

Some believe Jacob Brodbeck made the first powered flight in history—but there's little proof

BY MARTHA DEERING • ILLUSTRATION BY DANA SMITH

NEARLY 40 YEARS before the Wright brothers made their famous first flight on a North Carolina beach in 1903, a German immigrant named Jacob Brodbeck flew a homemade airship in a field near Luckenbach in 1865.

At least he might have.

Many details have been lost to history, and uncertainty abounds. The Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas includes a passage about the feat, though it acknowledges the flight might have occurred in San Antonio—and perhaps even in 1868. An official Texas historical marker in Luckenbach affirms the flight with no mention of the year and somewhat vaguely pins the accomplish-

ment as occurring north of San Antonio.

Iris Brodbeck Macek, who is a great-granddaughter of Brodbeck, self-published *Wings Over Luckenbach*, a partially fictionalized account of the man and his life. In it, she acknowledges the perplexity of that flight: "Good stories never go away. Stories inspired by true events laced with mystery become even more memorable. Jacob Brodbeck's story is one of these."

Brodbeck, a professor, inventor and talented musician, was a German immigrant who settled in Fredericksburg, where he became a schoolmaster. He was captivated by the idea of manned flight. In Fredericksburg he made small

models of airships powered by tightly wound springs, an idea that grew out of his attempts to invent a self-winding clock. He took a model to local fairs where it drew attention from other mechanically minded innovators. Their interest prompted Brodbeck to offer shares in his invention.

In an 1865 article in a San Antonio newspaper, he wrote: "For more than 20 years, I have labored to construct a machine which should enable man to use, like a bird, the atmospheric region as the medium of his travels. I have therefore concluded to collect subscriptions ... in order to build a large Air Ship."

He set the price of one share at \$5 to be repaid with interest when he sold the patent.

The airship featured a cockpit, helicopterlike propeller, compass and barometer. The TSHA writes that the airship rose 12 feet over a Luckenbach field September 20, 1865, and traveled about 100 feet before the spring that powered it completely unwound. A hard landing followed in which the craft was destroyed, but Brodbeck walked away without serious injury. His investors, who had hoped to make a fortune when he sold the patent, were not game for another try.

A photo purports to show the wrecked airship, though what happened to it after that day remains a mystery.

In spite of his failure, Brodbeck contributed much to pioneer Texas, serving as Gillespie County surveyor and later as county commissioner. In 1967, Gov. John Connally declared him the Father of American Aviation. ■

Incredible Eggs

A prized ingredient that's as versatile as it's cracked up to be

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Eggs are such an essential part of our daily kitchen landscape, and yet we often forget how versatile they are. Fruit curds are a wonderful way to celebrate eggs. Here, tart grapefruit is mixed with honey for a luscious spread that can be served for breakfast or on top of angel food cake.

Grapefruit Curd

½ cup grapefruit juice

¼ cup honey

2 eggs

2 egg yolks

5 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces

1. Fill a small saucepan with 2 inches of water and set over medium heat to simmer.
2. In a heatproof bowl that can sit on the saucepan, whisk together grapefruit juice, honey, eggs and egg yolks.
3. Set the bowl over the simmering water and cook, whisking until honey is melted and liquid is a uniform consistency.
4. Add the butter a few pieces at a time, whisking to melt and combine. Once the first pieces are almost completely melted, add the next few pieces. Keep adding butter and whisking until all the butter is incorporated. The curd should be smooth and noticeably thicker, coating the back of a spoon. It will thicken more as it cools; do not overcook. If desired, press the curd through a sieve to remove any lumps.
5. Pour into a jar, cover and chill at least 2 hours to set before serving.

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Cheese Quiche.





Zucchini Crescent Pie

JUDY SEWARD
HAMILTON COUNTY EC

Perfect for brunch or as a dinner side, this veggie-filled dish is a crowd pleaser. Slicing the zucchini thinly helps it bake into the filling along with the cheese.

- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
- 4 cups thinly sliced zucchini
- 1 cup chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ teaspoon dried basil
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella or Muenster cheese
- 1 can crescent rolls (8 ounces)
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- Grated Parmesan cheese, for topping

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat a skillet over medium and add butter to melt. Once melted, add the zucchini and onion and cook until very soft, about 10 minutes. Stir in parsley, basil, oregano, salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, beat eggs, then stir in cheese. Stir into vegetable filling.
3. Coat a 7-by-11-inch baking dish with nonstick spray. Unroll the crescent roll dough but do not separate. Press the dough into the bottom and partially up the sides of the dish, sealing any holes in the seams. Spread mustard evenly on dough.
4. Pour vegetable filling over the dough. Bake 18–20 minutes, until golden brown and filling is set. Let cool 10 minutes, then sprinkle with Parmesan and serve.

SERVES 6

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

BLT Egg Salad

PAIGE STAFFORD
PEDERNALES EC



Egg salad lovers, this one's for you. Bacon and sun-dried tomatoes add savory flavor to this classic sandwich filling. Any mustard from yellow to grainy Dijon works well for this spread.

SERVES 4–6

- 6 eggs
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar or lemon juice
- 6 slices cooked bacon, coarsely chopped
- ¼ cup sun-dried tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 2–3 green onions, diced
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

1. To hard-boil, place the eggs in a medium pot and fill with water until they are covered. Add vinegar and a dash of salt. Bring the water to a boil, then cover and reduce heat to low. Cook the eggs 8 minutes, drain and place the eggs in an ice bath to cool.
2. Once completely cooled, peel the eggs and chop into bite-size pieces. Place in a bowl along with the remaining ingredients. Stir well to combine, then taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Serve with crackers or vegetables or as a sandwich.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

NO-BAKE DESSERTS DUE APRIL 10
How do you beat the heat and still offer a flourishing finish? Send us your favorite no-bake desserts by April 10 for a chance to win \$500.



Spicy Sausage and Egg Boats

PATRICIA STEHLING
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Egg boats make for a fun presentation at breakfast. Add your favorite vegetables, such as bell pepper, mushrooms or spinach, to the filling.

4 demi baguettes or large bolillos

8 ounces breakfast sausage

8 eggs

½ cup heavy cream

Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

4 green onions, sliced

4 jalapeño peppers, seeded and diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Scoop out the centers of the breads to create a boatlike shape, leaving an edge all around.

2. Cook sausage and set aside. In a bowl, beat eggs, then whisk in cream and salt and pepper. Stir in the sausage, cheese, green onions, jalapeños and garlic.



3. Spoon mixture into bread boats. Bake 25–30 minutes, until eggs are set and no longer runny.

SERVES 4–6

TCP These great dishes just scratch the surface of what you can do with eggs. Check out our website, where you'll find hundreds of reader recipes that feature eggs, many incorporating them in hard-to-resist baked goods.

Egg-zact Replacements

BY MEGAN MYERS

Many recipes default to using large eggs. But what if you don't have any large eggs on hand? Use this handy guide for subbing different sizes of eggs in recipes.

You can replace **one** large egg with **one** egg of any other size.

Replace **two** large eggs with **two** medium, extra-large or jumbo eggs; or **three** small eggs.

Replace **three** large eggs with **two** jumbo eggs, **three** medium or extra-large eggs, or **four** small eggs.

Replace **four** large eggs with **three** jumbo eggs, **four** extra-large eggs, or **five** medium or small eggs.

You can also replace whole eggs with liquid eggs: 1 cup of liquid egg equals about five large eggs.



JASON RISNER PHOTOGRAPHY

Fredericksburg

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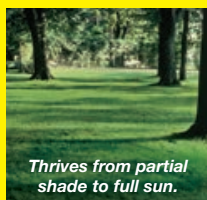
No weeding means no costly chemicals. Amazoy Zoysia lawns naturally resist insects, so you'll save money, while helping to protect the environment. Never expose your family and pets to weed killers and pesticide poison.

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Super Plugs Precut plugs 3 inches by 3 inches READY TO PLANT Packed in trays of 15 Super Plugs. Plant minimum 1 plug per 4 sq. ft.

Super Plugs	Free Plugs	Tray	Your PRICE	+Shipping	SAVINGS
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25	+5	2	\$ 42.50	\$20.00	25%
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Meteoric Fall

Odessa crater marks the site of a space rock's collision with Earth

BY CHET GARNER

IT'S NOT OFTEN you can say "it came from outer space" and actually mean it. But that's what happened some 62,000 years ago, when an object fell from the sky and crashed just southwest of what is now Odessa. In search of an extraterrestrial experience, I grabbed my tinfoil hat and headed west.

My pulse quickened as I drove through cactus and mesquite in search of one of the largest meteorite impact craters in the U.S. Once there I stared at an empty field just slightly lower (about 15 feet) than the surrounding desert. "Hmm," I thought. "Where's the massive crater?" I needed some explanation.

Inside the visitor center, I learned how a 25-foot space rock hurtled toward Earth at 27,000 mph. It pierced the atmosphere and shattered into thousands of pieces that crashed into the land with the force of 19,000 tons of dynamite. The impact stretched over 2 square miles, with this largest crater measuring at least 500 feet wide and 100 feet deep. It has perplexed cowboys and scientists alike since it was first documented in 1892.

Over time, the crater became a mere shadow of its former self as dust and silt filled in the hole, leaving a simple depression marked by a rim of jagged rocks. In the 1940s, scientists dug a 165-foot shaft into the center to see if a large meteorite remained. They found fragments—the largest weighing 300 pounds.

While it may not be as impressive as it once was, it's the only crater of its kind in America that visitors can walk through. I set off on foot imagining what it might have been like when the meteorite smashed into this exact location. I would have been pulverized in an instant. It was an appropriately existential thought for such an extraterrestrial place. ■

ABOVE The Odessa crater spreads out behind Chet.

TCP Follow along as Chet walks onto the very site of an extraterrestrial event. See the video on our website 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.

APRIL

07

Canton [7–8] Tractor Show and Swap Meet, (214) 837-8861, lonestarihc25.org/canton

Addison [7–9] Dallas Reggae Festival, (832) 277-3874, dallasreggaeifest.com

08

Kerrville EasterFest, (830) 896-1155, kerrvillechamber.biz

San Marcos Easter Egg Hunt and Festival, (512) 392-4295, heritagesanmarcos.org

Stonewall Easter at the Farm, (830) 644-8107, tpwd.texas.gov

15

Burton Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, texascottonginmuseum.org

Corpus Christi Explore the Shore, (361) 749-5246, tpwd.texas.gov

Fredericksburg Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Department Fish Fry, (830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

Gonzales Spring Plant Sale, (830) 672-8531, gonzalesmastergardeners.org

Grapevine New Vintage Wine and Gallery Trail and Art Show, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Kerrville Spring Native Plant Sale, (830) 257-4837, riversidenaturecenter.org

Stephenville Wine and Art Walk, (817) 715-1682, facebook.com/stephenville-downtownmerchants

20

Chappell Hill [15-16]
Bluebonnet Festival,
 (979) 836-6033,
chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com

Lubbock [15-16] Arts
Festival, (806) 744-2787,
lubbockartsfestival.org

21

Dale [20-23] Old Settler's
Music Festival,
oldsettlersmusicfest.org

Henderson [21-22] East
Texas Antique Tractor
and Engine Club Show,
 (903) 646-3769

McKinney [21-22] Tom
Cotter, (214) 769-0645,
thecomedyarena.com

Terrell [21-22] Kaufman
Quilt Show, (972) 979-9152,
kaufmanquiltguild.org

Fredericksburg [21-23,
28-30] The Play That Goes
Wrong, (830) 997-3588,
fredericksburgtheater.org

Ingram [21-23, 28-30, May
5-7] The Gods of Comedy,
 (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

22

Brenham One Night in
Memphis, (979) 337-7240,
thebarnhillcenter.com

Grapevine Spring Into
Nash, (817) 410-3185,
grapevinetexasusa.com

Helotes Fiesta Dachshund
Dash, (844) 703-6943,
ddrtx.org

The Colony Coach Cox's
Kid Chase, (972) 625-1106,
visitthecolonytx.com

Tyler Ruthie Foster,
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MORE EVENTS >

TCP Submit Your Event

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Pick of the Month

Conroe Crossroads Music Festival

Conroe, April 13–16
conroecrossroads.com

Experience 40 shows across eight venues over four days in one city! A wide variety of musical genres are represented in the lineup, and daytime activities are free and fun for the whole family.

APRIL EVENTS CONTINUED

27

Alvin [27–29] Frontier Days, (832) 868-1478, alvinrotary.org

28

Gun Barrel City [28–29] Quilt Show, (903) 391-3241, gunbarrelquiltersguild.org

McKinney [28–29] James Camacho, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

Seguin [28–29] Yellow Rose Fiber Fiesta, (210) 422-0619, yellowrosefiberfiesta.com

Saint Jo [28–30] The Real West Symposium, therealwest.org

29

Hillsboro Wine and Photography Art Walk, (843) 442-7424

Ingram Stonehenge Celtic Festival and Highland Games, (830) 367-5121, hcac.com

Johnson City JCTX Jazz and Art Festival, (830) 868-7111, johnsoncitytx.org

Kerrville Hill Country Chorale Spring Concert, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

Nacogdoches [29–30] Sacred Heart Catholic Church Multicultural Festival, (936) 564-7807, sacredheartnac.org

Waco [29–30] Central Texas Comic Con, ctxcomiccon.com

Llano [29–30, May 5–7] The Savannah Sipping Society, facebook.com/llanocommunitytheater

MAY

05

Brenham [5–6] Maifest, (979) 337-7580, brenhammaifest.com

Burnet [5–6] Utopiafest, utopiafest.com

Milam [5–6] Trade Days, (430) 558-7134, milamsettlers.org

Port Aransas [5–6, 12–13] PalmFest, (361) 444-3631, palmfestporta.com

06

Hilltop Lakes Kentucky Derby Gala, (713) 503-0470, hilltoplakes.com

Quitaque Experience Caprock, (806) 455-1492, tpwd.texas.gov

The Colony Up, Up & Away Festival of Flight, (972) 625-1106, visitthecolonytx.com

Willow City Willow City Volunteer Fire & Rescue Department's Fundraiser, (830) 456-3785, willowcityfd.com

Riding the River

Texans love to make a splash. So stock the cooler and grab your river shoes—it's time to dive in and test the waters.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 STEVE COYLE
PEDERNALES EC

"Taking in sunset on Galveston Bay with a squall line approaching from the north."

2 WENDY ALLEY MLADENKA
SAN BERNARD EC

A family day of kayaking on the Colorado River near Beason's Park in Columbus.

3 ANGELA RIED
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

The Frio River in Garner State Park.

4 TAWN AND MICHAEL WAYNE SOLISE
BANDERA EC

Stopping for a drink at sunset in Bandera.



1



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

DUE APR 10 Hoof and Horn

DUE MAY 10 Night Sky

DUE JUN 10 Helping Out



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Riding the River photos from readers.



A memorial created in 2017 stood across the street from where the fertilizer plant exploded in West.

Rise Up West

10 years after a deadly explosion, the town is stronger than ever

BY JEFFREE WYN ITRICH

AS THE SAYING GOES, I wasn't born here, but I got here as soon as I could. And *here* is the small Czech town of West, north of Waco. I knew about this charming town long before I followed my Texas roots to settle here in the land of my forebears, who go back to the post-Civil War period.

I remember with razor-sharp clarity the night I watched a story on the evening news detailing how 30 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in a West fertilizer plant on April 17, 2013, at 7:51 in the evening. Five years later, my husband and I settled in West. It was only then that I understood the full scope of the explosion that registered as a 2.1 magnitude tremor and blasted a crater in the ground nearly 100 feet wide and 10 feet deep.

Fifteen people died in the tragedy, 12 of them volunteer firefighters who

responded to a fire—later determined to be intentionally set—before it triggered the explosion that turned the scene into a war zone. In moments, 350 homes were destroyed or damaged, a nursing home came down like a tornado had roared through, and the emergency medical services building buckled and fell. Tommy Muska, the mayor then and still today, estimated that there was \$200 million in damage to the city and its schools and businesses.

The destruction was so severe that many outsiders projected it would be West's demise. Those outsiders, however, didn't grasp the soul of this town. "The city of West will not be defined by the explosion but by the resilience and the spirit of the citizens to rebuild their community," Muska said last fall. And that is exactly what has happened, in a remarkably short period of time.

Anyone who visits West these days won't find any physical evidence of blast damage. In the 10 years since the disaster, there have been more than 1,000 residential and commercial building permits issued, 82 new homes and three new schools built, 123 remodels completed, and over \$10 million in infrastructure improvements made. Currently, there are five subdivisions being built, in all price ranges.

A person has to wonder: How did this small town pull itself up by its bootstraps in the face of such overwhelming tragedy?

In short, the blast brought people together in unexpected ways. Their resilience and staunch faith made them stronger and more united than ever. They are a people who have proved themselves unshakable, even in the face of profound heartache and grief.

Perhaps Muska said it best when 10 years ago he proclaimed, "This town will not die on my watch." He was not alone in his commitment. The entire town lived it, believed it and made sure West would not only survive but would thrive.

And indeed it has. ■



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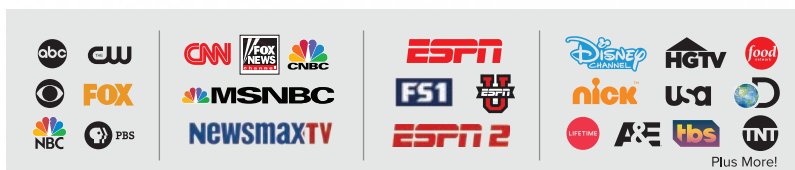


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