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AUGUST 2021

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# August 2021



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*By Melissa Gaskill  
Photos by Julia Robinson*

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*By Chris Burrows  
Photos by Eric Pohl*

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Diane Wilson shows nurdles—plastic pellets—she has collected at the Texas coast.  
*Photo by Julia Robinson*

ABOVE

One of the thousands of bags Hunter Beaton has prepared for foster youths.  
*Photo courtesy NRECA*

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# Chess Royalty

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS** Rio Grande Valley chess team won its third consecutive national championship, defeating Webster University in April for the President's Cup.

Our June 2012 story *The Kings and Queens of Brownsville* told how young students made all the right moves to turn the U.S.'s southernmost border town into a chess powerhouse.



Members of the UTRGV chess team often mentor K-12 students in Brownsville schools.



## **TCP** Contests and More

[ON TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM](http://ONTEXASCOOPPOWER.COM)

### **\$500 RECIPE CONTEST**

Soups and Stews

### **FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS**

Bridges

### **POWER OF OUR PEOPLE**

Know anybody as inspired and exceptional as Hunter Beaton, featured on Page 12? Let us know so we can shine the spotlight on them.

## August 22

### **National Tooth Fairy Day**

The tooth fairy forks over an average of \$4.70 per visit in the U.S., a recent poll shows. That's a far cry from the nickel recommended more than a century ago.

The *Chicago Tribune* carried the first published mention of the tooth fairy—in 1908. Writer Lillian Brown advised that parents might have an easier time persuading children to have loose teeth pulled if a "tooth fairy" left a small gift of 5 cents under youngsters' pillows for each tooth lost.





## SCORE ONE FOR THE CO-OP

When Hereford Sports & Wellness took delivery of two digital scoreboards for its soccer field in the Panhandle town, the non-profit community center realized it didn't have the means to install them.

Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative did. The co-op sent a bucket truck outfitted with an auger and a crew of linemen, who drilled a half-dozen 6-foot-deep holes to securely mount the new displays.



## Cool Coat

**ENGINEERS HAVE CREATED** the whitest paint ever—a paint so white that building surfaces coated in it are 8 degrees cooler than the air on a sunny day. The innovation could reduce air conditioning demands and mitigate the effects of climate change, Vice reports.

The new paint, developed by a team at Purdue University, reflects 98.1% of sunlight. Researchers used barium sulfate, a powder that's reflective across all wavelengths of sunlight, to pigment the new paint—unlike most white paints, which tend to use titanium dioxide as pigment.



“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

—STEPHEN KING

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE IT'S SO HOT ...

**TCP** Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to [letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com) or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our June prompt: **I always laugh when my dad ...**

Says rain sounds like a cow peeing on a flat rock.

SUE BIGAY  
SAM HOUSTON EC  
LIVINGSTON

Read the comics to me—in different voices to match the character.

BETTY BILLINGSLEY  
VIA FACEBOOK

Couldn't pronounce a word, so he made up a new one that sounded similar.

CRAIG MASSOUH  
PEDERNALES EC  
SATTLER

To see more responses, read Currents online.

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COURTESY PEDERNALES ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

**'That's What Co-ops Are For'**

“We are blessed to have co-op employees who persevere in all types of weather to restore electricity and risk their lives to do so.”

JANE PATTERSON  
BOWIE-CASS EC  
TEXARKANA

**Wheel Fact**

*Texas Talk Man* [June 2021] describes a trip that some of the cast of the movie *Giant* took to the state fairgrounds in Dallas in 1955, mentioning they “boarded the soaring Texas Star” Ferris wheel. That particular wheel was shipped over from Europe and set up in Dallas in 1985.

William F. Culver III  
Farmers EC  
Collin County

Jessica Ridge wrote a great story. Also, the photo by Wyatt McSpadden of Hinkle leaning on the tree branch with the horse in the background was perfect.

Larry Reese  
Bluebonnet EC  
Brenham



The most glorious sight in Aransas County after Hurricane Harvey hit was the arrival of the line-men from all over [*'That's What Co-ops Are For,'* June 2021]. Heroes all.

KAREN BEVERLY  
VIA FACEBOOK

**Fruitful Adventure**

Armed with our April issue, we went in search of Alphonse and Martha Dotson on a recent trip to the Hill Country [*The Seed Flourishes,* April 2021]. What we thought would be a short wine tasting turned into an afternoon of great memories. We left with extraordinary stories, exquisite wine, an auto-graphed cover, new friends and a promise to return.

Traveling is really about the people you encounter along the way.

Patti and Larry Terrell  
Bowie-Cass EC  
Red Lick

**Fleeing Thought**

I never realized that while the armies of Texians and Mexicans fought, many civilians found it necessary to abandon everything they owned and relocate in a hurry [*The Runaway Scrape,* April 2021]. This makes me wonder what I would do if that situation arose in my lifetime.

B. Jason Epps  
Trinity Valley EC  
Heartland



COURTESY PATTI TERRELL

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

Texas Co-op Power

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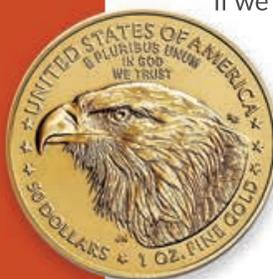
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# Channel Your



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Diane Wilson has gathered millions of nurdles—like the handful shown—in her decades as a citizen scientist. Jace Tunnell collects nurdles near a Port Lavaca estuary. Tania Homayoun, an urban conservation biologist, uploads a picture of a turtle using the iNaturalist app.



BY MELISSA GASKILL  
PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

# Inner Scientist

Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research

Victoria resident and shrimp boat captain Diane Wilson often walks along the shoreline. She keeps a sharp eye out, not for seashells but for small pellets of plastic. Called nurdles, these lentil-sized bits are raw material used for manufacturing plastics. She has found as many as 21,000 nurdles at one time.

“They’re like little peas, or lentils, with different shapes,” says Wilson, who reports her finds to Nurdle Patrol at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas. This work makes her a citizen scientist—one of thousands of people who lend their eyes, ears, hands and time to professional scientists conducting all kinds of research around the world.

“To date, we’ve had more than 2,000 volunteers remove more than 1.5 million nurdles from beaches spanning from Brazil to Canada,” says Jace Tunnell, director of the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve at the institute, which runs Nurdle Patrol. After a spill left nurdles all over coastlines around Corpus Christi in September 2018, Tunnell started a Facebook group for people to report the pellets. Within a few weeks, posts had poured in from every U.S. state along the Gulf of Mexico; a university in Veracruz, Mexico; and a nonprofit on the Yucatán Peninsula. That led him to create the full-blown citizen science project.

“If this was just a university project, three or four of us going out and trying to figure out where nurdles are com-

ing from, we would never be able to do it,” Tunnell says. “It is really the citizen scientists who are making this project a success.”

Early Nurdle Patrol volunteers reported high concentrations of pellets in bay systems along the Texas coast, where many plastic manufacturers are located. A map created from these reports uses warmer colors to depict higher concentrations of pellets. “Texas and Louisiana are purple, indicating more than 1,000 pellets found in 10 minutes,” Tunnell says, adding that the project hopes to stop plastic from entering the environment and to give volunteers the opportunity to be involved in impactful work.

“You just collect a sample and estimate the count from what you can pick up in 10 minutes,” Wilson explains. “You don’t remove all the pellets or you’d go nuts. It’s very easy and is a way to protect your own health as well as the bays and wildlife.”

Nurdle Patrol, like most citizen science projects, requires no special skill or knowledge. Some citizen science even can be done sitting on your couch with a computer or smartphone. The FISHstory project asks people to identify and count fish in historical fishing photos, helping to estimate what kinds of and how many fish people caught in the South Atlantic during the 1940s through the 1970s. That information supports current management of those waters. Other couch-bound projects include transcribing historical



documents, playing video games to show how people solve problems and completing a survey about your dog.

Other tasks can be done just outside your door. For Globe at Night, a worldwide map of artificial light pollution, simply go outside after dark, use a night sky phone app to find a designated constellation and then use a star chart to identify the faintest star you can see nearby.

Still other projects provide the perfect excuse to go exploring. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's dozen Texas Nature Trackers projects ask people to report sightings anywhere in Texas of specific plants and animals using the iNaturalist app. The information helps the department understand the distribution and seasonality of species and how they change over time.

"Every county in Texas has one assigned wildlife biologist, and it's impossible for one individual in any given county to keep track of all the flora and fauna," says the program's Craig Hensley. "Through citizen science, we gain information that leads to better conservation decisions." The projects focus on species with the greatest conservation need, such as the Texas horned lizard, whooping cranes, monarch butterflies and milkweed, and freshwater mussels, which are threatened by invasive species.

Lee County resident and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member Linda Jo Conn, a Texas master naturalist, participates in Nature Trackers projects on milkweed and mammals. "I call myself an iNaturalist addict," Conn says. "I learn a lot. That's one of the reasons I'm involved. I go places just to see what I can find and am known to stop on highways. My friends know that if I'm not waving my arms, I'm OK."

Elaine Cowley, a Guadalupe Valley EC member who lives in Luling, helps Nature Trackers refine data on mammals in Texas, specifically the swamp rabbit. "I was already using iNaturalist for some other projects, so I said yes to this curation project," she says. "There is so much data out there,

LEFT TO RIGHT Biologist Craig Hensley examines a wing banding to find the age of a loggerhead shrike. Hensley helps train citizen scientists to monitor target species all over the state. He and Homayoun attach leg bands to a loggerhead.

**TCP WEB EXTRA** See what links we have to help you contribute to citizen science projects.

but unless it is in the right category, TPWD can't use it.

"There are so many ways to get involved in citizen science that don't take a lot of time," she adds. "It's enjoyable at the same time. You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize."

Weather watchers can turn their interest into citizen science as well. For six years Chris Keating of Mason has collected data for the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, known as CoCoRaHS. At the most basic level, volunteers report the amount of rain in their gauges daily. Keating also submits a weekly report summarizing conditions in his Hill Country town, the number of thunderclaps when there is a storm and extreme weather details when something unusual happens, such as hail.

"I have read scientific papers that refer to CoCoRaHS, so it is a productive project, with the data put to scientific use," Keating says. "You can do it on a phone app or a computer. It's designed for the layperson. You just have to be able to read a rain gauge."

A related project, the Global Learning and Observations



'You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize.'



photographers and eventually want to know what they're taking pictures of," Tjelmeland says. "Others are more like me and want to know what's in their backyard or favorite natural area. You can just grab a camera and start snapping pictures, even without knowing a lot initially."

Insects can seem overwhelming in terms of sheer numbers of species and the difficulty of identifying them. Tjelmeland advises starting with things you are interested in, perhaps moths or grasshoppers, and expanding from there. On the plus side, you do not have to go far to find insects.

Volunteers at the preserve have tallied almost 2,000 species of plants and animals, including insects. "Almost anywhere you go, biodiversity is weighted toward those smaller things that are often overlooked but really important in terms of ecology," he says.

Citizen scientists contribute information needed by scientists and project managers, providing much more than those professionals could obtain on their own. These contributions are equally if not more important in rural communities, Hensley says, especially when information is collected on private land. He notes that iNaturalist allows users to protect the location of their reports, sharing it only with the project and not the public.

"The more we know, the better we can be at managing things," Hensley says. "An animal may be more common than we know it to be because there is good habitat on private land holdings but no one is sharing the information. As a result, we may be making decisions without all the facts. Citizen science is vital to conservation efforts going forward." ■

to Benefit the Environment Observer Program, asks citizen scientists to submit photographs of cloud cover.

People who live near or visit the Texas coast can use the iSeaTurtle app to report sightings of these endangered reptiles. The data helps scientists at Texas A&M University map and understand their distribution.

**A**t the Nature Conservancy's Texas City Prairie Preserve, outside Houston, volunteers can photograph and report plants and animals observed on its 2,300 acres using iNaturalist. Aaron Tjelmeland, preserve manager, has tallied almost 600 species of moths there. The project grew from his participation in the 2019 City Nature Challenge, an annual international event that mobilizes citizen scientists to record urban biodiversity on iNaturalist.

"That interested me in the depth and breadth of biodiversity here at the preserve, things other than the more obvious birds and reptiles," Tjelmeland says. "From moths, it grew into the broader insect community—anything I could take a picture of, basically."

People come into the project in different ways. "Some are



POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

# Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through difficult transitions

Hunter Beaton has delivered some 45,000 bags since he started his project in 2016.

BY CHRIS BURROWS • PHOTOS BY ERIC POHL

**T**he police cruiser barely registered with Tim Allen when it moved past the porch where he was meeting with a child in the foster care system.

But the 11-year-old girl from rural Houston County noticed. “She just started shaking,” said Allen, a volunteer for Court Appointed Special Advocates, which assists children in the foster care system. “And I realized that the only context she’s ever had for a police officer was when her mother was pulled over with her in the car, for a drug violation.”

Stirred by the young girl’s response, Allen wanted to do something to help other children in her position, who may be entering the foster care system after a traumatic police encounter.

He knew who could bring his idea to life.

Hunter Beaton started Day 1 Bags in 2016, after his own foster siblings arrived at the Beaton house in Boerne with their belongings in trash bags. “How awful is that?” Beaton told *Texas Co-op Power* in July 2018. “No kid deserves this.”

In the five years since, what started as an Eagle Scout project with \$10,000 in community donations for 15-year-old Beaton has become a full-fledged independent nonprofit that has delivered some 45,000 locally made duffel bags to children in foster care in 22 states. The premise is simple: Give those kids a reason to smile and something to call their own. Beaton, 20, now serves as CEO of the organization while he studies at the University of Texas at Austin, even spending his spring break meeting with police agencies and donors, looking over the finances, and crafting social media strategy.

“We are continuing to do our main mission: providing backpacks and luggage for foster children and at-risk youth who are moving from home to home,” Beaton said. “So many youth have been moved around so much—so to have something they can keep, that is really nice and to put any belongings inside really means so much to them.”

But now Day 1 Bags is expanding its reach, partnering with advocates like Allen to help more children and shine a light on lesser-known issues faced by youths in the foster system.

“I never envisioned it taking off like it did,” said Paula Beaton, Hunter’s mom and a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative. “And it’s overwhelming at times. I mean, we’ll have boxes arrive, and my husband’s like, ‘Ugh, another set of boxes’—and we never intended for our house to be a warehouse.

“But honestly, every quarter I ask Hunter, ‘Do you want to keep doing this?’ And he says, ‘Absolutely.’”

## Serenity Packs

**W**ith bags supplied by Hunter Beaton and donations from Houston County businesses, Allen created packs of snacks, activities and other items designed to comfort children caught up in police incidents—especially in rural areas, where family members or Child Protective Services may be miles away.

“It could be 30, 40 minutes, and they don’t know what’s going on; there’s lights flashing, and the officer has to take care of an accident scene or an arrest,” said Allen, who is president of the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards, in which capacity he met Beaton in 2017, and a member of Houston County EC.

To equip police vehicles with bags for children, Allen worked with nearby departments, who were enthusiastic about the A Serenity Activity Packs, or ASAP bags, as he called them. Beaton was too, and his bags, sourced from Boerne-based Flying Circle Gear, were a perfect match.

“It seems odd maybe to have a bag full of toys and trinkets in a patrol car, but from what I’ve heard, the police officers love it,” Beaton said. “It’s something that can build a little bit of trust.”

Since January, ASAP bags have spread from Houston County to more than 30 police agencies in Texas—a total of 2,500 bags.

“It just kind of took off,” Allen said. “One county after the next—about every week or two we’ll hear about a new county implementing it.”

## Adopt a Senior

**A**llie Grace Graves knows how life can be different for foster children because she was one before she was adopted as a 6-year-old.

“I had to grow up a lot faster than the average child,” said the native of Lone Star, in northeast Texas. “I was doing the dishes, getting on the church bus, roaming around town by myself before I was 4 years old.”

That was on Graves’ mind in 2020 as she was set to graduate from high school. She had her family to celebrate with but knew that more than 500 graduating high school students still in foster care in Texas would not.

She wanted to help and reached out to someone she knew could bring her idea to life: Hunter Beaton.

“Most high school students have someone to celebrate their graduation with,” Graves said. “We want that to be the case for every foster youth in Texas.”

Graves and Beaton teamed up to send duffel bags full of goodies, including personalized letters, to each graduate still in foster care. Donors “adopt” a senior through the program.

About 1,200 foster youths in Texas turn 18 each year without being reunited with their birth family or adopted. More than a quarter of them exit the system without a high school diploma or stable housing, and nearly half are unemployed, according to Texas CASA.

“When I first started, I was so focused on the younger side of



LEFT Comal County sheriff's deputies carry ASAP bags in their cruisers. BELOW Beaton loads boxes from Flying Circle Gear, the Boerne company that makes the bags, into his family's van for delivery.

**TCP HOW TO HELP** Visit [day1bags.org/donate](http://day1bags.org/donate) to help Hunter Beaton further his mission.

the board. The Beatons' Hill Country neighbors also have kept up their support.

"People think it's the corporate donors who do all the heavy lifting, but it's really all the \$10, \$20, \$50 donations here and there that really build it up," Beaton said. "People are just so generous."

He said he plans to continue his nonprofit work after college, where he's studying communications and leadership. And while he accomplished more than most on spring break this year, Beaton still made time for the former

things, toddlers and children, that I completely overlooked high school," Beaton said. "So now we're doing our best to help."

Beaton expanded the program this year, outfitting all 562 graduates in the class of 2021 with a vital documents bag, gift cards, reusable water bottles and other items.

"Just so they have something to celebrate their graduation with," he said.

## Riding to the Challenge

A few years ago, when Beaton was preparing to get his driver's license, he didn't want to drive a vehicle with an automatic transmission. That would be too easy.

"I wanted to test in a stick shift," he said. "So I practiced a lot, burned out my dad's clutch but ended up being able to pass the driver's test. I like big challenges like that."

That same ethic is visible in Beaton's commitment to foster children. Being named the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars Scout of the Year and winning a Congressional Gold Medal for his work was just the start.

"There's always going to be a need," Beaton said. "I want to continue to grow and do new things and make Day 1 Bags incredibly influential for these youth."

It's still a family effort behind him with Paula (his "top pusher and supporter," he said) as treasurer; his sister Hailey as social media guru; and his dad, Kevin, serving on

foster children in his life—his own siblings, who started it all.

They played board games, basketball and tennis. "It's fun to come back home and be around kids," he said. "They aren't so serious and make you laugh a lot." ■



## TCP POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

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



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## Collectors Crave Firsts

Collectors covet coins with Key Dates. Key Dates mark significance in a coin's history...firsts, lasts, lowest mintage,

new finishes and new designs. Now, for the first time in over three-and-a-half decades, the Silver Eagle is getting a new design, leading to a historic "first" unlike anything we've seen. The iconic Heraldic Eagle reverse is being replaced by a beautiful new "Eagle Landing" design. This is arguably a bigger deal than even the actual introduction of the coin because there's so much more interest now than in 1986, with investors and collectors!

## If You Knew Then What You Know Now...

If you'd had a crystal ball in 1986, you undoubtedly would have grabbed every Silver Eagle you could get. Those coins in uncirculated condition continue to be sought-after. Now you're getting another chance to land a big Silver Eagle first, a Key Date. Additionally, since these newly designed Silver Eagles are only being released during the second half of 2021, it's quite possible this will be one of the lowest mintages we've seen. That's significant because it could make 2021 a DOUBLE Key Date, with both a new design and a low mintage. Demand for these coins is already sky-high, but if that

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MESSAGE  
FROM  
PRESIDENT/  
CEO

**DARRYL  
SCHRIVER**

# Brazos Bankruptcy Update

**NEARLY SIX MONTHS** have passed since February's Winter Storm Uri wreaked havoc on the Texas electric grid, as well as many of you and your family members. Unfortunately, we are still working to deal with the aftermath of this massive weather event. As the President/CEO of your cooperative, it is my responsibility to keep you informed about our efforts to navigate the fallout from the storm and to aggressively carry out the board's directive of "leaving no stone unturned" as we investigate the events surrounding the storm.

The most significant challenge we face centers on Brazos Electric Power Cooperative, Inc. (Brazos) and its performance during Winter Storm Uri. Brazos has been our generation and transmission cooperative (G&T), which supplies Tri-County Electric Cooperative with our full requirements for wholesale power services through a long-term contract. Based on this contract, Tri-County Electric Co-op is dependent upon Brazos to protect it from events like the winter storm and the resulting financial damages. If Brazos's generation assets had operated at minimum industry standards, much of the financial devastation that has affected Brazos would have been avoided.

To this end, we remain acutely concerned about the failure of the Brazos generation assets during the storm, particularly when compared to the performance of other generators in the ERCOT market. We also continue to struggle with the lack of information that has come from Brazos since they entered bankruptcy to protect the member-cooperatives.

Each of the 16 local electric distribution cooperatives who are members of the Brazos family has worked hard to navigate the challenges presented by the winter storm. Further, we collectively relied upon our all-requirements contracts with Brazos to protect us. Although we justifiably relied upon our long-standing relationship with Brazos and its management team for this protection, it has become painfully evident that Brazos's generation fleet failed to operate in accordance with industry standards when it was most needed.

While Brazos represents less than 1% of the load in ERCOT, it is responsible for the majority of the unpaid ERCOT charges related to the winter storm. This failure by Brazos's management to exercise the appropriate skill and care in the maintenance and operation of the generation fleet was not of our making and the economic consequences of this catastrophic failure by Brazos cannot be fully borne by the 16 member-cooperatives or their member-owners. 800667116

Based upon our investigation of the events surrounding the winter storm, and the subsequent decision by Brazos to hurriedly duck into bankruptcy, our Board has taken unanimous action to call for a change in the senior management of Brazos. ERCOT's CEO, several ERCOT board members, the Chairman and Commissioners of the Public Utility Commission of Texas, and others have been asked to resign their positions based upon their failures to properly perform their duties in relation to the winter storm.

It is now time for a change at Brazos as well. The senior management of Brazos should be no less accountable for failure to properly discharge their duties than the other leaders in the state who have been held accountable for their failures and forced to resign.

A change in leadership is not only justified but is necessary so that Brazos can chart a new course for the future. We did not take this action lightly and feel that decisive action is needed to protect the financial viability of our cooperative and the best interests of you, our member-owners. This is a very fluid situation, which may take many twists and turns. We will continue to represent you to the best of our abilities, and I look forward to serving you well into the future. We are in this together. ■



## CAPITAL CREDITS RETIREMENT

Tri-County Electric Co-op's Board of Directors approved the retirement of \$5 million in capital credits to members who received electric service in 2002.

ALEXANDER SCHIMMECK | UNSPLASH

# Capital Credits Retirements

AS A TRI-COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE member-owner, you invest and share in the ownership of the co-op. Each member also receives dividends, or capital credits, from the year's margins.

### Here's how capital credits work:

#### Establish Membership

When you establish service at your home or business, you become a member of Tri-County Electric Co-op. When you become a member, a separate capital credits account is established in your name to track your investment in the co-op.

#### Allocations

Each year the board of directors allocates any funds remaining after expenses have been paid to the membership. Funds are allocated to each member's capital credits account based on the amount of electricity purchased. Allocations may vary from year to year. 800736770

#### Retirements

Each year the board of directors evaluates the financial status of the cooperative. Capital that is not retired will be used as operating capital for system improvements and maintenance. When capital credits are retired, the board will retire allocated funds from a previous fiscal year. The amount of capital retired to members as capital credits may change from year to year.

Capital credits are returned to members in the form of a bill credit or check. If the amount is \$150 or less, a member will receive a credit on their electric account. If the amount is more than \$150, the member will receive a check through the mail. Inactive members will receive a check mailed to their last known address.

Capital credits are just one perk of being a Tri-County Electric Co-op member-owner.

#### 2021 Retirements

This year, the board authorized the retirement of \$5 million to members who received electric service in 2002. Members can expect to receive those funds in September.

Right now Tri-County Electric Co-op is about 19 years out on returning capital credits. That's well above average for co-ops, but we'd still like to cut that to about 15 years so members see those credits in a more reasonable time and see a quicker return on their investment.

We just want you to know our vision at Tri-County Electric Co-op is to take care of our member-owners. Returning capital is just one way we look out for our membership. ■

## I Work for You



### TINA DILLINGHAM

#### Plant Accountant Accounting

Tina Dillingham has been at Tri-County more than 32 years – but understand, this was her first job.

She started as a data-entry clerk in engineering, then filled various roles in engineering, dispatch and as a work-order technician before settling in accounting. Today, she's the plant accountant, reviewing work orders and invoices, making sure materials match what's built before it's all closed and capitalized.

The co-op has grown from 30,000 to 100,000 members during Tina's time here.

"When I started, we were still mailing out our own bills," she said. "When the machine broke down, we stuffed envelopes. We were kind of stuck in the 60s, except we had computers."

She said the company has "revamped, modernized and moved forward" over the last few years – and truly come into the 21st century. 800737705

"I would have never dreamed I'd be in an office like this," she said. "It's been an interesting ride."

The self-described "Air Force brat" was born in Delaware and lived in Mississippi and New Jersey before graduating high school in Altus, Oklahoma. She came to Fort Worth and earned a BBA at Texas Wesleyan University in 1987. When she came to Tri-County, she was expecting her first child.

She and her husband, Gary, have two grown children and five grandchildren – but the co-op is her second family.

"Terry and Donyea – and my girls in the accounting department – are like sisters," she said. "Joe, Wes, and my buddy Mike Martin, I grew up with those guys. I love the people I work with." ■

## Boat Safely This Summer

**IF YOUR SUMMER** plans include boating at a marina, take care to avoid the dangers of electricity and water.

The Energy Education Council, along with the American Boat and Yacht Council, and National Electrical Contractors Association, offer these rules for water recreation safety and accident prevention:

All electrical installations should be performed by a professional electrical contractor familiar with marine codes and standards and should be inspected annually. 53200001

Docks should have ground-fault circuit interrupters on the circuits that feed electricity to the dock.

The metal frames of docks should be bonded to connect all metal parts to the alternating current safety ground at the power source. That will ensure that any part of the metal dock that becomes energized because of an electrical malfunction will trip the circuit breaker.

Neighboring docks can also present a shock hazard. Make your neighbors aware of the need for safety inspections and maintenance. ■



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## 5 Home Energy Hogs

**EVEN THOUGH TWO HOMES** may have many similarities, there may be hidden energy hogs causing one home's utility bills to be higher. Here are five energy hogs that increase energy use.

**1. An old fridge or freezer in the garage.** That second refrigerator or freezer may be costing more than you think. If the model was produced prior to 1990, it's likely using twice as much energy (or more!) than a newer Energy Star-rated model. If it's located in the garage, it may run constantly in the summer, which leads to higher electric bills.

**2. Cooling or heating an uninsulated area.** Cooling or heating an uninsulated workshop or garage can be expensive. If you really want to heat or cool these types of spaces, add insulation. 800823489

**3. Hot tub.** The cost to operate a hot tub can be exponentially higher if it's an older, less efficient model. A smaller hot tub with better insulation, a cover and a pump that runs on a lower voltage will use less energy. In the end, getting a "good deal" on a used hot tub may cost more in energy bills in the long run.

**4. Swimming pool.** If you have a pool, consider installing a smaller, more efficient pump and reducing how often it runs. You can also look at installing a larger filter and maximizing the flow of water through the pipes by making them larger. These measures could cut your electric use for the pool pump by as much as 75%. Consult with a pool installation specialist to find the most efficient setup that will still keep your pool clean.

**5. Pumps.** If you live on acreage or a farm, you probably have several pumps, including irrigation, well, septic and sump. You probably use those pumps until they break down. Consider replacing the oldest and most-used pumps over time with more efficient ones that are sized correctly for their task. ■

# Save the Date!

Join us on Tuesday, October 5, 2021, for  
Tri-County Electric Cooperative's 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual  
Meeting of the Members.

## What you need to know:

### About the Election Ballot

Members will receive an official election ballot on the September *Texas Co-op Power* magazine.

### What's on the Ballot

The 2021 official election ballot includes director elections for director districts 3, 6 and 8. Learn more about the candidates running for the board of directors on the next few pages.

### Who can vote

Every member may vote in the official 2021 election, regardless of the district in which you reside. Tri-County Electric Co-op's Board of Directors represents the membership as a whole.

### How to Vote

Members can vote online or by mail. Your September *Texas Co-op Power* magazine will include additional details on voting.



### Why you should Vote

Members who vote by the deadline will receive a \$25 bill credit and be entered in the door prize drawing!

**\$25 Bill Credit!**

## 2021 Election and Director Candidates

ONE OF THE GUIDING cooperative principles is democratic member control. As a member-owner of Tri-County Electric Cooperative, you have the right, and obligation, to vote in cooperative elections. Next month, you will receive your official 2021 election ballot on the *Texas Co-op Power* magazine.

The ballot will include three director seats up for election this year: districts 3, 6 and 8. On the following pages, you will see biographies for each candidate. According to the co-op's election policies and procedures, candidates could submit bios to the governance team to publish in election materials. You will see members took advantage of the new nomination process with three types of candidates: incumbent, nomination and petitioning candidates.

Incumbents are **Jorden Wood** (district 3), **John Killough** (district 6) and **Jarrett Armstrong** (district 8). These candidates currently sit on the board of directors and are seeking reelection. **Michael Sivertsen** (district 8) is a director candidate seeking election through the committee. **Rick Barnes** (district 8) is a director candidate seeking election through member petition. Each of the candidates submitted their application packets by the deadline and were ratified by the committee to be placed on the official election ballot.

## District 3



### **JORDEN WOOD**

*INCUMBENT  
UNOPPOSED*

Jorden Wood represents the members of District 3 and has served on the Tri-County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors since February of 2006. He currently serves as board chairman and has held the position since 2014.

Wood completes yearly training to maintain his Director Gold Credential awarded by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He also received his Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate through NRECA.

Wood leads Texas Electric Cooperative's Government Relations committee as the chairman. Since 2017, he has served on the committee to help advocate on behalf of electric cooperatives on legislative and regulatory matters at the state and national levels.

Wood maintains an active role in his community serving on several boards and organizing charitable fundraisers.

Professionally, Mr. Wood has been involved in real estate investments, property development, new home construction and ranch management. ■

## District 6



### **JOHN KILLOUGH**

*INCUMBENT  
UNOPPOSED*

John Killough represents the members of District 6 and has served on the Tri-County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors since February 2005.

Killough completed training requirements for his Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and is working toward his Board Leadership Certificate through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Killough, a Granbury and Hood County native, graduated from Granbury High School and from Tarleton State University with a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology.

He has been a small business owner in the Granbury area since 1993 and is active in his community through the Granbury Masonic Lodge and church, Triple Cross Cowboy Church. ■

## *Meet the Candidates*

**Join us at 6:30 pm on Thursday, August 26, for a virtual candidate forum.**

Each director candidate will be asked a series of questions by co-op staff, as well as take questions from the membership. The forum will be recorded and available on our website one week after the event.

**Stream Online: [tcectexas.com/director-elections](https://tcectexas.com/director-elections)**

**Listen by phone: 855-710-6229**

## District 8



### **JARRETT ARMSTRONG**

*INCUMBENT*

Jarrett Armstrong represents the member-owners of District 8. He has served on the Tri-County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors since June 2010.

Armstrong completes yearly training to maintain his Director Gold Credential awarded by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He also received his Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate through NRECA.

Jarrett Armstrong D.C. has been in private practice in Keller, Texas, since 1992. He currently serves on the Keller Lions Foundation Board and North Texas Charity Board. Armstrong is a member of the Keller Lions Club, Keller Masonic Lodge and Scottish Rite. He has previously served on the Keller Chamber of Commerce Board and the Keller ISD Board. Armstrong is married and has four grown children who all live in Keller, Texas. ■

## District 8



### **MICHAEL SIVERTSEN**

*NOMINATION  
CANDIDATE*

I wish to serve our community as the Tri-County Electric Co-op District 8 Board member. I have 15 years of electric utility experience, a B.S. degree in Physics, and a Master's degree in Knowledge Management. Prior to my recent retirement, I was a Systems Engineer with Lockheed Martin Aeronautics in Fort Worth.

I was born and raised in Wisconsin and attended the University of Minnesota, Institute of Technology, where I graduated with a Physics degree in 1979. My wife and I married that same year. I then worked for Schlumberger Well Services as a Field Engineer. This was followed by a year as an in-country Christian missionary, after which I began a 15-year electric utility career in Connecticut.

My electric utility experience was wide-ranging and included scientist positions in both radiation physics and information systems. I was recognized for my written and spoken communication skills as a nuclear engineering instructor with an appointment to the instructional staff for new instructors. During this time management noted that I was a welcome addition due to my technical aptitude, high moral standards, good work habits, and sense of humor. Another manager noted that they needed a person of honesty and integrity in a company-wide information management position, which is why I was hired.

Community involvement included electrical generation presentations in middle schools and high schools, science teacher workshops, and judging a State Science Fair. I also volunteered as a Cub Scout Den Leader and took my son and his fellow Cub Scouts on a tour of a nuclear power plant. That was an exciting event for them!

As the favorite saying goes, "I wasn't born in Texas,

*Continued on next page.*

but I got here as fast as I could.” In the mid-1990s I intentionally choose Texas for the future home of our five-member family. I secured a job here and we all relocated in 1997. My three grown children and their spouses love Texas as much as I do. They have all remained in North Texas and have blessed us with eight wonderful grandchildren. So the family of five has now grown to 16!

Activities I enjoy in Texas have included engineering and science career presentations at local high schools and bicycle rides with my granddaughters in Keller and North Richland Hills. I’ve also enjoyed elk hunting in nearby states.

In 2004, I received Lockheed Martin Aeronautics highest award, the Aero Star Award, for developing a unique web-based tool for the assessment and development of aerospace leadership. The analytic and adaptable style of decision-making, problem solving, and teamwork that resulted in this award will be well suited to the Board where problems and issues faced by Co-op leadership can be complex, varied, or unpredictable.

I am comfortable talking about issues across a wide range of levels and perspectives, from focusing on just key points to exploring things in detail. My Master’s Degree in Knowledge Management, coupled with an expertise in personal knowledge management, enables me to stay abreast of numerous topics that could impact our Board and Members. As a result I am able to see further down the road and provide early warnings and recommendations, which supports better decision making in the face of complexity. This was demonstrated in my interactions with TCEC management and the Board regarding the recent change to a new metering system. I met with the General Manager and did a formal Board presentation in November 2019 regarding potential health risks. In February 2020, the Board adopted an opt-out policy similar to that of Oncor. This positive experience in working with the Board is part of the reason I am now running as a Board candidate. In addition, my retirement will provide the time I need to properly discharge my Board duties.

The importance of a Board member with direct experience in the electric utility industry, coupled with a science and engineering background, was dramatically underscored by the Texas state-wide electrical outage in February 2021. ERCOT Board members came under intense scrutiny as a result of this disaster.

A co-op provides the means for us to achieve an over-arching unity around the goal of a dependable electrical supplier. We are all members, we have a voice, and we vote on important matters — in essence a microcosm of the great American experiment.

Thank you for your vote to represent you as your District 8 Board member. ■

## District 8



### **RICK BARNES**

#### *PETITIONING CANDIDATE*

Born in Fort Worth as a “Gladney Baby,” Rick Barnes was adopted and raised in West Texas by educators. He received his bachelor’s degree from Texas Tech University and his master’s from Texas Christian University

Rick and Sheila Barnes celebrate 33 years of marriage in 2021 and have lived in the Keller area for over 25 years. Rick has served on 14 boards of directors, serving as Chairman or President of many. He has a great understanding of board leadership, public service and commitment to organizational purpose and overall success.

Rick served three years on the Keller City Council as Mayor Pro-Tem and four years on the Keller Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. He is currently the Chairman of the Tarrant County Republican Party. He is an established speaker, author, business coach and leadership trainer. He has been a featured speaker, presenter, and consultant to over 2-million audience members through corporate, international, and non-profit organizations throughout the United States and three other countries. Rick owns and operates Rick Barnes Insurance in North Richland Hills, Texas, serving clients in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Colorado, and South Carolina.

Rick is a dedicated and visionary leader who remains fully committed to those he serves and with whom he works. ■



# Power Couple

## Weatherford's Bakers demonstrate the power that comes from loving a job, and making a difference

BY BOB BUCKEL,  
COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA REPRESENTATIVE

PHOTO: Brent and Elizabeth Baker are longtime Tri-County Electric Co-op members who bring the power of love to their jobs at Weatherford College and Mary Martin Elementary School.

**USUALLY WHEN PEOPLE** talk about power couples, the focus is on fame, wealth or political clout. Brent and Elizabeth Baker are a “power couple” who embody different kinds of power.

The power of words – spoken, written and sung.

The power of loving your community and working to make it better.

The power of having a job you love, doing it well, and making a difference. 8000717401

Brent is vice-president for institutional advancement at Weatherford College. Elizabeth is the music teacher at Weatherford ISD's Mary Martin Elementary. They met at the University of North Texas, where he was majoring in Radio/Television/Film and she was earning her degree in music education. They got married in August 1994, and came to Elizabeth's hometown to live, work and raise their family. Since 2005, they've been members of Tri-County Electric Co-op, living in the “country” near Hudson Oaks.



“I graduated from college, got my first job, and proposed to Elizabeth in the same week,” Brent said.

That job was in radio, at KZEE, then KYXS, as news and sports director for both stations. In 1997 he became director of college relations at Weatherford College, and in 2000 he was named associate dean of external affairs. The title has changed over the years, but the job description has remained constant.

“My day-to-day is primarily fundraising,” he said. “I oversee marketing, public relations – anything to do with the public. I’ve been here 24 years, and I love it.”

Raising money may sound a little dry, but Baker loves the role he plays. 800814556

“One of the big things that I get to do is raise money for scholarships,” he said. “I hear students’ stories all the time, how their lives are being changed. I come across a lot of people who are just grateful and thankful, and that’s a real shot in the arm.

“It’s a reason to get up in the morning, knowing you’re being used in a positive way.”

He loves telling the Weatherford College story and being a part of a growing community college that serves Parker, Wise,

Palo Pinto, Hood and Jack counties – the same basic footprint as Tri-County Electric Co-op’s original territory. WC continues to adjust to meet the needs of students, partner with employers and work with area high schools on advance credit and placement. Baker has also kept his voice in radio and continues to do a morning show for KMQX, a non-profit community station.

“I do news and sports in the morning, 6 to 8,” he said. “Every morning, my alarm clock goes off at 4:45 and I’m there at 5:30, on the air from 6 to about 10 ‘til 8, then I’m here by 8.”

If you think he’s busy, just try following Elizabeth around.

#### A Passion for the Stage

Elizabeth can’t remember when she wasn’t drawn to the magic of music, the excitement of the stage. Growing up, her mom took her to musicals at Weatherford High School and Casa Mañana, and she sang for three years in the Texas Girls Choir, enjoying “amazing performing opportunities” that influenced her deeply as a musician, performer and director.

“I was a musical theatre nut,” she said. “I loved it.”

When she got in high school, she played Ado Annie in a production of *Oklahoma!* but that was the only musical the school did during her years there. At UNT, she was so busy learning how to be a music teacher, there wasn’t time to perform.

The itch was still there, but it was not getting scratched.

Her first teaching job was at Brock, and for five years she was the fine arts department. She taught elementary music, middle school and high school band and choir and high school theater. Her last year, they staged the musical *Annie Junior*. After that, she stayed home for 12 years to raise her kids.

She taught private voice, then started a musical theater camp at Trinity Bible Church where the family attends. For 10 years she often co-wrote the shows with her friend Ginger Adams, then she took a part-time job at Couets Christian Academy. Not surprisingly, she did shows there as well.

She re-entered public education when the music job opened at Mary Martin Elementary, named for the Weatherford native who won three Tony awards as a star on Broadway.

“If I was ever going to teach anywhere it would be Mary Martin,” she said. “I literally grew up with a sketch of her as Peter Pan above my bed. It was perfect.”

In 2013, she decided to put on a musical. She chose – what else? – *Peter Pan*.

**“It’s a reason  
to get up in  
the morning,  
knowing you’re  
being used in a  
positive way.”**

—BRENT BAKER



PHOTOS: The many faces of Elizabeth Baker are visible as she works with a room full of students, learning a song in Hawaiian for the musical *Moana Jr.* back in June.

“I greatly underestimated the amount of interest we would have,” she said. “I just threw out a little thing to parents about auditions, expecting 20 or 30 kids. We had, I think, 140.”

Having told the kids nobody who wanted to be in the show would be “cut,” Elizabeth quickly knew she was going to have to make some adjustments.

“I was just going to do this cute little show in the cafeteria, and we wound up renting the Durant auditorium at Weatherford High School,” she said. “Once you make that decision you need a set, you need mics, you need all these things.”

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**“I was just going to do this cute little show in the cafeteria, and we wound up renting the Durant auditorium at Weatherford High School.” —ELIZABETH BAKER**

---

With a shoestring budget – the PTA fronted the money for the license – she put out a call for volunteers, and they came out of the woodwork.

“It just so happened that in the parents of Mary Martin I had set builders and costumers and all these amazing volunteers,” she said. 800674920

To provide funding, and keep that momentum going, they set up a non-profit called Martin Musicals. “It just turned into this giant, amazing, beautiful thing,” she said. This year they did their eighth show, *The Lion King*.

### Still Growing Opportunities

Martin Musicals was embraced by the entire community, not just the school. But it became clear that older kids, and those who didn’t attend Mary Martin, were also hungry for opportunities to perform and be involved.

“They had the bug,” she said. “We started talking about this idea of doing a summer camp for kids who are the next grade level – something that could get the gang back together.”

That became Weatherford College’s teen musical theatre camp, which in June staged *Moana Jr.* after an intensive two

weeks of rehearsal. She and Erin Brownlee co-directed children and teens from all over the area – Stephenville, Mineral Wells, Aledo, Weatherford, Granbury, Joshua, Fort Worth and Azle – for four performances at the college’s Alkek Fine Arts Center.

Continued brainstorming led recently to the creation of another nonprofit: the Second Star Theatre Company. That name came from a Mary Martin line when Peter Pan gave Wendy directions to his house: “Second star to the right and straight on ‘til morning!”

At this writing, it looked like Second Star would get a home in the redeveloping area around the Baker Hotel in Mineral Wells.

“They were looking for a theatre company,” she said. “There are a lot of exciting plans going on.” Elizabeth’s excitement is contagious. Her most frequently-used phrase, hands-down, is: “It was so much fun!”

“She just has a joy and a passion,” Brent said. “All these things she does, she just goes 100 percent.”

Brent is the unofficial president of the Elizabeth Baker Fan Club – and it’s a big club.

“In this town I’m not Brent Baker, I’m Elizabeth’s husband,” he laughed. “Everywhere she goes in Weatherford, people know her. She’s a superstar.”

She’s also very good at attracting others who share that passion. The cast, crew and volunteers on *Moana Jr.* included not only former Mary Martin students and parents, but kids and adults who’ve worked with Elizabeth in other productions. The Bakers’ daughter, Hannah, a student at Weatherford High School, had a role. Sons Wilson and J.T. are WHS graduates and students at UNT. They all grew up seeing first-hand how performing brings people together.

“It’s amazing,” Brent said. “They work really hard on something and then they have the show and see the culmination of their hard work, right in front of them. It’s very satisfying.”

Weatherford College and the area’s musical theatre scene continue to benefit and grow, touching lives every day because of the Baker family – a shining example of the power of love.

The people at Tri-County Electric Co-op know the feeling. It’s fun to see power put to good use, making life better for everyone. ■



JONATHAN J. CASTELLON | UNSPLASH

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**Heroes with Handbags**  
August 26

**13th Annual Sting Fling**  
September 11

## Your Co-op's Community Calendar

### August

5  
**Sugar Rush Event**  
cacparkercounty.org

19-22  
**Busted in Baylor County**  
bustedinbaylorcounty.com

26  
**Heroes with Handbags**  
paluxyrivercac.org

**Director Candidate Forum**  
Details inside the 2021 Annual Meeting insert

**NOTE:** Events are subject to postponement or cancellation due to COVID-19 guidance. Please check the event resource for updates.

**Interested in promoting your event in the next issue of *Texas Co-op Power*?**  
Email [pr@tcectexas.com](mailto:pr@tcectexas.com) with the event name, date and where readers can find more information.

### September

9  
**Keller Chamber Golf Classic**  
kellerchamber.com

11  
**13th Annual Sting Fling**  
azlestingfling.com

14  
**Freedom House Garden Safari**  
freedomhousepc.org

17  
**Lone Star Legislative Report**  
metroportchamber.org

18  
**Wild West Festival**  
springtownchamber.org

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SHELLEY PAULS | UNSPLASH

# Calico Beans

BY ELVA DELAUNE  
MILLSAP

- 1 15 oz. can Pork & Beans
- 1 16 oz. can butter beans
- 1 16 oz. can kidney beans
- 1 lb. ground beef, browned and drained
- ½ lb. bacon, chopped and fried
- 1 cup ketchup
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup white sugar
- ½ cup onion, chopped

1. Combine all ingredients and mix together.
2. Spoon into a casserole dish.
3. Bake at 350°F for 1 hour, uncovered until done.

Enjoy!

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RECIPE NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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Common obverse shown actual size

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Nelson Algren  
circa 1949.

# Stolen Words

While in Texas, author Nelson Algren was a man with a thieving arm

BY CHRISTOPHER ADAMS

**THE AWARD-WINNING** author who would go on to write the classic novel *The Man With the Golden Arm* entered a building at Sul Ross State Teachers College in Alpine in early 1934 and made off with one of the institution's typewriters. The next morning, the thief hopped a train out of town.

Nelson Algren won the National Book Award in 1950 for the aforementioned novel and earned three O. Henry Awards for his short stories, but the "poet of the Chicago slums" found trouble in Texas before achieving national literary acclaim.

Algren couldn't find work in his hometown of Chicago or anywhere else in the greater Midwest during the Great Depression and eventually traveled to Texas to pack black-eyed peas and run a Sinclair gas station between Rio Hondo

and Harlingen. But neither venture provided Algren satisfactory income, and he sought other opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.

"He crossed the border to Matamoros and came back again, ate in missions, slept in hobo jungles, lost in crap games, rode in cattle or refrigerated boxcars," wrote author Bettina Drew in the introduction to the book *The Texas Stories of Nelson Algren*.

An exhausted Algren returned to Chicago at the end of 1932 and, having written a well-received short story, decided that creative writing was his path to fulfillment. He persuaded a New York publisher to give him an advance for a novel that was to be about the illusion of the American dream and based on

his experiences in Texas.

"He saw a lot of poverty and contradictions, such as poor whites who were oppressed by the rich but took out their anger on Mexicans and Blacks who were even poorer and more oppressed," Mary Wisniewski, author of a 2016 Algren biography called *Algren: A Life*, explained in an email.

Algren returned to Texas in September 1933 and made his way to Alpine to create his crucial work. He convinced the president of Sul Ross State Teachers College (now Sul Ross State University) that he was "a big-time New York writer," granting him access to the college's typewriters to draft his novel. However, his advance hadn't amounted to much, and by January 1934, he was broke, with an unfinished manuscript. He had no choice but to return home, where accessing a typewriter would be a real challenge. So he stole one from Sul Ross.

"I think he just figured he needed the typewriter more than the college did, so he had a right to it," Wisniewski said.

Algren fled Alpine on a freight train but was subsequently caught and locked up in the Brewster County jail. It proved to be a temporary setback. He returned to Chicago after his release and completed his first novel, *Somebody in Boots*, about his experiences living in Texas.

And the typewriter? Algren left it at an Alpine freight depot where it was to be shipped to Chicago.

"The typewriter was not sent to Chicago," Wisniewski said. Its whereabouts seem to be unknown. "Algren had used it to write *Somebody in Boots* while he was working at Alpine—but didn't finish it on that typewriter. He had to finish it back in Chicago on another machine." ■

# Kids Cooking

Youngsters in the kitchen help make family meals truly rewarding

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

I've encouraged my children to join me in the kitchen ever since they were little. Cooking with kids requires extra patience but reaps rewards down the line. Small children can practice mixing and measuring ingredients and kneading dough, and older kids can learn how to chop and take charge of the stove. Encouraging their efforts makes all the difference in kids' kitchen success. My son adores meatballs, and this baked version keeps it simple. Serve with your favorite pasta or just scoop onto slices of garlic bread.

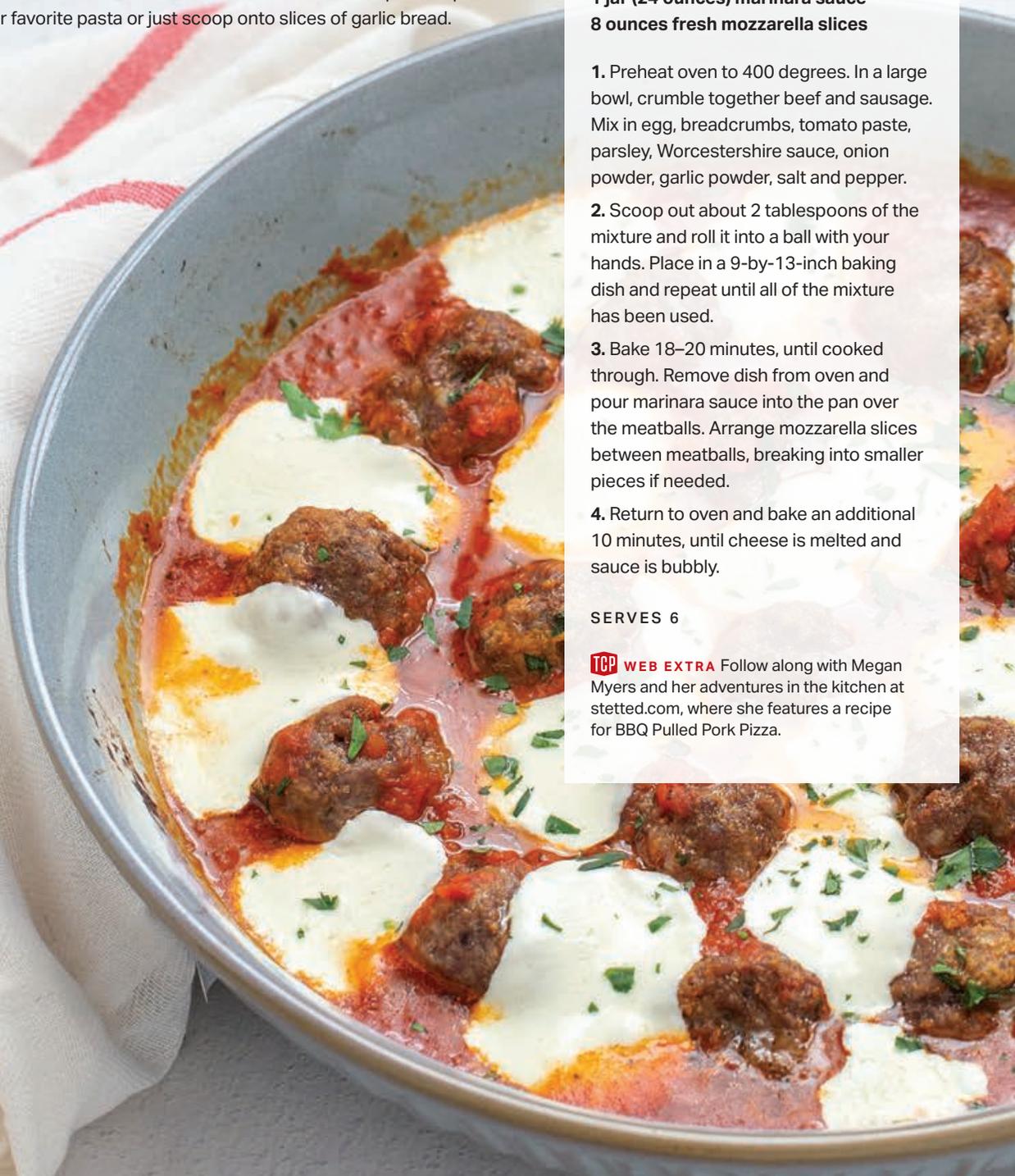
## Cheesy Baked Meatballs

**1 pound ground beef**  
**½ pound pork sausage**  
**1 egg**  
**¼ cup breadcrumbs**  
**1 tablespoon tomato paste**  
**1 tablespoon chopped parsley**  
**1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**  
**1 teaspoon onion powder**  
**1 teaspoon garlic powder**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**¼ teaspoon pepper**  
**1 jar (24 ounces) marinara sauce**  
**8 ounces fresh mozzarella slices**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, crumble together beef and sausage. Mix in egg, breadcrumbs, tomato paste, parsley, Worcestershire sauce, onion powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper.
2. Scoop out about 2 tablespoons of the mixture and roll it into a ball with your hands. Place in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and repeat until all of the mixture has been used.
3. Bake 18–20 minutes, until cooked through. Remove dish from oven and pour marinara sauce into the pan over the meatballs. Arrange mozzarella slices between meatballs, breaking into smaller pieces if needed.
4. Return to oven and bake an additional 10 minutes, until cheese is melted and sauce is bubbly.

SERVES 6

**TCP WEB EXTRA** Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com), where she features a recipe for BBQ Pulled Pork Pizza.





## Guacamole

IVAN REMLEY  
BLUEBONNET EC

Adults can take care of the chopping while little hands do the mashing and mixing of this fresh guacamole. Don't limit yourself to eating it with just chips or tacos—Ivan, 14, recommends serving with fresh veggies such as sliced radishes, carrots and cucumbers or even kale chips.

**½ onion, diced**

**2 Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced**

**½ jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced**

**1 clove garlic, minced**

**Juice of 1–2 limes, divided use**

**½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste**

**3 avocados, divided use**

1. In a large bowl, stir together the onion, tomatoes, jalapeño, garlic, 1 tablespoon lime juice and salt.

2. Slice two avocados in half lengthwise, making one long cut around the pit. Separate the halves and remove the pits. With a spoon, scoop out the flesh and add to the mixture in the bowl.

3. Mash and stir everything together, until the ingredients are well combined.

4. Slice the third avocado lengthwise, separate the halves and remove the pit. With a small knife, cut the flesh into small cubes. Scoop out the cubes and add them to the bowl with the avocado mixture. Add 1 tablespoon of lime juice and fold the avocado cubes in just enough for a slightly chunky texture.

5. Taste and adjust seasoning with lime juice and salt as needed.

**MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS**

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



**\$500 WINNER**

## Cooper's Bacon Cheddar Chicken Pasta

COOPER JOHNSON  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES



This family-friendly pasta recipe is a great way to teach older kids a variety of skills, such as sautéing and creating a simple cheese sauce. Cooper, 12, recommends adding chopped green onions to serve along with the extra bacon.

**SERVES 6–8**

**1 pound pasta, any type**

**6 strips bacon, diced; divided use**

**1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts; cut into 1-inch chunks**

**Salt and pepper, to taste**

**1 tablespoon butter**

**2 tablespoons flour**

**1 packet ranch dip mix**

**2 cups milk**

**1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese**

1. Cook pasta according to package directions, drain and keep warm.

2. While pasta is cooking, cook bacon in a large, deep-sided skillet over medium heat until crisp, then remove and drain on a paper towel. Drain all but one tablespoon of bacon drippings from pan.

3. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add butter to the skillet with the bacon drippings, stirring to melt, then add chicken. Cook until tender and no longer pink, 8–10 minutes.

4. Mix together flour and ranch dip mix, then sprinkle evenly over the chicken and stir to coat. Stir in the milk and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened and bubbly.

5. Stir in cheddar and half of the reserved bacon, stirring to melt the cheese completely. Add the pasta and stir to mix well. Serve with remaining bacon sprinkled on top.

## **TCP** \$500 Recipe Contest

**SOUPS AND STEWS** DUE AUGUST 10

Winter is the ideal time to cozy up to a warm bowl, so we want your best soup and stew recipes.

The best reader recipe wins \$500. Enter at [TexasCooPower.com/contests](http://TexasCooPower.com/contests) by August 10.



### Texas-Style Chorizo Frittata

MATTHEW PEÑA  
PEDERNALES EC

Breakfast for dinner is always a great way to get kids involved in the kitchen. Matthew, 16, came up with this recipe to help out his parents on a busy day using ingredients they already had in the fridge.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ onion, chopped

- 1½ cups chopped bell pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound Mexican chorizo
- 9 eggs
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 8 ounces Oaxaca cheese, sliced

OPTIONAL GARNISHES

- Chopped parsley
- Sour cream or Mexican crema
- Sliced avocado
- Pico de gallo

**COOK'S TIP** For a spicier frittata, add sliced jalapeños or hot sauce to the egg mixture before baking.

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Heat a 10-inch ovenproof skillet over medium heat and add olive oil. Stir in onion and bell pepper and sauté until tender. Add garlic and cook an additional 3 minutes, stirring often to prevent garlic from burning. Remove vegetables to a bowl and set aside.

3. Crumble the chorizo into the skillet and sauté until fully cooked, breaking up any large chunks. Remove from heat and drain excess oil if needed.

4. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, cheddar, parsley, salt and pepper. Add egg mixture and sautéed vegetables to the cooked chorizo in the skillet. Stir to combine and distribute ingredients evenly. Add Oaxaca cheese evenly on top of frittata.

5. Place skillet in oven and bake 20 minutes, making sure the frittata has fully set. Garnish with parsley, sour cream or Mexican crema, sliced avocado, and pico de gallo.

SERVES 6

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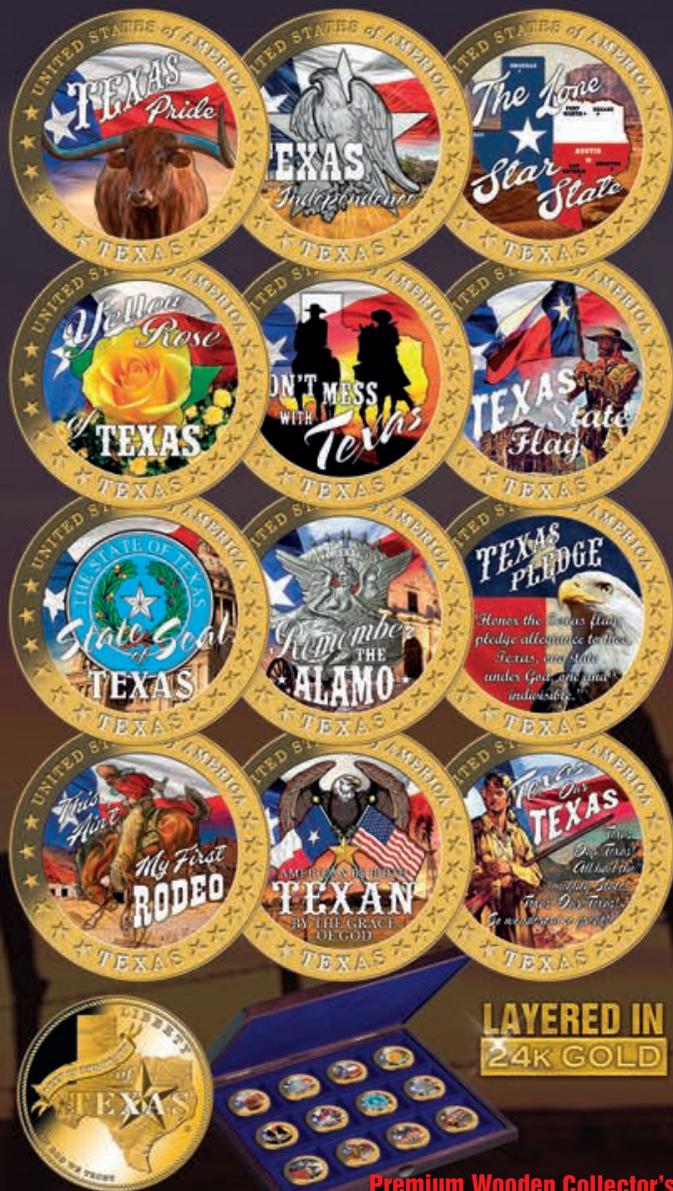
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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Head Honcho

The barbacoa at Vera’s in Brownsville rises to the occasion

BY CHET GARNER

**TO MANY TEXANS,** Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish explorer who shipwrecked near Galveston Island centuries ago. For folks in Brownsville, *cabeza de vaca* (head of the cow) has a much tastier meaning. And you won’t find a more authentic version of real-deal cow head *barbacoa* than at Vera’s Backyard Bar-B-Que.

Before lunch, I asked owner Armando Vera for a look at his pit because you can learn a lot about pit bosses by seeing the tools they use. Vera’s pit was unlike anything I’ve seen. It’s literally a pit in the ground, about 4 feet deep and full of blazing logs. It looked like a gateway to Hades.

Vera explained that an open pit is the traditional way to cook Mexican-style barbacoa. An entire cow head is wrapped in foil, placed in a hole and covered with burning logs for 10–12 hours. Vera’s is the only place in Texas that still cooks barbacoa underground, the traditional way that Vera’s father used when he started the business in 1955.

Even though I found the sight of the head to be less than appetizing, I decided to judge the barbacoa with my mouth instead of my eyes. The menu included almost every part of the head: *lengua* (tongue), *ojos* (eyes), *jeta* (jaw) and *cachete* (cheek). I ordered a bit of everything, along with homemade tortillas and salsa.

With each bite, the image of the full head faded, replaced by savory flavors of perfectly smoked meat, tangy salsa and pillowy tortillas. The barbacoa offers flavor, smoke and texture that you can’t get cooking it in an oven or over a stove. The experience at Vera’s prompted me to do something I never expected to do in my lifetime: I ordered a second helping of *lengua*. ■

ABOVE Chet isn’t sure he sees eye to eye with the cow head in front of him.

**TCP WEB EXTRA** Chet finds that barbacoa, much like his musings, is tongue in cheek in his latest video. See all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

## Know Before You Go

Call or check an event’s website for scheduling details.

## AUGUST

04

**South Padre Island [4–7]**  
**U.S. Lifesaving Association National Championship,**  
(956) 761-3000, sopadre.com

05

**Levelland [5–8] SPOTC Dog Agility Trials,** (806) 894-4161, malleteventcenter.com

**Palestine [5, 7, 19–21, 26–28]**  
**Palestine Diesel Roundtrip,**  
1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

06

**South Padre Island [6–8]**  
**Ladies Kingfish Tournament,**  
(956) 761-4412, sopadre.com

07

**Bellville Farmers Market,**  
(979) 865-3407, discoverbellville.com

**Corpus Christi Summer PolkaFest,** (361) 215-9163, facebook.com/chssouthtexas

**Frankston Neches River Wilderness Race,**  
(903) 245-9490, necheswildernessrace.com

**Graham Cars & Stars Car Show,** (940) 550-8468, grahamcarsandstars.org

**McKinney Sips of Summer,**  
(318) 527-9221, mckinneysipandstroll.com

**Palestine Dogwood Jamboree: If That Ain’t Country,**  
(903) 723-6291, dogwoodjamboree.com

**Temple Dig It Family Day,**  
(254) 298-5378, downtowntemple.com

**Bandera [7, 14, 21, 28]**  
**Cowboys On Main,**  
(830) 796-3045, banderacowboycapital.com

**Allen [7, 21, Sept. 4] Radha Krishna Temple Chess Club Tournaments,** (860) 605-3683, radhakrishnatemple.net/chess-tournament

**Palestine [7, 14, 21, 28, Sept. 4] Market Day,** (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

**Palestine [7, Sept. 4] Saturdays on Main,** (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

09

**Palestine [9, 16, 23, 30, Sept. 6] Trivia Night at the Pint,** (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

12

**Palestine [12-14] Palestine Steam Roundtrip,** 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

**Addison [12, 26] Vitruvian Nights Live,** (972) 590-8866, udr.com/vitruvian-park

13

**San Antonio Iliza Shlesinger,** (210) 223-8624, tobincenr.org

**South Padre Island [13-14] Shallow Sport Owners Tournament,** (956) 761-3000, shallowstournament.com

**Fredericksburg [13-15, 20-22] Always ... Patsy Cline,** 1-888-669-7114, fredericksburgtheater.org

14

**Lake Jackson Farmers Market,** (281) 924-0596, lakejacksonfarmersmarket.com

**Leming Battle of Medina Symposium,** (830) 480-2741, facebook.com/atascosahistory

MORE EVENTS >

**TCP Submit Your Event**

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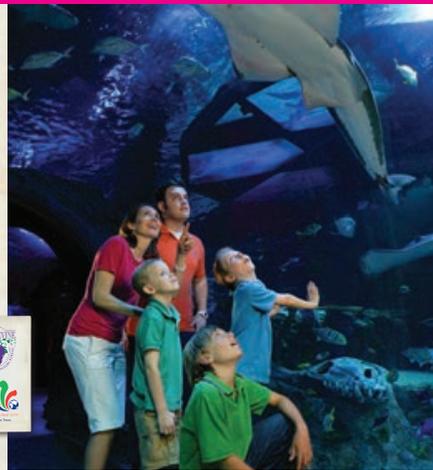
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### Event Calendar

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#### AUGUST EVENTS CONTINUED

14

**Temple Farmers Market**, (254) 298-5378, downtowntemple.com

**New Braunfels [14-15] Hill Country Comicon**, (830) 221-4011, hillcountrycomicon.com

**McKinney [14, 22] Zip Line Day**, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org/ropescourse

**Boerne [14, 28] Bluegrass Jam**, (210) 445-1080, theagricultural.org/bluegrass-jams

20

**Crockett Exile**, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

**Fredericksburg [20-22] Trade Days**, (210) 846-4094, fbgradedays.com

**Ingram [20-22, 27-29; Sept. 3-4] Nobody's Perfect**, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

21

**Arlington Chris Stapleton's All-American Road Show**, (817) 533-1972, arlington.org

**Boerne Moondance Outdoor Concerts: Big Cedar Fever**, (830) 249-4616, cibolo.org

**Palestine Summer Concert Series: Carson Jeffrey**, (903) 724-4385, visitpalestine.com

**Castroville [21-22] St. Louis Day**, (830) 931-2826, saintlouisday.com

26

**Kerrville Symphony of the Hills: Homecoming**, (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

**Fredericksburg [26-29] Gillespie County Fair**, (830) 997-2359, gillespiefair.com

27

**Stonewall Commemoration of Lyndon Johnson's Birthday**, (830) 868-7128, nps.gov/lyjo

**Tyler [27-29] Texas Rose Breed Horse Show**, (903) 882-8696, texasrosehorsepark.com

28

**Austin Bat Fest**, (512) 441-9015, roadwayevents.com/event/bat-fest

**Brenham Lee Greenwood**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com/events

**Bryan BCS Library Friends Book Sale for Young Readers**, (979) 209-5600, friendsbcs.org

**Columbus Country Market**, (979) 732-8385, columbusfmtx.org

**Lakehills Last Saturday Market**, (254) 979-1073, lakehillssaturdaymarket.com

**Waco Karem Classics Car Show**, (254) 855-3722, karemshriners.com

## SEPTEMBER

02

**La Grange Fayette County Fair**, (979) 968-3911, fayettecountyfair.org

04

**Driftwood Sip & Stroll**, (713) 299-1728, sunrisebeachvfd.org

**Bulverde [4, 11, 18, 25, Oct. 2] Saturday Night Rodeo**, (830) 980-2226, tejasrodeo.com

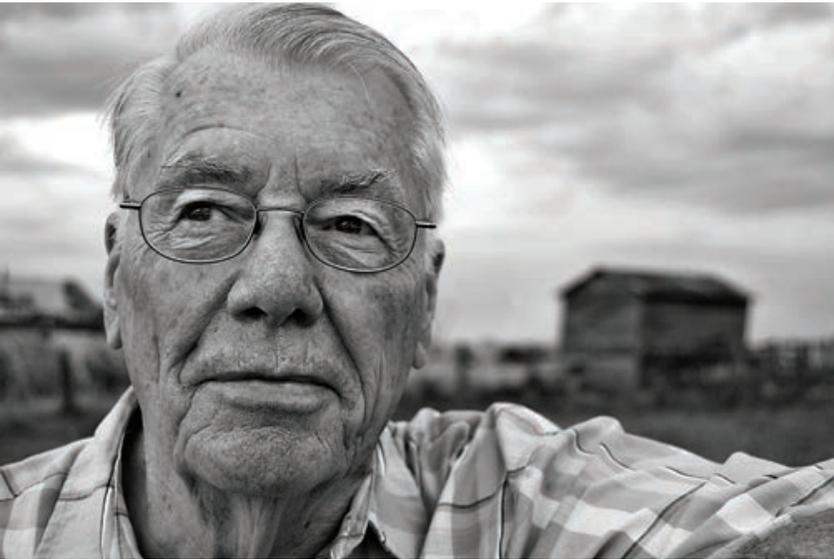
05

**New Berlin Sausage Festival**, (210) 343-9570, facebook.com/nbtxsausagefest

# Portraits

Deep lines and wrinkles tell a person's story, but a twinkle of the eye or sly smile makes us wonder what more there is to tell. Whether carefully posed or caught spontaneously, these Texans have great heads on their shoulders.

BY GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

**PAUL HOLLAND**  
PEDERNALES EC

James Hinkley, an artist and longtime resident of the Panhandle who now lives in Leander.

**PATSI TINDEL**  
LAMAR ELECTRIC

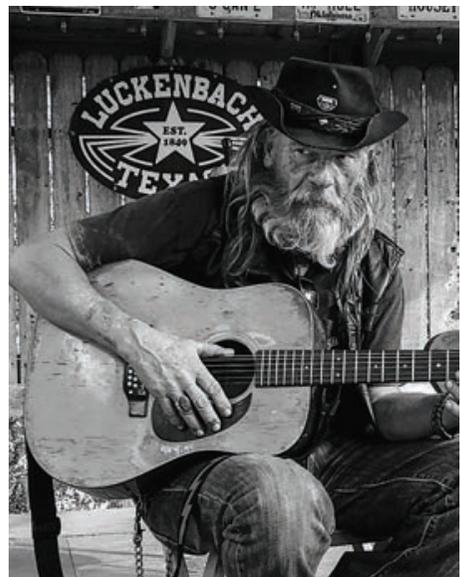
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- DUE SEP 10** Fired Up!
- DUE OCT 10** Public Art

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



## Pools in the Pasture

Summers on a ranch promise swimming in stock tanks

BY BRENDA KISSKO

**WHEN YOU GROW UP** on a ranch in West Texas, you learn early about the finer things in life. You eat oysters (of the mountain variety), you hire a full-time lawn service to maintain every acre of your spread (some call it grazing cattle), and you even get your own pair of jeans with free designer rips. And of course, *dahling*, we always had a pool.

Granted, the cows thought those live-stock tanks were for them, but I believed my dad put those tanks all over the ranch just so us girls could take our pick of swimming locations for the day. The water was always ice cold and as pure as it comes, straight from the ground. If we were thirsty, we'd just stick our tongue under the fill pipe for a gulp of goodness straight from God to our mouths. I swear it was better than Fiji Water or Topo Chico.

That's how we spent our summers, my mom, sister and I—with the pickup backed up to a stock tank, pulp fiction in hand, George Strait serenading us from the stereo speakers. No sunscreen allowed because cows don't really like drinking oxybenzone. Any time we had a slumber party, swimming was on the agenda, followed by rolling in a huge pile of cottonseed.

If the tank hadn't been cleaned out in a while, we'd just grab chunks of the moss (picture the Grinch's snot) and throw it to the ground below. Totally cool. But not if you tried to do a handstand and came up with it all over your face. Gross.

My favorite tank—I mean pool—was at my grandparents' ranch. My aunt freed her pet goldfish in it before going off to college at Texas Tech, and—no kidding—those suckers grew to be a foot long and multiplied like rabbits. All us grandkids loved learning to swim there, racing from side to side and seeing who could catch the most fish with our hands. I'm sure their great-great-great-grand-fishes are still swimming around in the tank today.

I think Kevin Bacon did his part to bring tank swimming back in style. In *I Love Dick*, an Amazon series set in Marfa (another one of my favorite places), he ends the pilot episode with a skinny-dip in a tank with a gorgeous view of the mountains. That's some good living right there.

As I'm writing this, I'm trying to remember the last time I swam in a live-stock tank. Sure, I've done rooftop pools, lazy rivers and hot tubs right off the ski slope, but it's been far too long since that good old-fashioned, back-to-my-roots dunk in a redneck infinity pool. Good thing summer's not quite over. ■

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