

REPLANTING A  
VALLEY FOREST

PAINTING OUR SPRINGS  
WITH WILDFLOWERS

KICK ASHE,  
CLEAR THE LAND

# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

APRIL 2026



## Whirly Birds

The special place  
in West Texas  
where hummers flock



# MOTORIZED SCREENS AND AWNINGS

**HURRY!**  
**LIMITED TIME OFFER!**

# \$250 OFF\*

**Motorized Outdoor Screens & Awnings**

★ **SCHEDULE A FREE ESTIMATE** ★

Call Today  
**1-844-682-8974**

Or Scan to Learn More!

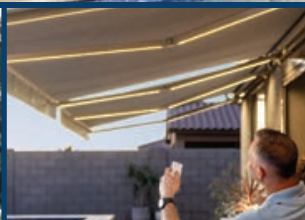


**FREE LED Lights\***

*Privacy Screens & Awnings*



*Storm Screens*



*Retractable Awnings*



*Bug Screens*

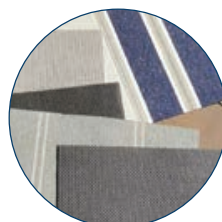
## Transform Your Deck, Patio, Pool, Garage & More With Outdoor Screens & Awnings



Proudly made in the USA



In-house professional installation



Fabric choices by Sunbrella®



**10-Year Limited Lifetime Warranty on Hardware, Motors and Mesh**

\*Offer valid on SPF brand motorized awnings and screens only. Offer excludes installation, sales tax, shipping and handling. This offer supersedes any prior offers or advertisements. Free LED Lights offered on motorized awnings only.

# April 2026



10

## 06 Fast and Curious

Nineteen species of hummingbird call Texas home, and these West Texans can help you see many of them.

*By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers*

## 10 Growing Tradition

Rio Grande Valley volunteers gather each fall to replant a thorn forest, seedling by seedling.

*By Eileen Mattei  
Photos by Larry Ditto*

04

### Currents

The latest buzz

05

### TCP Talk

Readers respond

16

### Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

### Footnotes in Texas History

Painting by Numbers  
*By W.F. Strong*

26

### TCP Kitchen

Five-Ingredient Dinners  
*By Vianney Rodriguez*

30

### Hit the Road

Tragedy on the Prairie  
*By Chet Garner*

33

### Focus on Texas

Photo Contest: Gates

34

### Observations

Kickin' Ashe  
*By Bob McCullough*

ON THE COVER

A male ruby-throated hummingbird fuels up on a zinnia bloom.

*Photo by Laurie Lawler*

ABOVE

Reforestation volunteers gather at sunrise on a patch of federal land near the Rio Grande.

*Photo by Larry Ditto*



Lori and Gregg Belcher

“To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.”  
—AUDREY HEPBURN

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

If I could use only one electronic device, it would be ...

**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 February prompt: **The perfect Valentine's gift is ...**

The love shown by Cicero to Olla [*What Love Looks Like*, February 2026].

MARILYN WERKHEISER  
BLUEBONNET EC  
BASTROP

Giving from the heart and expecting nothing in return.

JIM DUNGAN  
VIA FACEBOOK

To be thought of as special by someone.

KAT CROSS  
HOUSTON COUNTY EC  
CROCKETT

Spending time with the ones you love.

ANITA BURT  
BIG COUNTRY EC  
SNYDER

Having popcorn and Diet Dr Pepper with my husband of 68 years.

SANDRA LEA  
BARTLETT EC  
MILANO

Visit our website to see more responses.

# Mutual Appreciation

**ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES TAKE** time every April to recognize the heroes of the power lines on National Lineworker Appreciation Day—April 13 this year.

For one Central Texas lineworker, appreciation came last summer. Gregg Belcher lay in a Dallas hospital after an electrical injury in June 2025. The foreman at Hamilton County Electric Cooperative had suffered horrific burns on his back and chest and lost his left arm.

Co-workers and friends in Hico and Hamilton and at neighboring co-ops rallied to help with expenses, collecting \$93,000 at a benefit event in August and through other donations.

“We were just blown away by the love that people have shown us,” said Lori Belcher, his wife.

**TCP** Visit our website to read about Gregg Belcher's recovery.

## **TCP** Contests and More

**\$500 RECIPE CONTEST**  
Pancakes and Waffles

**FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS**  
Underwater Life

**RECOMMENDED READING**  
This month's Pancakes and Waffles contest reminds us of *Breakfast in Texas*, our May 2015 feature story. Find it on our website.



ENTER ONLINE



FEBRUARY 2026

“Loved the pics of animals at the rehab center, especially the cross-eyed opossum [Giving a Hoot]. And the artwork by Pete Lloyd was beautiful [What Love Looks Like].”

SANDY KEOGH  
PEDERNALES EC  
CANYON LAKE



TIFFANY HOFELDT

### Noble Deeds

Big thanks to Martha Deeringer and Tiffany Hofeldt for the informative and interesting article on wildlife rehabbers: such noble and generous volunteers [Giving a Hoot, February 2026].

Lee Turner  
MidSouth EC  
Montgomery

### Setting the Record Straight

President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not sign an executive order integrating the armed forces [Currents, February 2026]. While he signed Executive Order 8802 in 1941 to prohibit racial discrimination in the defense industry, he upheld segregation within the military.

The desegregation of the armed forces was achieved later, by President Harry S. Truman via Executive Order 9981 on July 26, 1948.

Don F. Davison  
Central Texas EC  
Fredericksburg



PETE LLOYD

### Floored by Willie

In 1974 I was a young lieutenant in San Antonio. A friend suggested that we go out to John T. Floore's Country Store because a guy named Willie Nelson was playing [Honky-Tonk Heaven, February 2026].

For three hours Willie and his band never left the stage. When the band would take a short break, they would just pass a bottle of whiskey around. I've been a Willie fan for over 50 years.

Joe Kreimborg  
CoServ  
Highland Village

### Road Trip

My old high school boyfriend lived in an old Army house on Fort McIntosh back in the 1960s, and I also took a couple of classes at Laredo Junior College one summer [From Posts to Pillars, February 2026].

An interesting trip would be to visit each of those old Rio Grande forts.

Sheri Sweet  
Bluebonnet EC and Central Texas EC  
Lexington and Fredericksburg

**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

### TEXAS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Chair** Bryan Wood, San Augustine  
**Vice Chair** Cameron Smallwood, Burleson  
**Secretary-Treasurer** Jim Coleman, Edna  
**Board Members** Matt Bentke, Bastrop  
Kerry Kelton, Navasota • Mark McClain,  
Roby • Zac Perkins, Hooker, Oklahoma

**PRESIDENT/CEO** Mike Williams, Austin

### COMMUNICATIONS & MEMBER SERVICES COMMITTEE

Mike Ables, Bellville • Kathi Calvert, Crockett  
Tachi Hinojosa, Fredericksburg  
Gary Miller, Bryan • Bryan Story, Blossom  
Grace Subealdea, Dalhart  
Buff Whitten, Eldorado

### MAGAZINE STAFF

**Vice President, Communications & Member Services** Martin Bevin  
**Editor** Chris Burrows

**Associate Editor** Tom Widlowski  
**Production Manager** Karen Nejtke  
**Creative Manager** Andy Doughty  
**Advertising Manager** Elaine Sproull  
**Communications Specialist** Samantha Bryant  
**Digital Media Specialist** Caytlyn Calhoun  
**Senior Designer** Stacy Coale  
**Assistant Production Manager** Alex Dal Santo  
**Print Production Specialist** Grace Fultz  
**Food Editor** Vianney Rodriguez  
**Communications Specialist** Erin Sinclair  
**Communications Specialist** Claire Stevens  
**Communications Specialist** Kelly Tran  
**Proofreader** Jessica Ridge

**TEXAS CO-OP POWER** Volume 82, Number 10 (USPS 540-560). Texas Co-op Power is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 77 electric cooperatives. Texas Co-op Power's website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** Subscription price is \$5.53 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

**Co-op members:** Please notify your co-op of address changes or other subscription requests.

**POSTMASTER** Send address changes to Texas Co-op Power (USPS 540-560), 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. Please enclose label from this copy of Texas Co-op Power showing old address and key numbers.

**ADVERTISING** Contact Elaine Sproull at (512) 486-6251 or esproull@texas-ec.org for information about purchasing display ad space in Texas Co-op Power and/or in our 26 sister publications in other states. Advertisements in Texas Co-op Power are paid solicitations. The publisher neither endorses nor guarantees in any manner any product or company included in this publication.

**COPYRIGHT** All content © 2026 Texas Electric Cooperatives Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction of this issue or any portion of it is expressly prohibited without written permission. Willie Wire-hand © 2026 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.





# *FAST and* *CURIOUS*



HUMMINGBIRDS THIS SPREAD: LAURIE LAWLER

ABOVE An interaction between ruby-throated hummingbirds.

LEFT A male Allen's hummingbird at rest.

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A male ruby-throated hummingbird. Since the 1990s, Dan and Cathy Brown have been guardians of a thriving hummingbird habitat near Christoval in West Texas.

## Nineteen species of hummingbird call Texas home, and these West Texans can help you see many of them

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

**T**housands of black-chinned hummingbirds nest during the summer among the live oak and pecan trees on Dan Brown's family ranch near Christoval in West Texas. And for nearly six decades, Brown has helped feed the tiny birds. Well into his 90s, his hearing has dulled but not his eyesight nor his energy.

One afternoon last June, Dan and his wife, Cathy, take a break from chores and relax in folding chairs in their observation room, an air-conditioned spot for watching the birds zip around sugar water feeders hung beneath roof eaves.

Beyond the room's huge plate-glass windows, a wild bird community is on full display. A painted bunting ruffles his wet feathers on a tiered water feature surrounded by flowering native plants. Black-crested titmice and northern cardinals snatch sunflower seeds and white millet from ball-shaped feeders. From an iron skillet nailed to a live oak, a golden-fronted woodpecker swoops in for a mouthful of suet, then flies off to feed his nestlings.

"This has become more than a hobby," muses Dan, focusing his blue eyes on the various birds. "Here it's developed into an enterprise. I couldn't do it without Cathy."

The couple call their business the Hummer House, a wooded wildlife habitat just east of the South Concho River that includes three rentable guest cottages. Since 1996, visitors from across the country and around the world have come to witness the aerial antics.

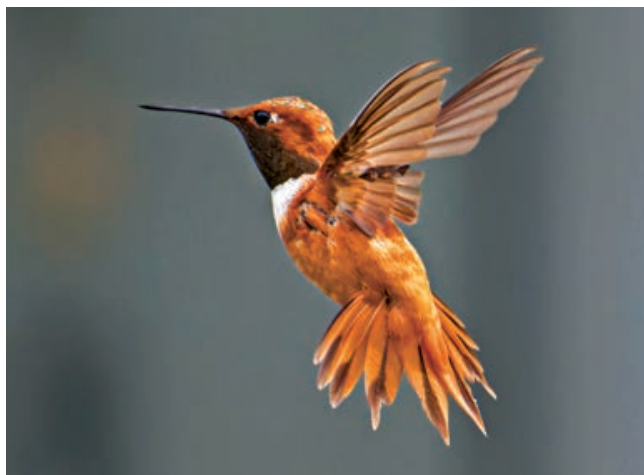
Altogether, the Browns put out 25 gigantic feeders that each hold 48 or 80 ounces of sugar water. Since one 48-ounce feeder lasts only 24 hours, keeping them filled is a daily job.

Production of the hummingbird fuel starts in a storage room, where Dan measures and pours sugar into 1-gallon plastic jugs, then sets them on shelves. As needed, the jugs are carried via golf cart to the observation room. At a sink, Cathy fills the jugs with water and shakes them well. Then she scours empty feeders with a long-handled brush and refills them with fresh sugar water.

In the 1990s, Dan bought sugar in annual amounts that ranged from 390 to 685 pounds. "Now we average about 1,500 pounds of pure cane sugar each year," Cathy says.



TIFFANY HOFELDT



HUMMINGBIRDS: LAURIE LAWLER

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A male Anna's hummingbird, with its iridescent pink-red throat; male rufous hummingbird; and male broad-billed hummingbird, with its black-tipped, long red bill.

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP A female ruby-throated hummingbird feeds at a red salvia plant. The Browns found this hummingbird nest, built from plant fibers, lichen and spider silk, on their property.

"We're a very large nesting site for black-chinned hummingbirds. Within a quarter-mile radius, we estimate that there are probably about 3,000 hummingbirds."

But they're not just here for the sugar water. "Hummingbirds are insectivores," Cathy explains. "We have thousands of native pecan trees that have aphids. Aphids are like T-bone steaks to hummingbirds. They're very high in protein and very sweet. You could take down every one of these feeders, and we'd still have hummingbirds."

### Fueling Fighter Jets

The next time a hummingbird streaks past, imagine you've been buzzed by a miniature fighter jet. That's how fast nature's smallest bird can fly relative to its size. In flight, a hummingbird beats its wings in a figure eight up to 40 times or more per second. This rapid motion enables it to spin, hover, and fly backward and upside down at speeds of 30 mph or more.

To fuel such a high metabolism, a hummingbird, which can weigh 2–20 grams, slurps up nectar that's at least double its weight every day. One fill-up lasts 20 minutes, then it's off to find more flowers and insects or return to a feeder—dining territory that a hummer will fiercely defend, even remembering which blooms it has already drained (and pollinated).

At night, a hummer may go into torpor to stave off starvation. During this deep sleep, its heart slows from 1,200 beats a minute down to 50.

Nineteen hummingbird species have been recorded across Texas. In summer breeding months, the two most common species are black-chinned hummers in West Texas and ruby-throated hummingbirds in East Texas. Depending on the species, hummingbirds can breed as far away as Alaska and Canada and migrate as far south as Central America.



Since 2010, federally licensed bird bander Charles Floyd and other permitted volunteers have banded more than 10,000 hummingbirds at the Hummer House. Based on his research, about 95% of all the black-chinned hummers there are returning females from prior years.

"It wouldn't make a difference if the Browns hung a thousand feeders," says Floyd, a retired school principal who lives nearby. "What matters most is that the Browns are preserving the trees, the understory and the natural habitat."

Floyd and his banding partner—master bander and retired biologist Kelly Bryan of Rockport—collect banding data for West Texas Avian Research, a nonprofit they founded in 2011 to support bird banding research and bird conservation in West Texas.

"Banding has led me to understand the life cycle and migratory habits of hummingbirds," Floyd says. "Their established pattern of habits and movements has continued for centuries. Certain factors, such as the widespread introduction of feeders, have made some changes in that behavior. But overall patterns have remained the same."

So far, Floyd has banded 162 bird species at the Hummer

House, including half of Texas' hummingbird species. Many are banded Saturday mornings April through July at the ranch. That's when the Browns welcome visitors free of charge to watch Floyd and his wife, Nancy, band hummers and other species. Children and overnight guests are often allowed to release birds after they've been banded.

### Travel Plans

At the Hummer House, male black-chinned hummingbirds arrive first in mid-March and stake out their breeding territories. By April, females show up and begin gathering unbleached cotton the Browns put out for nest building. "They keep pulling it through mid-July," Cathy says. "That's a good indication that they breed twice."

Males woo mates by performing dramatic aerial dives and buzzing their tails. They also flash their iridescent gorget, the colorful throat patch that sets males apart.

Female hummers—drably feathered for camouflage—build nests and tend the young with no help from mates. Their tiny nests are made of plant materials and held together with spiderwebs. Mothers usually lay two white eggs smaller than jelly beans and feed their hatchlings regurgitated insects and nectar.

By late June and into July, males start leaving. "They've proven through banding that they may go out west or to the Hill Country," Cathy says. "They take their time migrating back to southern Mexico for the winter. During that time, we may see male hummingbirds from farther north."

From the second week in May through the end of June, "we have a constant population of hummers," Cathy continues. "But after that, a lot of males have started to migrate. Then ruby-throated males come through. The last to leave are black-chinned females and their young ones. Our population is ever evolving."

In late August, more ruby-throated hummingbirds than black-chinneds show up. "We're on the western edge of ruby-throated migration, so we see a lot of those," Cathy says. "During fall migration, you'll see the biggest variety here, like Allen's and rufous, but not in great numbers."

The Browns get up from their chairs in the observation room and head off to refill sugar water feeders. "It's like having a dairy farm," Cathy says. "You make the circles in the morning and fill what's empty. Then in the evening, you do it all again."

Dan smiles. "If you love to work," he says, "this is the place to fall in love with." ■

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and get to know Dan and Cathy Brown and the hummingbirds they love.



LAURIE LAWLER

## LURING LONG BEAKS

Hummer-friendly gardens provide a variety of nectar sources to meet the birds' high energy needs. They're drawn to red tubular flowers, such as salvias and honeysuckles. The trumpet shape accommodates their long bills and forked tongues. Once they discover nectar sources, hummers will also feed on other shapes, sizes and colors of flowers. Try these Texas natives:

- Autumn sage (salvia)
- Coral honeysuckle
- Flame acanthus
- Trumpet creeper
- Turk's cap



TIFFANY HOFELDT

Valley volunteers gather each fall to replant a thorn forest, seedling by seedling

# Growing Tradition

BY EILEEN MATTEI • PHOTOS BY LARRY DITTO

**David Alvarado remembers** digging holes alongside other volunteers near the Rio Grande when he was in high school, almost 20 years ago. Nowadays he has lots of little helpers.

“I wanted to share this with my family,” says the San Juan resident, plunging his shovel into the earth again—this time with the help of his 14-year-old son, Jeremiah. His daughter, Adalee, 3, uses a trowel and her hands to pat soil around freshly planted seedlings that his wife, Berenize, places in the ground and backfills.



The Alvarados are among some 1,800 volunteers on this October morning who traveled to this 9-acre patch of federal land south of the rusty-red slats of the border wall and less than a mile north of the Rio Grande. They’re here with a lofty goal: plant 10,000 native seedlings.

The 2025 gathering marked the 31st year volunteers have come out to revegetate a piece of the Lower Rio Grande Valley on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service land. The Tamaulipan thorn forest once covered 1 million acres along the Rio Grande, but just 10% of it remains intact today.

## Green Goals

By reintroducing native seedlings like Texas ebony, wild olive, fiddlewood and snake-eyes to former farm fields, the Rio Reforestation project aims to restore the thorn forest. The plants attract bugs, which bring birds, rabbits, snakes, bobcats, tortoises and javelinas. Extending the wildlife corridor allows plant and animal populations to thrive and avoid genetic isolation.

“Rio Reforestation is the biggest community planting event in the U.S. Nothing else comes close,” says Jon Dale, a senior director for American Forests. The nonprofit collects seeds and grows native plants for the USFWS at Marinoff Nursery in Alamo.

“In the last 30 years, we have restored 18,500 acres of USFWS-owned farmland by planting over 10 million native thornscrub seedlings,” says Imer de la Garza, a USFWS project leader.

Over those years, they discovered best practices that increase seedlings’ chance of survival, now around 90%. One factor is high-density planting: 10,000 plants on 9 acres works out to more than 1,000 per acre.

The native seedlings are drought- and heat-tolerant as well as freeze-, flood- and fire-resistant. Reforestation goes beyond canopy trees like mesquite and Texas persimmon to include understory plants such as allthorn, cenizo and coyotillo, plus ground covers like heliotrope and frogfruit.

LEFT After a selfie, volunteers will get the waiting plants into the ground.

OPPOSITE Three-year-old Adalee Alvarado does her part as a Rio Reforestation volunteer. She says she had a great time “playing with dirt.”





It takes a year of preparation to put crates jammed with an assortment of 35 native species into the field with an army of volunteers. Seeds are collected from the wild and Marinoff's orchard year-round, with ripe seeds intercepted before the wind or animals carry them off.

Many seeds require finicky processing techniques for successful germination. For example, wolfberry fruit must be squeezed to disgorge the seeds. Texas persimmon fruits are rolled on hardware cloth to release their large seeds. Hard ebony seeds are abraded with sandpaper.

**“In the last 30 years, we have restored 18,500 acres of USFWS-owned farmland by planting over 10 million native thornscrub seedlings.”**

Marinoff staff fills biodegradable plant bands with a mixture of vermiculite, local soil, fertilizer and a seed in the spring. Through the summer the plants sit on grow-out benches under shade cloth. Rio Reforestation's fall planting gives seedlings months to establish strong root systems before the next summer's heat.

The nursery contracts with private growers to help it supply this project and the other 185,000 native seedlings USFWS needs to revegetate about 200 acres annually.

### **From Field to Forest**

Last year the 9 acres of the Milagro tract produced a crop of organic cabbage for Rio Fresh, a third-generation produce grower and packer. Before the Reforestation volunteers arrive, a tractor has plowed the soil into east-west rows. A dense thicket of 100-year-old mesquites, ebony trees and understory bushes borders the tract to the west and north.



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP The planting crews use 6-foot ropes to ensure adequate spacing between seedlings. A manzanita fruit is collected at Marinoff Nursery in Alamo, where seeds are prepared for planting.

RIGHT A volunteer plants a Texas ebony seedling.

Volunteers sign in near a banner that reads, “Let’s Restore the Thornforest Together.” It outlines the work ahead: Get your shovel. Go to one of the 200 rows where a leader awaits. Pick up a blue crate. Use a 6-foot rope to measure the distance between seedling holes. Dig a hole as deep as the top of the plant band. Put it in and backfill.

Small groups of family or friends work eastward down each row. Some organize a division of labor: the leads measuring the spacing and wielding shovels or post-hole diggers. Then come the planters with a crate of seedlings. In other rows, two or three dig, then plant and then measure to the next site. Dragonflies flit past while a turkey vulture tilts overhead.

Wearing hats and leather gloves, Mitchell, Michelle, Lindsey and Joaquin Sternberg of Mission show they know about getting down and dirty. “It’s different every year—the people, the location, the weather,” says Mitchell, who has been participating since the 1990s.

School buses of elementary, middle and high school students arrive. Idea Los Encinos of McAllen sends three buses of students. Another school sends nearly 200 students.

Berta Palacios of Pharr oversees 20 Hidalgo County 4-H kids participating as a community service project. She spies high-spirited fifth graders larking and asks them, “Is that safe, the way you’re holding that shovel?”

Low humidity and a constant breeze temper the 85-degree air, which is filled with happy chatter. “It’s really fun, something to do on the weekend with friends. We all like doing it,” says Jennavie Juarez, one of 15 from the Weslaco High School National Honor Society here for their third year.

Girl Scout Troop 269 from La Feria has returned as well. “The girls enjoy it,” says Krystal Cruz, a scout leader and parent of a volunteer. “This is something we hope to continue every year.”

Maria Ortega and her three young children tackle a row themselves. “This is the very first time we have planted anything,” she says. Near them Victor Ostolaza Jr. is digging holes with his father while his wife, Cynthia, and daughter Kiara follow with the seedlings. He explains that Kiara’s school involvement brought them out. “We participated before because of her.”

Row leader Chad Wilmoth, a retired Rio Hondo science teacher and member of Magic Valley Electric Cooperative, grew some of the seedlings Marinoff distributes. Row leaders know not to fuss if seedlings are not planted at the exact spacing or depth. Volunteers familiar with the event under-



stand that engaging and energizing the community is an important part of the work.

A young boy jumps on a shovel his mom holds steady, upright. A teen girl empties her water bottle onto a newly planted Western soapberry. After completing their rows, 23 kids in the Green Club of Idea Mission lean on their shovels, listening to Tejano music from a small speaker.

“It’s controlled chaos,” Dale says as the event winds down. “Survival could be 100% this time since the tract is surrounded by agriculture and its moisture. Tight proximity results in a more diverse habitat.”

### Set Up for Success

Dropped gloves and empty crates litter the field as volunteers head home after picking up a boxed lunch. If they want, workers can take home a pot of chile pequin, crucita or Mexican hat. After all, they now know how to plant them.

Soon after Rio Reforestation, contractors insert a 3-foot-tall durable tree tube around each plant. Besides thwarting plant nibblers, morning moisture collects on the tubes and trickles down to the seedlings. That’s the only moisture the young plants get besides rain.

Over time, wild seedlings will pop up under the taller trees, taking advantage of the shade and moisture. Insects, birds and other creatures will spread out into restored habitat. ■



FROM  
**\$9,995**  
INSTALLED



**AFFORDABLE  
BATHROOM  
REMODEL**

FROM **\$129** PER MONTH

- Lifetime Warranty
- Custom Sizes Available
- 100% Financing Available
- A+ BBB Rating
- Good Contractors List



**BEST BUY WALK-IN TUBS**  
FEATURING "SEALTITE" TECHNOLOGY

Trusted by Texans for Over 20 Years  
Tubs and Showers Made in America

Visit Our Texas Showroom

**CALL FOR MORE INFO**

682-205-3532 • 877-416-5289  
[bestbuywalkintubs.com](http://bestbuywalkintubs.com)

**\$500 OFF!** Contact us TODAY for big savings with this limited-time offer.



**Scarborough  
Renaissance Festival**

APRIL 4 THRU MAY 25

**STEP BACK IN TIME  
FOR THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE**  
SATURDAYS, SUNDAYS & MEMORIAL DAY MONDAY

New In 2026: Elevated Joust Arena & Royal Dais +  
King's Feast & Jubilee + King's Dungeon Museum +  
Immersive Scarborough Castle Experience



**SRFESTIVAL.COM**



Just 30 minutes south of downtown  
Dallas & Fort Worth in Waxahachie!





# Finally - A Mobility Scooter That Goes Everywhere You Do

Remember when getting around was effortless? When you could shop, visit friends, or just take a stroll without worry? **The EZY Light brings that freedom back.**

### So Light, You Won't Believe the Power

The EZY Light is one of the lightest mobility scooters available at just **43 pounds** (without the removeable battery)—yet it delivers impressive performance. Travel up to **7.5 miles** on a single charge at speeds up to **4.3 mph**. That's enough to handle your entire day, whether you're running errands, taking a trip, or enjoying time outdoors with family.

### Go Anywhere. Effortlessly

Built for versatile terrain use with puncture-resistant tires.

Flight-approved and travel-ready, it's the perfect companion for air travel and cruises.

### Ready to Ride in Seconds

No complicated assembly. The EZY Light folds and unfolds in just two simple steps—no tools required. Raise the steering column, raise the seat, and you're ready to go. It's that simple.

### Engineered for Your Safety and Comfort





Safety comes first with the EZY Light's four-wheel design that provides maximum stability. Anti-tip rear wheels add extra protection, while the innovative Electronic Stability Control automatically reduces speed during turns to help prevent tipping.

The comfort features are impressive too: adjustable armrests, an adjustable steering column, and large wheels that smooth out bumps—even on grass and gravel. Plus, integrated front and rear lights keep you visible, and the horn alerts others when needed.

### Your Independence Awaits

Don't let mobility concerns keep you from the activities you love. The EZY Light comes with a one-year warranty, nationwide sales and service centers for support, and flexible financing options.




-  Cruises
-  Flights
-  Public Transport
-  Road Trip



Loading the **EZY LIGHT** scooter into your car is incredibly simple and convenient. Just wheel the scooter up to your trunk, lift the front end and place it in first, then follow with the back end, and slide it in. This method allows you to lift only half of the scooter at a time, making the whole process much easier and practically effortless for anyone.

## CALL NOW

FOR YOUR FREE INFORMATION KIT AND GET 10% OFF YOUR NEXT SCOOTER PURCHASE



**HOME AND SHOWROOM DEMONSTRATIONS AVAILABLE.**

*Our nationwide team of mobility experts is committed to helping you find and customize the mobility scooter that perfectly suits your lifestyle.*



**CALL NOW: (281) 524-2886**



GENERAL  
MANAGER  
**ERIC  
HALFMANN**

## Lives on the Line

**EVERY YEAR, WE** take time to thank our extraordinary lineworkers who dedicate their lives to keeping the lights on in our communities. Across Karnes Electric Cooperative's service territory 33 lineworkers maintain 4,880 miles of line. Without them, our world would be dark.

We depend on our entire staff to keep Karnes EC running smoothly, but April 13, National Lineworker Appreciation Day, we honor the lineworkers who often face dangerous and challenging situations so that our lives may be a little bit brighter and safer every day.

These brave men and women repair damaged lines and maintain critical infrastructure for our communities. Without their hard work and commitment to the job, our co-op would not thrive.

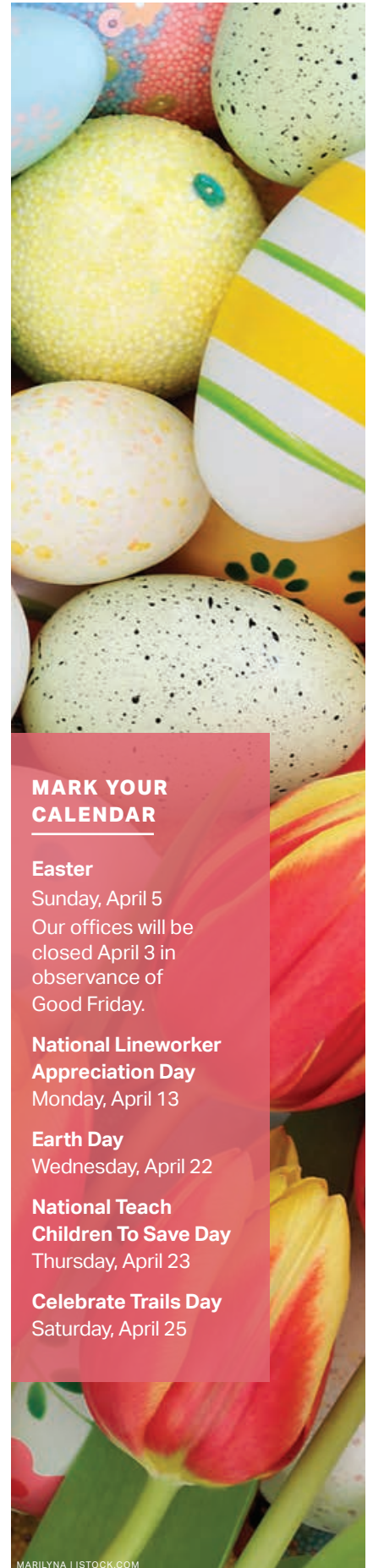


No matter the time—day or night, weekday or weekend—if the lights go out, so do they.

Perhaps you've seen them raising their bucket trucks in howling winds and torrential rains or in freezing, icy conditions. They work around the clock near high-voltage power lines until electricity is restored to every member in our co-op community.

Our lineworkers are courageous, committed and critical to our success. We hope you will join us in thanking the many lineworkers—locally and around the world—who light our lives.

Remember, your power works because they do! ■



### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

#### Easter

Sunday, April 5  
Our offices will be closed April 3 in observance of Good Friday.

#### National Lineworker Appreciation Day

Monday, April 13

#### Earth Day

Wednesday, April 22

#### National Teach Children To Save Day

Thursday, April 23

#### Celebrate Trails Day

Saturday, April 25

# How Your Community Can Prevent Wildfires

**MAY 2 IS WILDFIRE** Community Preparedness Day. This annual event is a national campaign organized by the National Fire Protection Association meant to encourage us all to take action to raise awareness and reduce wildfire risks.

Fires can happen at any time, and their consequences can be devastating. But each of us can do our part to mitigate the danger and help protect our community. NFPA offers these tips for making the most of Wildfire Community Preparedness Day.

## Check

Make sure your address number is clearly visible from the street and unobstructed by vegetation in case firefighters need to find you. Map two possible routes to get out of your neighborhood.

Move woodpiles so they are at least 30 feet from your home.

Take an audit of your possessions for insurance purposes. Visit [iii.org](http://iii.org) for tips from the Insurance Information Institute on conducting an inventory of your belongings.

## Clear

Clear dry leaves or brush at least 3–5 feet away from your home's foundation. Over time, expand that radius to 30 feet, if possible. Also clear debris from porches and decks and dispose of it in appropriate trash receptacles.

Remove items stored under decks and porches. Gasoline cans and portable propane tanks should never be stored in or near your house.

## Communicate

Create a family communication plan and assemble a 72-hour evacuation kit for your household and pets.

Register your mobile number with the local office of emergency management to receive text alerts. Work with neighbors to create a phone tree to alert everyone about a fire or evacuation.

Visit [nfpa.org](http://nfpa.org) for more tips and resources. ■



MATHEW RISLEY | ISTOCK.COM

## Karnes Electric Cooperative

### CONTACT US

P.O. Box 7, Karnes City, TX 78118

**Toll-Free** 1-888-807-3952

**Web** [karnesec.org](http://karnesec.org)

### General Manager

Eric Halfmann

### Board of Directors

Paul T. Brysch Jr., President, District 5

David Ross Nieschwitz, Vice President, District 7

Clif Royal, Secretary-Treasurer, District 6

Frank A. Geyer Jr., Assistant Secretary-Treasurer, District 3

L. Scott McClaugherty IV, District 4

Larry R. Schendel, District 1

Boyd Vaughan, District 2

## 24/7 Outage Reporting

### TOLL-FREE

1-888-807-3952

### ONLINE

At [karnesec.org](http://karnesec.org) using your SmartHub account, or use the SmartHub app on your mobile device.

Please be prepared to provide your account number and meter number.

### PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Online or via the SmartHub app
- 24-hour pay-by-phone
- Auto bill pay
- Mail
- In person
- Night drop
- Kiosk

### OFFICE LOCATIONS

Open Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

#### Karnes City Headquarters

1800 N. U.S. Highway 181, Karnes City

#### Pleasanton Member Service Center

1824 W. Goodwin St., Pleasanton

### MISSION STATEMENT

Providing quality service to empower communities and improve lives.



Check us out at

[TexasCoopPower.com/karnes](http://TexasCoopPower.com/karnes)



FST0PH123 | ISTOCK.COM

## Take an Extra Second To Look Up

Distracted farm workers are a major danger

**AS FARMERS PREPARE** to enter the fields for planting, Karnes Electric Cooperative urges everyone working in agriculture to be alert to the dangers of working near overhead power lines, poles and other electrical equipment.

Before you think an accident could never happen to you, consider electrical accident survivor Cody Conrady's experience. He shares what happened to him in an effort to help increase power line awareness.

It was Conrady's next-to-last day as an assistant manager for a fertilizer company. They were understaffed that day, and Conrady jumped in a truck to get ahead of a sprayer. Once the sprayer was in position, he hopped out to fill the tank with fertilizer. What happened next changed everything.

What he and his co-worker inside the cab were unaware of was that the sprayer boom had either made contact with or gotten too close to a power line. More than 7,000 volts of electricity traveled through the boom and electrified the equipment and ground where Conrady was standing. The unyielding stray voltage traveled through Conrady's body as part of its path to the ground.

In the minutes and hours that followed, he was brought back to life, rushed to a local hospital and then transferred via helicopter to a Level 1 trauma center. That was the start of a very long and arduous road to recovery that included many surgeries, rehabilitation and prosthetic fittings.

When working near power lines, "pay attention a little more," Conrady advises. "Keep an eye on your surroundings. Just take an extra second to look at things, to see how your situation is going to unfold."

To stay safe around overhead power lines, always follow safe work practices to help prevent serious and even deadly acci-

dents. Start by making sure everyone knows to maintain a minimum 10-foot clearance from power lines. This 10-foot rule applies not only to the area underneath the power line but to the full 360 degrees around it.

In addition, follow the safety guidelines below.

If your machinery or vehicle comes into contact with a power line, do not get out of the cab because you could be electrocuted. Instead, stay where you are and call 911.

If it's not safe to stay in the cab due to fire or smoke, make a solid, clean jump with both feet landing at the same time. Shuffle away with feet together as far as you can.

If you come across an accident near a downed power line, alert individuals (from at least 50 feet away) to stay in the cab or vehicle as long as there is no imminent danger. Call 911 and Karnes EC and do not approach the scene.

Have a daily meeting with staff to go over possible hazards. Map out and review routes where equipment will be moved and ensure it will clear power lines.

Teach anyone working with or for you (including family members and seasonal employees) about power line awareness and proper clearance distance.

When working around power lines, always use a spotter who has a broader vantage point than the person in the cab.

Lower extensions to the lowest setting when moving loads.

Even though planting season is a busy time filled with stress and tight deadlines, take time for safety, including electrical safety. It could save your life or the lives of others. ■

# Storm Season Incoming: Protect Your Electronics

**LIGHTNING, HIGH WINDS** and torrential downpours can put your home and neighborhood at risk of power surges and outages, which can damage your expensive household electronics.

Prepare for spring storms to protect yourself and your electronics from harm.

Install surge protectors as a first line of defense. Use them for computers, TVs, exercise equipment and other sensitive devices. Look for protectors with indicator lights that show when protection is active.

During severe storms, unplug electronics and turn them off—excluding things like the refrigerator and medical oxygen tanks. Even the best surge protectors cannot block a direct lightning strike. To conserve battery power on your phone, turn on power-saving mode and use portable battery chargers to keep it functional during a long-term outage. You might need your phone to make an emergency phone call in extreme cases.

If your home experiences frequent outages, consider having a licensed electrician install whole-home surge protection, which is installed at the electrical panel. A technician can explain whether this option makes sense for you.

Backup power options, such as battery packs, portable generators or whole-home standby generators, can help

keep essential devices running in case the power goes out. Portable generators should only be used outdoors and away from windows and doors to prevent potentially deadly carbon monoxide poisoning.

As a precaution, save copies of important electronic data on external drives or to the cloud in case of loss. Printing and preserving certain documents in a fireproof and waterproof safe can also help preserve data.

After an outage, wait a few minutes before turning electronics back on. This helps protect devices from voltage spikes as power is restored. If any electronic device seems damaged—such as by water or lightning—do not use it; have it inspected by a professional. ■



LIFESTYLEVISUALS | ISTOCK.COM



FILMSTUDIO | ISTOCK.COM

## Use Power Tools Safely

**AS YOU GET** to the business of spring-cleaning, inspect your tools—such as vacuum cleaners, pressure washers, carpet cleaners and power tools—to make sure they're in shape for another season.

Before starting any project, inspect cords and plugs for cracks, fraying or exposed wires. Damaged equipment should be repaired or replaced. Using tools with ground-fault circuit interrupter protection is especially important in garages, bathrooms, kitchens and the outdoors.

Follow manufacturer instructions and avoid overloading outlets or power strips. High-powered tools should be plugged directly into a wall outlet, not extension cords, unless the cord is rated for the tool's electrical load.

When cleaning or repairing appliances, unplug them first. Water and electricity are a dangerous combination, so keep tools dry and avoid using them with wet hands or on damp surfaces.

For outdoor projects, use extension cords labeled for outdoor use and keep connections off the ground. Wear appropriate protective gear, including gloves and eye protection, and keep tools away from children and pets.

Taking a few extra minutes to check equipment and follow basic precautions can prevent injuries and electrical hazards while tackling spring projects. ■



### SAVE THE DATE

## Karnes EC Annual Meeting

Thursday, June 11  
Karnes City ISD  
Performing Arts Center

OKSANA SAZHNEVA | ISTOCK.COM



## Lineworkers Are Wired for Service

**IN THE QUIET** hours before dawn breaks, while many of us are still nestled in our beds, lineworkers begin their day, often clad in flame-resistant clothing, safety glasses, rubber gloves and heavy boots.

They epitomize dedication to service in its purest form, and that's why America's electric cooperatives have designated the second Monday of April as National Lineworker Appreciation Day.

On April 13, Karnes Electric Cooperative honors the hard-working people who keep the lights on, often despite challenging conditions.

To mark the occasion, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association unanimously adopted this resolution in 2014, and it still rings true today:

“Whereas linemen leave their families and put their lives on the line every day to keep the power on; Whereas linemen work 365 days a year under dangerous conditions to build, maintain and repair the electric infrastructure; Whereas linemen are the first responders of the electric cooperative family, getting power back on and making things safe for all after storms and accidents, and; Whereas there would be no electric cooperatives without the brave men and women who comprise our corps of linemen;

“Therefore, be it resolved that NRECA recognize the second Monday of April of each year as National Lineman Appreciation Day ... to recognize the contributions of these valuable men and women to America's electric cooperatives.”

Amid towering utility poles and power lines, lineworkers exhibit a strength that goes far beyond the physical. Whether

battling inclement weather, troubleshooting technical problems or navigating treacherous heights, lineworkers demonstrate resilience and a quiet determination to keep our lights on, our homes comfortable and our communities connected.

Karnes EC crews travel across our service territory, building, maintaining and repairing parts of our local system. Their extraordinary skills ensure we can live and work comfortably and emergency services remain accessible—a lifeline that connects us all.

In moments of crisis, when the lights go out and we find ourselves in the dark, lineworkers emerge as beacons of hope. Their swift response restores normalcy, offering reassurance in times of uncertainty. Whether repairing storm-ravaged power lines or ensuring continuity during emergencies, their unwavering commitment illuminates life when we need it most.

Karnes EC lineworkers also answer the call beyond the boundaries of our service territory. Our crews travel to fellow co-ops near and far when widespread outages occur and additional support is needed. Cooperation Among Cooperatives is one of our seven guiding principles, and no one embodies this core commitment better than lineworkers.

This month, as we celebrate the remarkable men and women who ensure reliable power, let's recognize their unwavering dedication to the local communities they serve.

The next time you flip a switch, please take a moment to remember those who make it possible—lineworkers, wired for service and dedicated to illuminating life. ■

# Is an Electric Lawn Mower Right for You?

**YOU MIGHT HAVE** noticed more of your neighbors cutting their grass with electric lawn mowers. They're energy-efficient, quiet and cleaner than gas-powered mowers. But is an electric mower right for you?

## The Benefits

Electric mowers, especially battery-powered models, are quieter than gas mowers and produce no direct emissions. They also require less maintenance. There are no oil changes, spark plugs or fuel stabilizers to worry about, which can save time and money over the life of the machine.

## Considerations

Battery range is a big one. Smaller yards are a good match for electric mowers, but very large properties may require multiple batteries or longer charging times. An electric mower might be the right option for mowing that small patch of lawn near the house, while you keep a gas-powered mower or tractor for the less frequent trimming of weeds or natural grasses on larger swaths of property.

Corded electric mowers eliminate battery limits but require access to outdoor outlets and careful cord management. One wrong turn, and you could easily clip the cord, which can be dangerous.

Also, up-front costs can be higher for electric models. Still, operating costs are typically lower. Electricity is usually cheaper and more stable in price than gasoline, and maintenance expenses are minimal.

You should also consider storage and charging needs. Batteries should be stored indoors in moderate temperatures and charged according to manufacturer instructions to extend their lifespan. Do you have a space that fits the bill?

Understanding how the mower operates and how you will use it can help as you consider going electric when it comes to lawn care. ■



YINYANG | ISTOCK.COM



BUFF STRICKLAND

## Farro Picnic Salad

- 1 cup uncooked farro**
- 2 cups water, lightly salted**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Juice and finely grated zest of 1 lemon**
- Salt, to taste**
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- Crushed red pepper flakes, to taste**
- ¼ cup crumbled feta cheese**
- 1 can black-eyed peas (16 ounces), drained and rinsed**
- ½ cup chopped parsley or mint**
- Thinly sliced radishes (optional)**

1. Combine the farro with water in a pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer up to 40 minutes, until grains are tender with a slightly chewy texture. Drain any excess water.
2. In a large bowl, toss warm farro with oil and lemon juice and zest. Season with salt, pepper and red pepper flakes.
3. Add feta, black-eyed peas, parsley or mint, and radishes, and toss to combine. Salad will keep refrigerated up to 3 days.

**SERVES 4-6**

**TCP** Find this and more delicious recipes online at [TexasCoopPower.com](https://www.texascoopower.com).

# Uneasy Riders

Once in a while, the backseat drivers are at least half right

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

**WE WERE CRUISING** into Kansas, me and half a dozen Southwestern University cheerleaders, when the radio broadcast the first of what would be many tornado warnings on March 13, 1990.

I was driving us to Missouri for a men's basketball tournament, which I would be covering for the *Williamson County Sun*. The university had offered to pay my expenses in exchange for me driving the cheerleaders to Kansas City in a rented van. What could go wrong?

If you traced on a map the route from Georgetown to Kansas City up Interstate 35, you would draw a more or less straight line through the heart of Tornado Alley. Not that I gave a second thought to the weather that day.

We cruised through Texas and Oklahoma without incident, but the way I remember it now, the skies turned dark and the wind began to howl the very second we crossed the border into Kansas.

A couple of my passengers expressed alarm over the sudden change in the weather and insisted I turn up the van's AM radio. The static was pretty bad, but we all heard the announcement that a tornado had been spotted in a certain Kansas county. I don't remember the name of the county, only that a road sign had welcomed us to that very county no more than a mile previous.

Somebody asked me what county we were in.

"I have no idea," I lied.

Then somebody in the back of the van shouted, "There it is! *That's the tornado!*"

In the rearview mirror, I saw the cheerleaders leaning toward a window, looking up at the sky, where, yes, a suspicious-looking cloud was hanging low and ominous over the flat farmland.

This was one of nearly 60 tornadoes that would form over the central U.S. that day.

Several of my fellow travelers voiced the opinion that we needed to stop. And do what? Wait for the tornado to come down from the sky and whisk us away to Oz?

"Relax," I said with more confidence than I actually felt. "I'm from Lubbock. I was outrunning tornadoes when y'all weren't even in first grade. It's all going to be OK."

At the instant I stopped talking, this warning came across the radio: "Do not try to outrun a torna-

do. Tornadoes can change direction at any moment. If you're in a vehicle, stop the vehicle and get out. Do not get under your vehicle. Lie down in a flat gully, ditch or low spot on the ground."

A clear majority of the cheerleaders now begged me to stop the van. A couple of them ordered me to. "We ain't stopping," I announced and turned the radio off. Somebody in the back of the van said things about me and my IQ that I'm sure she has always regretted.

It got worse. Minutes later, for reasons I still can't fathom, my uneasy riders pleaded with me to stop at a Hardee's (or maybe it was a Pizza Hut) on the other side of the highway. Otherwise, they said, we would all die, and it would be my fault. (Several archived news stories I recently scrolled through mentioned a Pizza Hut on I-35 that was destroyed by a tornado that day, but I found nothing about a demolished Hardee's.)

At Wichita, we veered northeast and soon put the worst of the violent weather behind us.

The entire Southwestern men's basketball team was lined up outside the hotel in Kansas City, waiting for us, when I wheeled the van to the passenger drop-off point and turned off the engine. The team had just seen TV news footage of an EF5 tornado crossing I-35, right smack dab in the middle of our route, and, well, they sure were relieved to see those cheerleaders!

The front page of the next day's *Kansas City Star* had a picture of the massive twister crossing the highway. Then the tournament began, and it was a welcome distraction.

Any hard feelings that might have lingered between me and the cheerleaders seemed forgotten a few days later when we began our return trip to Central Texas.

The van was full of happy chatter early on, but it got real quiet when we cruised past the spot where I had refused to stop a few days previous. Now, where a fast-food restaurant had once promised false refuge, there was nothing but a pile of bricks and rubble.

I considered giving the cheerleaders a heavy dose of I-told-you-so, but, for once, I restrained myself. Offering thanks, rather than asking for it, seemed like the more proper play here. I stayed quiet and did what had got us that far—I kept driving. ■



# WANTED: DEMO HOMESITES FOR 2026 SEASON

## Display This Maintenance-Free Pool And \$SAVE \$\$!

*\$1,000-\$4000 Instant Rebate!*

*Call 800-794-6839 TODAY to Qualify for This Limited-Time Opportunity!*



**PRE-APPROVED  
FINANCING  
AVAILABLE!**

**WE CONSIDER  
ANYTHING  
ON TRADE!**



**VISIT OUR WEBSITE: SWIMTEXSUN.COM**



**STAYcation in your own back yard!**

**1-800-SWIMTEX (800-794-6839)**

*A family owned and operated Texas Company since 1986.*



Date our  
choice



## Genuine Eisenhower Dollar **FREE!**

- ★ Minted from 1971-1978
- ★ America's last large-dollar coin
- ★ Honors WWII Hero, 5-Star General & 2-Term U.S. President

**You'll also receive a handpicked trial selection of fascinating coins from our No-Obligation Coins-on-Approval Service,** from which you may purchase any or none of the coins – return balance within 15 days – with option to cancel at any time. Order today and **SAVE!**

 **Littleton  
Coin Company®**  
Serving Collectors Since 1945

**Mail Coupon Today!  
For Faster Service Visit:  
LittletonCoin.com/Respond**

**Offer Code:  
552400**

©2026 LCC, Inc.

**FOR NEW CUSTOMERS ONLY AGES 18+**

**YES** Please send me the following:

QTY	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
1	Eisenhower Dollar <i>(limit 1)</i>	<b>FREE!</b>
	Shipping	<b>FREE!</b>
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>FREE!</b>

REQUEST MUST BE RECEIVED WITHIN 7 DAYS

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt# \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:  Littleton Coin Company

**Offer Code: 552400**

1309 Mt. Eustis Rd  
Littleton NH 03561-3737



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



He bought land, studied soil types and planted test plots. He tinkered endlessly, building equipment that didn't exist and modifying machinery that did. He risked much and slept little. When something failed, he tried again.

He eventually had a gorgeous field of bluebonnets every spring, and he noticed people stopped in droves to photograph them. His entrepreneurial side said, "These folks need a place to get out of the sun and have a Coke and enjoy the view." He created such a place for them.

Over the next decade, Wildseed Farms blossomed—literally and figuratively. In 1993, he moved his operation to Fredericksburg, building what would become the largest working wildflower farm in the U.S.

Visitors who come in March or April see fields so bright they seem backlit by divine intervention. People stroll among the blooms, sip a little Hill Country wine and buy packets of seeds to take a piece of Texas home with them.

Thomas designed the J-Thom 42 Wild-seeder, a contraption that can sow a dozen species or more at once without damaging delicate seeds. He built a vacuum harvester that collects seeds by suction instead of by force, which preserves their fragile husks. Those inventions made large-scale wildflower farming possible.

Today, more than 20 states use Thomas' seeds to color their highways each spring. And Wildseed, which now fills hundreds of Hill Country acres, also grows grapes and sells its own wine.

But for all his business acumen, Thomas remains a farmer at heart. His face still turns upward when he hears thunder. As we sat in his pickup that spring afternoon, he squinted toward the horizon and said, "There's a cloud building out west. Maybe it'll come this way." ■

# Painting by Numbers

His countless big ideas brought dazzling color to hills and highways

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY JASON RAISH

**WE WERE SITTING** in John R. Thomas' big pickup overlooking about 60 acres of bluebonnets in bloom when he said something I'll always remember. "If we could get a good rain in the next day or two," he said, "it would be a million-dollar rain."

I asked Thomas just how a rain could be worth \$1 million. He said, "It'll push those bluebonnets up another few inches and double their seed yield."

Thomas owns Wildseed Farms, southeast of Fredericksburg in the Hill Country. He doesn't grow those enormous plots of petals just for their photographic beauty. He grows them for the seeds—bluebonnet, Indian blanket, Texas paintbrush and dozens of other native varieties.

The seeds are harvested with processes he pioneered and machines he invented. They're bagged and sold in his big country store along U.S. Highway 290 then shipped to customers around the world.

Thomas grew up on a ranch near Eagle Lake, west of Houston, where he learned early that the land could break your back and your heart in the same season. He studied business at Sam Houston State University before coming home to start a grass-seeding company that restored eroded land along highways.

People began asking him for wildflower seed—especially bluebonnets—but there was no dependable source. That was all the spark he needed.

In 1981, Thomas began experimenting.

# Five-Ingredient Dinners

Five stars for dishes that minimize ingredients and maximize flavor

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

After a long day of editing recipes, there's nothing I crave more than an oven-baked meal. This recipe, which I can pull together in a snap, hits the spot every single time with its spice and citrus notes. Be sure to store the leftover chipotles in the fridge.

## Orange Chipotle Baked Salmon

**1 pound salmon fillet**  
**1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, with 4 teaspoons adobo sauce reserved**  
**1 cup orange juice**  
**½ teaspoon salt**  
**Steamed rice, for serving**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place salmon on a baking sheet.
2. Finely dice chipotle. In a small bowl, combine chipotle, reserved adobo sauce, orange juice and salt. Spoon sauce over salmon.
3. Bake salmon until it flakes easily with a fork, about 15–20 minutes.
4. Serve over rice.

SERVES 4

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Creamy Chipotle Lime Shrimp.





## Pea Salad

GINGER CLARDY  
BANDERA EC

I was skeptical when I first tested this recipe, but little did I know this classic salad is the perfect virtually no-cook dinner. The salad is creamy with crunchy pieces of onion and chunks of cheese. Next time I will definitely double the recipe to enjoy with my family.

- 1 can English peas (15 ounces), drained**
- 2 tablespoons chopped onion**
- ¼ cup diced cheddar cheese**
- ½ boiled egg, diced**
- ¾ cup mayonnaise**

1. In a bowl, mix together peas, onion, cheddar, egg and mayonnaise.
2. Cover and refrigerate. Serve chilled.

**SERVES 2**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

## Birds

LORI KIRKPATRICK  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC



This recipe was given to Kirkpatrick 30 years ago by a dear friend and has remained a family favorite. I see why Birds has stood the test of time in her household. Buttery crescents filled with chicken and swimming in a cream sauce hit all the comfort food notes. Kirkpatrick likes to serve the birds over steamed rice.

- 1 can refrigerated crescent rolls (8 ounces)**
- 2 cups cooked chicken, diced**
- 1 can cream of chicken soup (10.5 ounces)**
- 1 can chicken broth (10.5 ounces)**
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch pan.
2. Unroll the crescent rolls and separate into 8 triangles. Place ¼ cup chicken on the wide end of each triangle, roll up dough and place in pan.
3. In a bowl, whisk together soup and broth. Pour over the prepared crescents. Top each crescent with 2 tablespoons cheddar.
4. Cover with foil and bake 20 minutes. Uncover and bake an additional 20 minutes.

**SERVES 4**

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**PANCAKES AND WAFFLES** DUE APR 10

Never mind which is better doused in syrup—we'll take either! The winning recipe will stack up \$500. We'll share our favorites in the September issue.

**CAMPFIRE FAVORITES** DUE MAY 10



ENTER  
ONLINE

## Parmesan Ranch Chicken

CINDY HANDY  
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Nothing beats oven-baked chicken, especially when it's coated in ranch dressing. I loved the ease of this recipe—no frying and coating the chicken in a plastic bag makes for less cleanup. Handy says this recipe works best with shelf-stable Parmesan that comes in a shaker. Serve with a salad or mashed potatoes for an easy weeknight meal.

- 1/3 cup flour**
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese**
- 1/3 cup Italian-style breadcrumbs**
- 1/2 cup ranch dressing**
- 5 chicken drumsticks**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Line a rimmed baking sheet with foil and coat with cooking spray.
3. In a large, resealable plastic bag combine flour, Parmesan and bread-



crumbs. In a large bowl, add ranch dressing.

4. Dip a drumstick into ranch dressing and coat well. Seal drumstick in plastic bag.
5. Shake bag to coat drumstick, and place on prepared baking sheet. Repeat with remaining drumsticks.

## Keep Your Cool

A well-stocked freezer keeps me sane through a hectic week. Knowing I have food on hand makes meal planning easier. Here's what you'll find in my freezer.

**PROTEIN:** Chicken thighs and breasts, ground beef and turkey, shrimp, salmon

**VEGGIES:** Corn, peas, asparagus, broccoli, cauliflower

**FRUIT:** Berries, mangoes, peaches

**READY TO BAKE:** Pie crusts, pizza dough, bread, rolls

**CONVENIENCE:** Fries, Tater Tots, steamed rice, burger patties, waffles, meatballs

—Vianney Rodriguez

6. Bake 20 minutes, turn drumsticks over and bake an additional 20 minutes.

**SERVES 2**



# DURABLE. VERSATILE. TRUSTED.

## THE DR® TRIMMER MOWER

For over 40 years, the DR Trimmer has delivered MORE:

- ▶ **POWER** – up to 5X more than an ordinary handheld trimmer
- ▶ **MANEUVERABILITY** – oversized wheels go everywhere a bladed mower can't
- ▶ **VERSATILITY** – mow anything with the toughest trimmer cord you can buy

Get More Power and Durability with a walk or tow-behind DR® Trimmer Mower

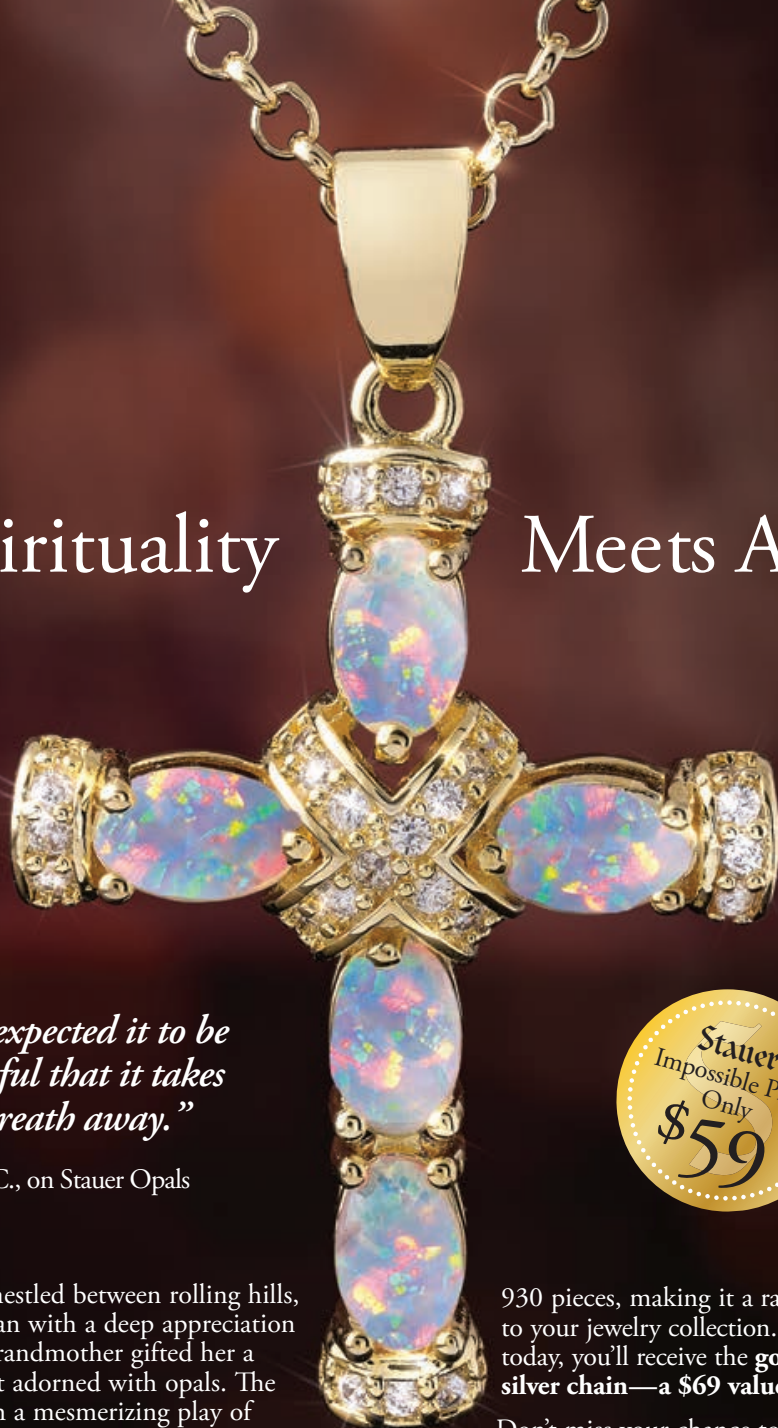
**Shop DRPower.com Today**



**PRO**

**FREE SHIPPING** Options Available | Request a **FREE CATALOG**

# Spirituality Meets Artistry



*"I never expected it to be so beautiful that it takes your breath away."*

— Kaya C., on Stauer Opals



In a quaint village, nestled between rolling hills, lived a young woman with a deep appreciation for gemstones. Her grandmother gifted her a delicate cross pendant adorned with opals. The opals shimmered with a mesmerizing play of colors, reflecting hues of blues, greens, and fiery oranges. Her grandmother shared the legend of the opals, believed to bring hope, purity, and luck to those who wore them.

Using this story as inspiration, Stauer brings you the **Opal Spirit Cross Pendant**. With over 2 total carats of Kyocera lab-created opals set in .925 sterling silver encased in yellow gold, this pendant is a radiant celebration of beauty and craftsmanship. Each opal captivates with a kaleidoscopic dance of fiery oranges blending into oceanic blues, streaked with flashes of vibrant green that seem to come alive with every movement. The shimmering opals are skillfully arranged to create an enchanting, otherworldly glow, embodying the spirit of hope and harmony.

This breathtaking combination of color and craftsmanship is available as a limited availability of only

930 pieces, making it a rare and treasured addition to your jewelry collection. Plus, when you order today, you'll receive the **gold-finished sterling silver chain**—a \$69 value—absolutely free!

Don't miss your chance to own this exclusive tribute to timeless elegance and meaningful symbolism.

#### Necklace Specifications:

- 2 ½ ctw. Kyocera lab opals and DiamondAura® accents
- Yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver setting
- 18" gold-clad .925 sterling silver chain

#### Opal Spirit Cross Pendant *plus* FREE Chain

~~-\$499~~ \$59\* + S & P **Save \$440**

\*Special price only for customers using the offer code.

## 1-800-333-2045

Your Insider Offer Code: OCR348-01

# Stauer®

14091 Southcross Drive W.  
Dept. OCR348-01, Burnsville, MN 55337  
[www.stauer.com](http://www.stauer.com)



COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Tragedy on the Prairie

Step into the hard life of frontier Texas at Old Fort Parker

BY CHET GARNER

**JUST OUTSIDE THE SMALL TOWN** of Groesbeck, east of Waco, tucked between cow pastures and the Navasota River, stands an old wooden fort that feels less like a destination and more like the stories of Jamestown and Plymouth Rock.

The spiked, wooden palisades of Old Fort Parker rise from the prairie grass like a movie set, but this isn't Hollywood—it's the site of a pivotal and tragic moment. You can almost hear the creak of the gate and the echo of gunfire that changed the course of a family and history.

In 1833, the fort was strategically built beside a natural spring with fertile soil in every direction. The settlers, led by brothers James and Silas Parker, had come to claim a piece of the frontier and begin a new life. However, in May 1836 their dream became a nightmare when a coalition of Native American warriors attacked the fort, killing several settlers and abducting 9-year-old Cynthia Ann Parker, her younger brother and three others.

The fort was abandoned, but over the next 24 years Cynthia assimilated into the Comanche tribe and married Chief Peta Nocona, becoming the mother of famed Chief Quanah Parker—the last great Comanche war leader.

Today, the replica fort, built in the 1930s and renovated in 1967, stands as a stark reminder of life nearly 200 years ago. It feels like a living time capsule, especially on special weekends when it's full of reenactors showing visitors how to do everything from blacksmithing to shucking corn.

You can wander through the cabins, peek through the rifle lookouts and imagine the fort bustling with frontier life. There's even a small museum detailing the Parker family saga, complete with artifacts and old maps. Here, among the oak trees and whispering prairie wind, history feels close enough to touch. ■

ABOVE Chet pulls guard duty, at least for this photo, at Old Fort Parker outside Groesbeck.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website as Chet visits the replica of Fort Parker. And find all of his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

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

## APRIL

9

**Fort Worth [9–12] Late Nite Catechism**, (817) 212-4280, [www.basshall.com](http://www.basshall.com)

10

**Richardson The Boho Market**, [info@thebohomarket.com](mailto:info@thebohomarket.com), [thebohomarket.com](http://thebohomarket.com)

**Canton [10–11] Tractor Show & Swap Meet**, (214) 837-8861, [lonestarihc25.org/canton](http://lonestarihc25.org/canton)

11

**Comfort Why Old Places Matter Tour**, (830) 995-2641, [comfortheritagefoundation.com](http://comfortheritagefoundation.com)

**Jacksonville Flamin' J BBQ Fest**, [jvillecpaaa@gmail.com](mailto:jvillecpaaa@gmail.com), [facebook.com/jvillecpaaa](https://facebook.com/jvillecpaaa)

**Levelland Centennial Celebration**, (806) 894-0113, [bit.ly/levellandcentennial](http://bit.ly/levellandcentennial)

**Schulenburg Sausagefest**, (979) 743-4514, [schulenburgsausagefest.com](http://schulenburgsausagefest.com)

**Spicewood Asleep at the Wheel**, (512) 264-2820, [spicewoodarts.org](http://spicewoodarts.org)

12

**Fredericksburg Friends of Gillespie County Country Schools BBQ Meal and Raffle**, (830) 685-3321, [historicschools.org](http://historicschools.org)

17

**Granbury [17–19] North Texas Gourd Festival**, [texasgourdsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:texasgourdsociety@hotmail.com), [texasgourdsociety.org](http://texasgourdsociety.org)

18

**Burton Cotton Gin Festival**, (979) 289-3378, [cottonginmuseum.org](http://cottonginmuseum.org)



## Pick of the Month

**Art, Herb & Wine Festival**  
**Bertram, April 25-26**  
 (512) 882-2992  
 bertramchamber.com

At this festival northwest of Austin, attendees can enjoy artisan and herbal vendors, free seminars and demonstrations, Texas wine, food trucks, craft beer, an artist showcase, a 5K run, and live music throughout the week-end. Children can participate in the art zone.

**Fort Worth Bubble Run,**  
 (602) 926-0995, bubblerun.com

**McKinney [18-19] Spring Native Plant Sale,**  
 (972) 562-5566,  
 heardmuseum.org

19 **Lufkin Dr. Seuss' Cat in the Hat,** (936) 633-5454,  
 angelinaarts.org

22 **Corsicana [22-25] Derrick Days,** (903) 654-4850,  
 derrickdays.com

23 **Levelland [23-25] Caprock Region South Plains College Rodeo,** (254) 396-1341,  
 caprockregionrodeo.com

MORE EVENTS >

### **Submit Your Event**

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



**42<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL**  
**MAY 15, 16 & 17, 2026**  
**MAINSTREET FEST**  
 A Timeless Texas Tradition  
**GRAPEVINE, TEXAS**

Presented by  
**BANK of the WEST**

**Three days of family-friendly festival fun!**  
 May 15, 16 & 17 | Grapevine, Texas

For details and tickets, scan above or visit [MainStFest.com](http://MainStFest.com)

**Bank C.D.'s Due?**  
**CALL US NOW**

**1-800-359-4940** TEXAS TOLL-FREE  
[www.mattsonfinancialservices.com](http://www.mattsonfinancialservices.com)

**BLAKE MATTSON, CFP™**  
 Signal Securities, Inc., 5400 Bosque, 4th Floor, Waco, TX 76710  
*Serving Customers All Over Texas*

All C.D.'s are insured to \$250,000 per institution by the F.D.I.C. All C.D.'s are subject to availability. Securities offered thru Signal Securities, Inc., Member FINRA/SIPC 700 Throckmorton, Ft. Worth, TX 76102. (817) 877-4256.



**WE DELIVER**

**RECS** Rental Equipment  
 1-800-427-RENT

**60' Long Reach**  
**Weekly & Monthly Rental**  
**254-436-8500**

## Restoring and Preserving Our History

*The Friends of Gillespie County Country  
Schools*

In the heart of the Texas Hill Country visit 17 historic one-room schools built between 1847 and 1936 by following the 120 mile Gillespie County Country Schools Driving Trail through the scenic Fredericksburg, Texas countryside.

A Driving Tour map and an Open House schedule are available on our website.

[WWW.HISTORICSCHOOLS.ORG](http://WWW.HISTORICSCHOOLS.ORG) 

All schools listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Member of Country School Association of America.

### APRIL EVENTS CONTINUED

24

**Kerrville [24–June 6]**  
Roundup Exhibition and Sale, (830) 896-2553, [museumofwesternart.com](http://museumofwesternart.com)

25

**Avinger Wildflower Trails**, (903) 562-2222, [avingertxchamber.org](http://avingertxchamber.org)

**Huntsville Gen. Sam Houston Day**, (936) 294-1832, [samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com](http://samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com)

**Lakehills Medina Lake Volunteer Fire Department BBQ**, (830) 751-2525, [facebook.com/medinalakevfd](http://facebook.com/medinalakevfd)

**Temple [25–26] Texas State Button Society Spring Show and Sale**, (325) 247-4955, [texasstatebuttonssociety.com](http://texasstatebuttonssociety.com)

MAY

1

**Gun Barrel City [1–2] Gun Barrel Quilters Guild Quilt Show**, (817) 896-7891, [gunbarrelquiltersguild.org](http://gunbarrelquiltersguild.org)

**Sargent [1–2] Volunteer Fire & Rescue BBQ Cookoff**, (281) 794-4933, [facebook.com/sargentvolunteerfiredept](http://facebook.com/sargentvolunteerfiredept)

2

**Vernon Doan's May Picnic**, (214) 244-1883, [doansmaypicnic.com](http://doansmaypicnic.com)

**Willow City Volunteer Fire & Rescue Department Benefit**, (830) 685-3376, [willowcityfd.com](http://willowcityfd.com)

**PERMA-ROOF**  
from Southern Builders

**Steel Mobile Home Roofing**

High energy bill?  
Roof rumble?  
Leaks?

 MOBILE HOME ROOFER SYSTEMS

Since 1983

Contact us at **800.633.8969**  
or **roofover.com**



**TCP E-news**

**TCP Sign up now**  
[TexasCoopPower.com/join](http://TexasCoopPower.com/join)

## WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS BEGINS WITH YOU

Have your "Go Kit" packed and ready.

Create defensible space around your home.

Identify two evacuation routes incase one becomes compromised.

Communicate with local officials and learn how they will send emergency notifications.



[tfsweb.tamu.edu/PreventWildfire](http://tfsweb.tamu.edu/PreventWildfire)

# Gates

It's been said that the creaking gate hangs the longest, and these readers made themselves heard. Whether they're keeping someone in or out, Texas gates are as unique as the folks behind them. So take a detour with us this month and, as the dust settles, let's see what awaits us at the gates.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

**1 JODY SEDGWICK**  
PEDERNALES EC  
"Springtime at a Hill Country gate. Flowers, deer and a kitty."

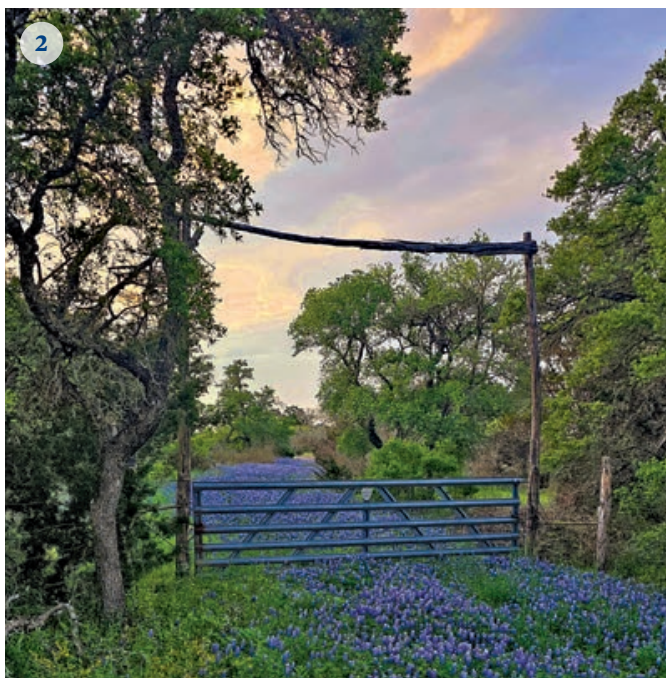
**2 DEANNE LAUMER**  
PEDERNALES EC  
"Bluebonnets on a back road."

**3 LISA WOODS**  
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES  
"Next to the Steel Bender off-road trail in Moab, Utah."

**4 GAYLEE WATSON**  
FARMERS EC  
"Two paints and a mule waiting at the gate for treats."



3



2



4

## Upcoming Contests

- UNDERWATER LIFE** DUE APR 10
- RODEO** DUE MAY 10
- TAILGATING** DUE JUN 10



ENTER ONLINE

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



## Kickin' Ashe

The perfect spring workout awaits in the Hill Country

BY BOB MCCULLOUGH  
ILLUSTRATION BY DAVE URBAN

A RANGE OF CELEBRITIES market workout routines that promise to burn calories and slow the aging process—for a price.

I'm certainly no celebrity, but as a ranch resident of the Hill Country with its ubiquitous, evergreen Ashe juniper (or mountain cedar), I myself have developed a workout that delivers heart-pumpin', muscle-buildin', weight-sheddin' results at no charge.

Cedar is an easy enemy. The prolific pollen producer native to the Edwards Plateau punishes seasonal allergy sufferers with "cedar fever." It's also incredibly thirsty, soaking up scarce rainfall to the detriment of other vegetation.

Cutting it back is like peeling an onion. You keep removing the trees' relatively soft wooden outgrowths—or layers, if you will—until you achieve the desired

clearance for trails, pathways and roads. Hand-to-branch combat fosters fitness as well as fulfillment. To take advantage of the Ashe-Kickin' Workout, I have some field-tested recommendations.

**Check, please!** Cedar-slaying can be strenuous, so check with your doctor and get the OK before beginning any exercise regimen.

**Rags to britches:** Attire yourself in the oldest, toughest, raggediest clothing in your closet because this workout surely will damage whatever you're wearing.

**Covering all the spaces:** Speaking of attire, opt for long sleeves and heavy pants or jeans to minimize cuts and scratches. And wear sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat to prevent sunburns. Thick leather gloves complete the ensemble.

**Make no mis-snake:** Cedar survives in rugged territory where snakes also thrive, so boots should be worn for extra protection.

**Bug off:** Likewise, bugs and other creepy crawlers could cross your path. Spraying repellent on pants, gloves or tops of boots helps.

**The cutting edges:** The workout requires relatively inexpensive tools—21-inch bow saws for cuts up to 5 inches and 31-inch lopping shears for overhead branches. Chain saws are strictly prohibited in the interest of maximizing fitness!

**Bind the wounds:** Now and then, an oak tree will get in the way, and oak trimming should be followed immediately with pruning paint to prevent the spread of deadly oak wilt.

**Muscles in knead:** After a vigorous session with cedar, the ultimate reward is an appointment with a massage therapist or a sympathetic spouse who can soothe away any soreness.

Through sawing, stretching, stooping and bending, the Ashe-Kickin' Workout offers an inexpensive way to stay fit throughout the calendar year. So if you're looking for me, chances are, I'm just cuttin' up in the great outdoors. ■



**Have you Found  
the Best Value  
in Travel?**

**Keel-billed Toucan**

Explore Costa Rica on a fully guided tour with Caravan. Book now for choice dates: Caravan.com, 1-800-CARAVAN

# Costa Rica 8-Day Tour \$1195

## Volcanoes, Beaches & Rainforests

**Welcome to a great vacation at an affordable price.**

Caravan's fully guided tours feature complete sightseeing, fascinating itineraries, and professional Tour Directors.

**Your Costa Rica tour is fully guided and includes all meals, all hotels, and all activities.**

See exotic birds, view volcanoes, soak in hot springs, hike in a jungle rainforest, enjoy a wildlife river cruise, and stay three nights at one of the most beautiful beaches in Costa Rica.

**Discover why smart shoppers and experienced travelers have chosen Caravan Tours since 1952.** Caravan includes all activities listed in the tour itinerary. Caravan does not sell any optional activities which can cost hundreds of extra dollars. Caravan gives you great vacations at prices much lower than you can find anywhere.

**"Brilliant, Affordable Pricing"**  
*Arthur Frommer, Travel Editor*

Latin America Tours	Days	Price
Costa Rica	8	1195
Panama	8	1495
Guatemala	8	1295
Colombia	10	1695
Peru with Machu Picchu	8	1695
Mexico Copper Canyon Train	10	1895
Mexico Ancient Civilizations	10	1695

USA and Canada Tours	Days	Price
Grand Canyon, Bryce & Zion	8	2295
Mt. Rushmore & Yellowstone	9	2695
New England & Fall Colors	8	2195
Nova Scotia & Maritimes	9	2295
Canadian Rockies & Glacier	9	2495



**Book Now For  
Choice Dates**  
Caravan.com  
1-800-CARAVAN

THE #1 IN VALUE—FULLY GUIDED TOURS SINCE 1952

# Caravan®

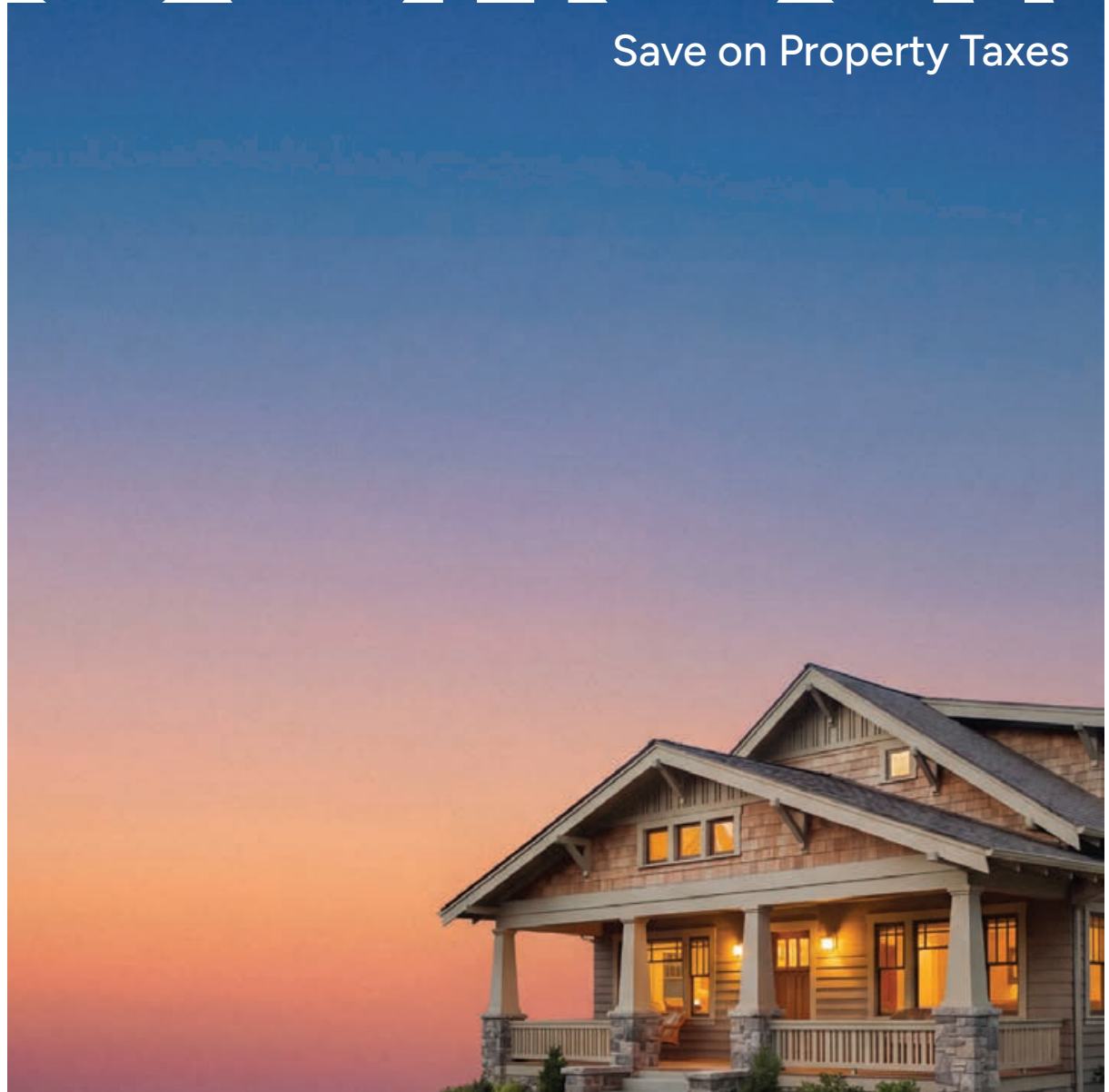
**CARAVAN TOURS**

**Available Only at Caravan.com or 1-800-CARAVAN**

# Ownwell

Save on Property Taxes

TEXAS PROTEST DEADLINE MAY 15TH



SCAN TO SEE HOW MUCH YOU CAN SAVE →

## Over 400,000 Texans chose Ownwell last year

In 2025, Ownwell filed property tax protests for more than 400,000 Texans. File before the May 15 deadline and keep more of your hard-earned money. See what you could save at [Ownwell.com/start3](https://Ownwell.com/start3)

