

HE UNEARTHED  
ANCIENT TOOLS

SAM RAYBURN TURNED ON  
TEXAS' LIGHTS

I'D DO ANYTHING  
FOR MOM

# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

MAY 2026

## Trickle Your Fancy

The arid West  
is awash, if you know  
where to look



# community phone

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**Forbes** HOME

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"With high consumer sentiment ratings and a **money-back guarantee**, Community Phone is our top choice."  
**Forbes, January 2026**



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"We are totally satisfied with the service. We have great reception in our rural area." **Sue, 71**

community phone

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**Alford, 84, Navy Veteran**



1



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2



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3



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# May 2026



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## 06 Wet Texas

Beyond and below the tumbleweeds and cactuses, oases beckon out west.

*Photo essay by Erich Schlegel*

## He Kept Digging

Thanks to an archaeologist's persistence, we have 20,000-year-old evidence of Texans.

*By Pam LeBlanc*

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#### ON THE COVER

Under a relentless sun, Lake Nueces on the Nueces River nurtures an inviting ecosystem.

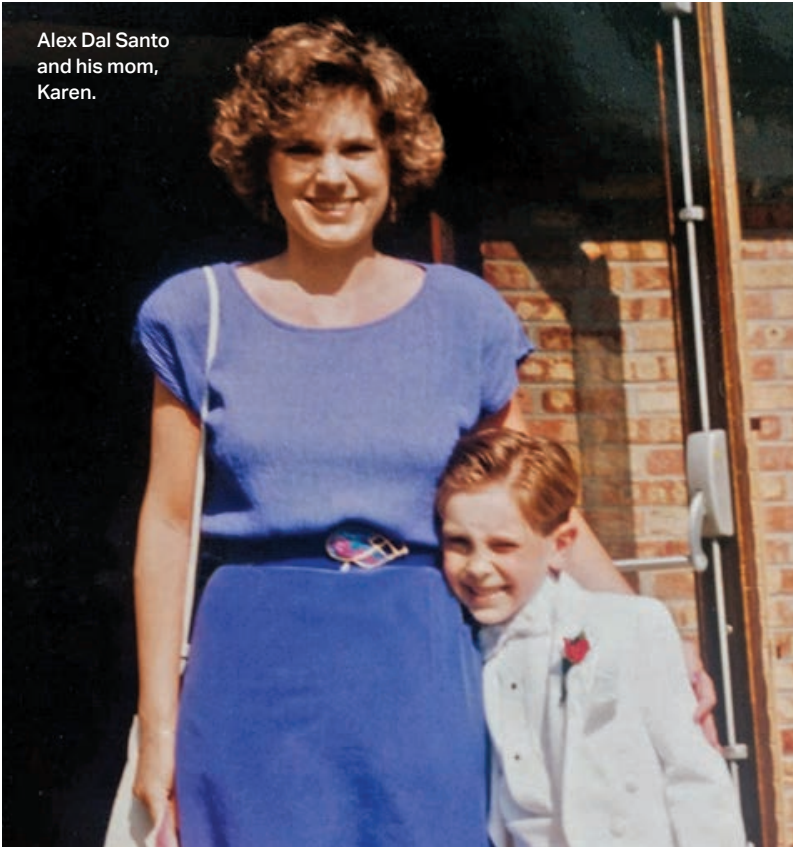
*Photo by Erich Schlegel*

#### ABOVE

Archaeologist Michael Collins examines Gault artifacts with Angela Davis, center, and Jon Lohse in 1999.

*Courtesy Kenneth Garrett*

# Appreciating Our Moms



Alex Dal Santo and his mom, Karen.

IN CELEBRATION OF MOTHER'S DAY, May 10 this year, we ask readers to finish the sentence "Moms are ..." *TCP's* writers and editors also share their thoughts.

**Lifelong learners—always reading, changing and growing.**

—Samantha Bryant, communications specialist

**The first person you want to call when something big happens, and you'll miss her when you can't.**

—Alex Dal Santo, assistant production manager

**Psychic. Mine can sense how I'm feeling even from miles away.**

—Erin Sinclair, communications specialist

**Frequently undervalued for their enormous contributions. They do so much.**

—Claire Stevens, communications specialist

**Family historians, capturing (usually unflattering) smartphone pics at family functions.**

—Kelly Tran, communications specialist

**Eternally selfless.**

—Tom Widlowski, associate editor



**TCP Contests and More**

**\$500 RECIPE CONTEST**

Campfire Favorites

**FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS**

Rodeo

**RECOMMENDED READING**

*Why We Like Bats*, our May 2006 feature story, looked closely at the creatures that still captivate Texans. Download the May 2006 issue at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).



ENTER ONLINE

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

### Moms are ...

**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 March prompt: **My favorite Texas saying is ...**

The sun has risen and the sun has set, but we haven't left Texas yet.

EUGENE NEESE  
BOWIE-CASS EC  
LINDEN

All hat and no cattle.

SISSY CARTER  
HAMILTON COUNTY EC  
GATESVILLE

If you don't like the weather, wait a minute.

TANYA STEELE  
BLUEBONNET EC  
BURTON

The bigger the hair, the closer to God.

DEBRA MILLS  
NUECES EC  
PORT ISABEL

Bless your heart.

KIT VAUGHN  
PEDERNALES EC  
LIBERTY HILL

Visit our website to see more responses.

MARCH 2026 Charted Waters

“Happy to see Pam LeBlanc is still adventurous. And Erich Schlegel’s photos artfully capture her adventure.”

STEVE HARDY  
PEDERNALES EC  
CEDAR PARK



ERICH SCHLEGEL

**Matters of Funding**

Overall, a great article, but there is a quote saying that rebuilding the Mason courthouse “didn’t cost taxpayers a dime” [*In All Their Glory*, March 2026]. At least \$9.6 million of funding from the state wasn’t from the tooth fairy.

Larry Strong  
CoServ  
Lewisville

**Shouldering the Load**

I loved the story of Tyler Schlickeisen, tow truck driver [*Currents*, March 2026]. It’s great to see stories on unsung heroes like him.

I do have to disagree with his comment, “Nobody likes to see a tow truck driver.” When I have needed them—on Interstate 35—my two tow truck drivers were heroes.

Frank Graham  
Navarro County EC  
Hill County

**A Rash of Trash**

Back in the ‘60s, Lady Bird Johnson championed a “Don’t Be a Litterbug” campaign, sending us children home with “litter bags” to hang on the handle of our roll-down car windows [*A Tidy Revolution*, March 2026]. Then in the ‘80s, the “Don’t Mess With Texas” slogan was a fun and effective refresher course.

Now we desperately need a new anti-litter crusade because Texas roadways have grown increasingly trashy.

Cheryl Irish  
Bluebonnet EC  
Bastrop

**Ancestry and ‘TCP’**

My hobby is genealogy and family history. Two articles in March gave enough information about people for me to see if I am related to them.

I discovered Tad Lucas [*Currents*] was the wife of my 10th cousin. Jennie Reynolds [*In All Their Glory*] is my 10th cousin. Our common progenitors date from the 1500s and 1600s.

Judith Tavares  
Nueces EC  
Corpus Christi



RYAN OLBRYSH

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
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Austin, TX 78701

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

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Ocotillo reaches out from a bluff overlooking Devils River State Natural Area, north of Del Rio. The river, part of the Rio Grande watershed in Southwest Texas, is one of the most pristine in Texas.

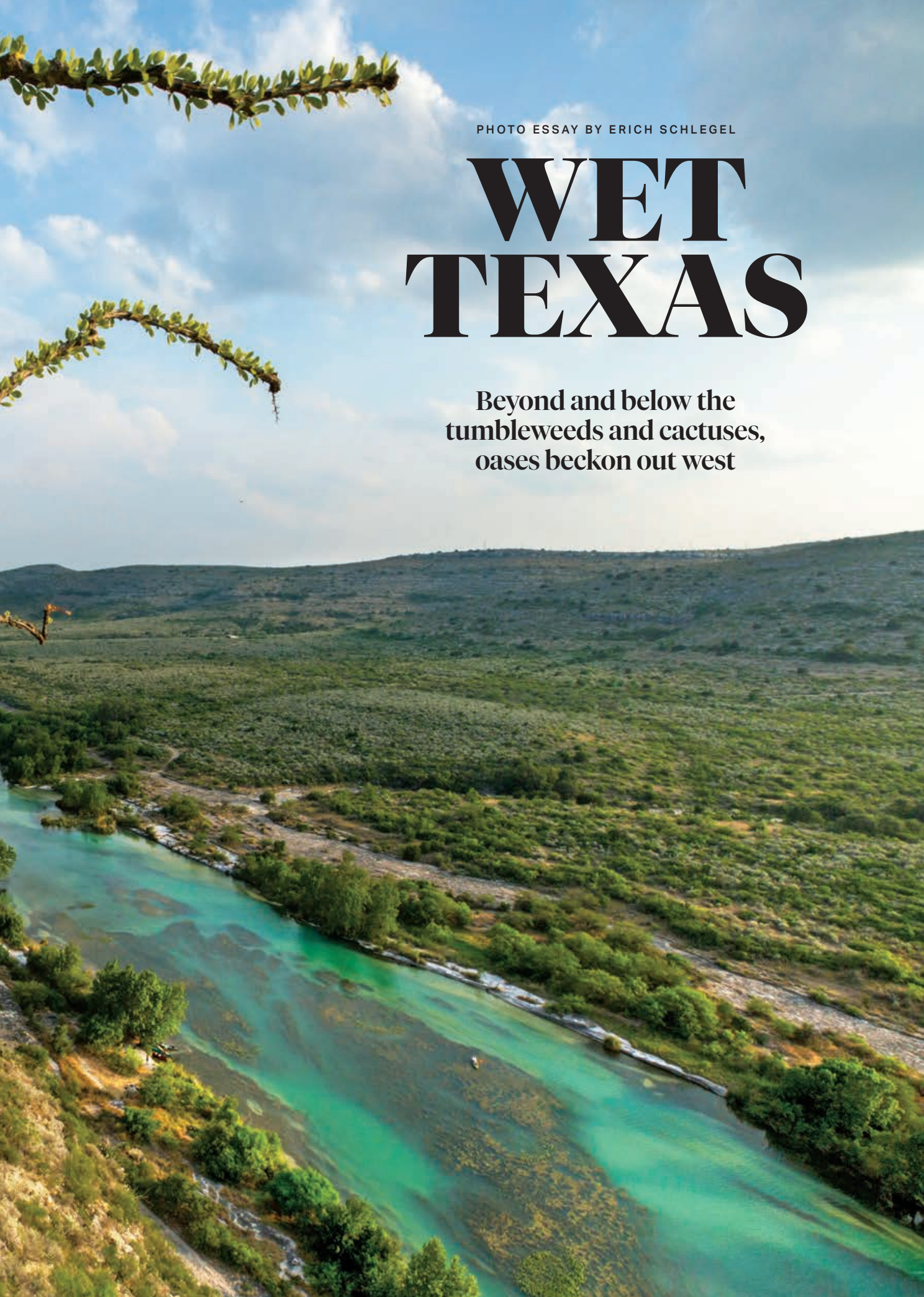
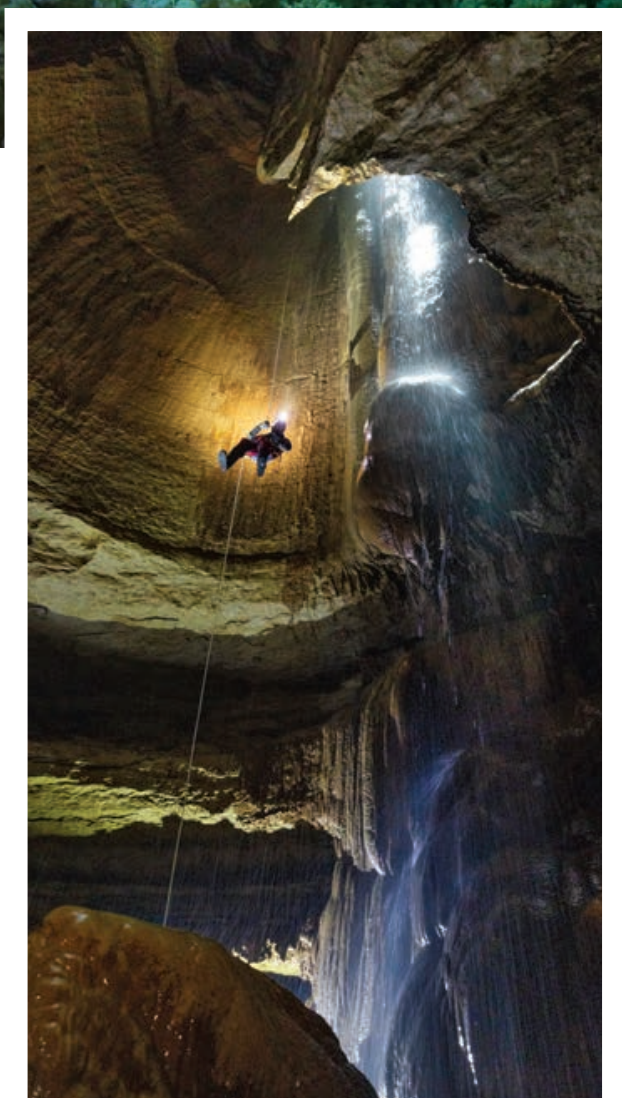
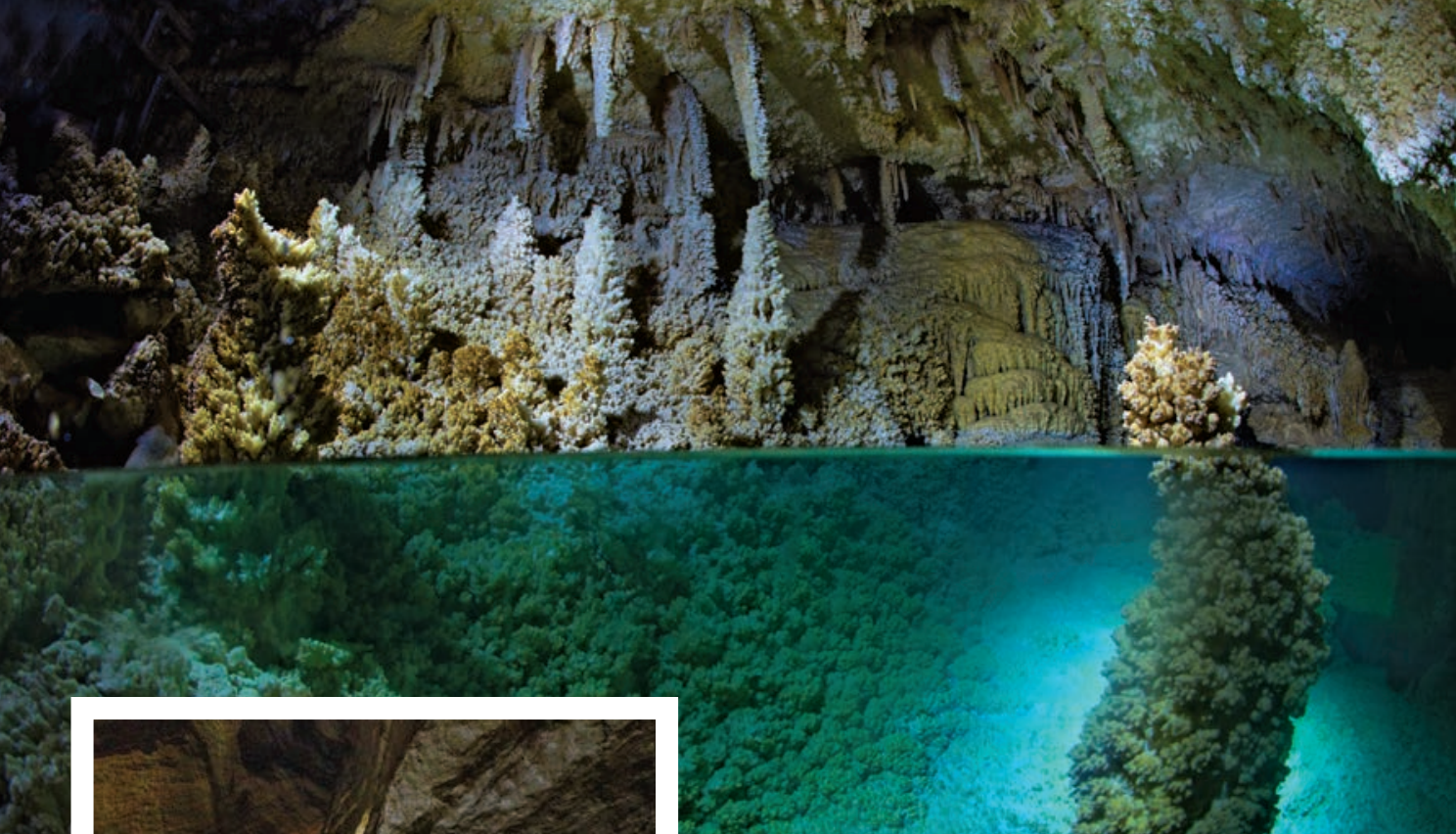
An aerial photograph of a wide river with vibrant turquoise water, winding through a lush green landscape. The river is bordered by dense vegetation and rocky banks. In the background, rolling hills are visible under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. A small boat is visible on the river. The overall scene is a beautiful representation of a natural oasis in a semi-arid region.

PHOTO ESSAY BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

# WET TEXAS

Beyond and below the  
tumbleweeds and cactuses,  
oases beckon out west



TOP The Horseshoe Lake room sits beneath the dry, barren landscape of West Texas in the Caverns of Sonora, where the humidity is always about 98%.

ABOVE Austin cave expert Ethan Perrine descends a rope alongside a 70-foot underground waterfall in a cave below a West Texas cow pasture.

## Drive west on Interstate 10 from the Hill Country, through beautiful desert mesas and mountains, and there's no water in sight, right?

Not unless you know where to look. Rivers, springs and even waterfalls are hidden across West Texas.

Most folks know about the Rio Grande, which cuts through the Big Bend, and you may even know of San Solomon Springs, which fills the 1.3-acre pool in Balmorhea State Park.

But you probably don't know about the 70-foot waterfall 143 feet below a cow pasture. It's managed by the Texas Cave Management Association and accessible only by wetsuit-clad expert cavers with advanced vertical rope training.

The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River, also known as the Lower Canyons, flows down from Big Bend National Park toward Amistad Reservoir near Del Rio—the most remote part of the state. The 83-mile canoe trip takes a week and requires extensive river paddling knowledge and wilderness experience. Help, if needed, can be days away, but only if you carry a satellite phone.

On the other hand, anybody can paddle and swim just west of the Hill Country. Here, the crystal-clear Nueces River is nothing like the muddy flows that empty into the Gulf of Mexico. You'll find swimming pool-clear water in Lake Nueces as well as upstream, in a swimming hole in the town of Camp Wood named for its depth in feet, Quince (15).

It's easy to take water for granted. But seeing and experiencing water in West Texas brings an appreciation of one of our state's most important and sensitive resources. ■

An aerial photograph of a narrow canyon. The central feature is a river with exceptionally clear, vibrant turquoise and emerald green water. The water's color varies, with deeper blues in the center and lighter greens near the banks. The canyon walls are composed of light-colored, layered rock formations, possibly limestone or sandstone, with sparse green vegetation growing on them. The surrounding area is densely forested with green trees. In the lower-left corner, a black metal ladder or set of stairs is visible on the rocky bank, leading down to the water. A small, dark silhouette of a person can be seen in the lower-middle part of the river, providing a sense of scale.

Blue Hole is a spring-fed swimming spot near the headwaters of the Frio River north of Leakey on the private property of the H. E. Butt Foundation Camp. Blue Hole reaches a maximum depth of about 30 feet.



Divers join a school of fish in San Solomon Springs at Balmorhea State Park, home of the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool. The springs have flowed out of the Chihuahuan Desert about 135 miles southwest of Midland for thousands of years.



LEFT The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River is the most remote part of the state. The heart of this stretch of the Rio Grande is an arduous 83 miles called the Lower Canyons, which offers spectacular scenery but requires extensive wilderness experience.

BELOW A campsite along the Devils River, which begins in northwest Sutton County and flows south for 94 miles, emptying into Amistad Reservoir on the Rio Grande.





Thanks to an archaeologist's persistence, we have 20,000-year-old evidence of Texans

COURTESY KENNETH GARRETT

BY PAM LEBLANC

# He Kept Digging



COURTESY KENNETH GARRETT

TOP Michael Collins stands with several chert cores—often called flint—recovered from the Gault site along Buttermilk Creek.

ABOVE Artifacts found at the Gault site by a collector in 1990 include two stones with hatch marks etched onto their surface.

**Last summer**, Michael Collins gazed over a tree-lined valley near Florence, his eyes scanning the grassy field where he once led excavations that changed our understanding of how and when humans first populated North America.

“I describe it as coming back to an old friend,” Collins said during that visit to the Gault archaeological site, about 50 miles north of Austin.

Collins sat beneath pecan trees for a picnic that day with others who had worked at Gault and filmmaker Olive Talley, whose 2025 documentary, *The Stones Are Speaking*, explores the site’s significance—and Collins’ role in saving it.

In the 1980s and ’90s, the film explains, artifact hunters lugging buckets and shovels flocked to the 30-acre plot of land, where a creek flowed and an abundant supply of flint rippled through a rocky ledge. They paid \$25 a day to search for scrapers, projectile points and knives made by Native Americans and walk away with whatever they found. They left behind empty holes and mounds of dirt.

By taking those stone artifacts, collectors were destroying much of the history that they held. “It’s like looking at a book, tearing a picture out and throwing away the rest of the book,” said Elton Prewitt, a longtime Texas archaeologist.

The Gault story could have ended there—as a pay-to-dig site whose significance disappeared along with the ancient implements once scattered in its soil. But that’s not what happened.

In 1990, collectors digging at Gault found something unusual: two stones with hatch marks etched onto their surface. Word got back to the University of Texas, where the discovery perked the ears of Thomas Hester, then the director of the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory, and Collins, then the lab’s associate director.

The two drove to the site, where more etched stones turned up—along with a Clovis spearpoint, named for a Paleo-Indian archaeological site near Clovis, New Mexico, where scientists had discovered distinctive human-made tools more than 11,000 years old.

Most archaeologists long believed that humans first funneled into North America via a land bridge that formed between Russia and Alaska across what is now the Bering Strait about 13,000 years ago. The so-called Clovis culture was thought to be the oldest in the Americas.

Because Clovis tools had been found at Gault, Collins knew the site was important. But at the time, nobody knew just how significant.

Over the next few years, the land changed hands, and the pay-to-dig operation ended. When the property’s new owners, Howard and Doris Lindsey, stumbled onto some mammoth bones, Collins again got the call. He struck up a friendship with the Lindseys, and in 1998, Collins convinced them to allow a three-year lease so he could conduct an excavation.

That dig turned up more artifacts from the Clovis period, but Collins ran out of time. He filled in the pit and left when the lease ended, convinced the site held even more significance.

Collins stayed in touch with the Lindseys, and in 2007 they agreed to sell him the land. (They still live nearby and keep an eye on the property.) Collins and his wife, Karen, used their own money to buy the site, then immediately donated it to the nonprofit Archaeological Conservancy, where it would be protected in perpetuity.

Collins began a meticulous, long-term excavation project. The people who had come here thousands of years ago made tools, discarded some and lost others, leaving behind a record. The researchers uncovered thousands of artifacts, plus a human-made surface believed to be the floor of a structure at least 15,000 years old.

At first, not everyone believed what the stones were saying. Some pushed back on the idea that humans had been in Central Texas since before the Clovis people. But using a technique called optically stimulated luminescence, which



COURTESY GAULT SCHOOL OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Collins with volunteers at the last part of the Gault site to be excavated. Currently there are no open excavation sites on the property and no digs planned.

tells scientists when sediments were last exposed to light, Collins and his team proved that some of the most deeply buried artifacts were indeed older than Clovis.

Today, most archaeologists agree that humans began to move into North America before the land bridge at the Bering Strait opened, using boats to cross the water and spread down the coast.

Evidence discovered through Collins’ excavations show signs that humans have come to the water at this Texas site—what is now nearby Buttermilk Creek—for 20,000 years.

That arguably makes it the oldest demonstrably inhabited site in the Western Hemisphere.

“What’s important about this site is what we’ve learned about ourselves from it,” says Tim Brown, a board member at the nonprofit Gault School of Archaeological Research, which Collins founded. “This site has been so important in the rewriting of the book about the very early story of man in the Americas.”

And it may have more stories to tell.

Collins, now in his 80s, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s in 2022, and the main excavation pit was covered in 2016. But just 3% of the land here has been excavated. New technologies may help future archaeologists unravel even more of its past.

“Walk across this soil,” Brown says. “If you don’t get a humble, awestruck reaction, there’s something wrong. And without Mike, we’d have no idea.” ■

## Dig In

To book a guided tour, visit the GSAR website, [gaultschool.org](http://gaultschool.org).

**TCP** Scan the QR code or visit [gaultfilm.com](http://gaultfilm.com) to learn more about *The Stones Are Speaking* and for streaming options.



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37	8.77	8.15	10.52	9.81	15	13	22	20	60	33.49	24.28	60.76	41.71	109	73	206	136
38	8.77	8.16	11.19	10.18	16	14	24	21	61	36.49	25.09	66.43	47.10	122	83	236	154
39	9.13	8.31	11.62	10.55	17	15	25	22	62	39.88	27.91	73.90	51.32	136	92	262	166
40	9.55	8.48	12.04	10.98	18	16	27	24	63	43.69	34.01	81.54	57.25	153	102	287	187
41	10.05	8.72	13.10	11.58	20	17	30	26	64	47.91	38.28	90.20	62.32	170	112	323	200
42	10.48	9.01	14.21	12.30	22	19	33	29	65	52.81	40.88	100.33	68.23	191	125	361	223
43	10.98	9.36	14.72	13.18	23	20	38	31	66	58.71	44.61	114.29	75.40	211	135	392	242
44	11.58	9.73	15.67	14.10	25	22	41	34	67	64.59	49.08	125.27	83.64	234	146	436	261
45	12.17	10.15	16.86	15.16	28	24	45	38	68	72.24	59.65	143.07	105.55	254	173	485	322
46	12.84	10.64	17.85	15.83	30	25	49	40	69	79.34	64.22	158.23	129.28	288	188	547	352
47	13.43	11.16	19.03	16.68	32	27	54	44	70	86.85	68.11	177.24	147.66	318	203	595	375
48	13.48	11.88	20.27	17.37	35	29	58	47	71	102.45	82.60	203.10	159.34	374	235	702	443
49	13.69	12.33	21.73	18.32	37	31	63	52	72	113.68	93.16	232.46	172.23	427	272	807	512
50	14.36	12.98	23.00	19.82	40	33	69	57	73	127.55	106.68	267.15	188.15	493	319	937	596
51	15.37	13.75	25.30	20.65	45	35	78	62	74	142.08	119.36	303.50	204.84	562	367	1074	685
52	16.36	14.87	27.63	22.13	49	38	87	67	75	159.25	140.48	346.45	224.56	644	424	1235	789
53	17.46	15.88	30.95	24.81	54	42	98	73	76	200.03	168.51	418.29	276.67	785	530	1489	982
54	18.68	16.72	33.99	26.20	60	46	110	81	77	249.54	216.74	505.52	339.94	956	658	1797	1215
55	20.70	17.50	37.13	27.85	67	50	121	90	78	310.70	268.40	613.27	418.11	1167	817	2179	1504
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GENERAL  
MANAGER

ERIC  
HALFMANN

## Our No. 1 Priority

**SAFETY IS A** serious topic, especially when it comes to electricity. For Karnes Electric Cooperative, it's the No. 1 priority—and that's not just talk. Over the years, our co-op has created a culture in which the safety of our employees and the community is above all else.

Our mission is to provide safe, affordable and reliable electricity to our member-owners. And that means ensuring our workers return home safely to their loved ones at the end of each day. That requires ongoing focus, dedication and vigilance.

### Setting the Standard

Working with electricity brings risks, especially for lineworkers who work in challenging conditions. That's why Karnes EC is focused on protecting our employees and the community.

We've established protocols based on leading national safety standards for the utility industry, and our lineworkers wear specialized protective equipment whenever they're working near or with energized power lines.

We encourage our crews to speak up and hold each other accountable. By fostering a culture of openness and transparency, we promote problem-solving rather than blame.

Our safety team meets regularly to discuss upcoming projects and develop the best procedures to tackle them safely. They monitor and track near-miss incidents to understand what happened, share the lessons learned and prevent future occurrences.

We analyze data to identify patterns, and we use safety metrics to improve in areas where we have

fallen short. We also brief contractors on our safety protocols and set clear expectations before they begin work.

### Keeping You Safe

Because we live and work in the community we serve, we care about our neighbors. Karnes EC conducts electrical safety demonstrations in schools and at community events, helping people of all ages understand how to stay safe around electricity.

May is National Electrical Safety Month—a good time to remember that electrical safety starts at home. According to Electrical Safety Foundation International, thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured each year because of electrical fires, accidents and electrocutions at home.

The good news is that many of these accidents are preventable, and you can help keep yourself and your community safe around electricity.

Don't attempt electrical do-it-yourself projects beyond basic tasks, and don't overload outlets. Always report downed power lines immediately, and treat every downed line as if it's energized. Let us know if you spot unlocked substations or padmount transformers that look damaged or tampered with.

If you would like Karnes EC to provide a safety demonstration at your school or community event, please get in touch.

When it comes to safety, taking a moment to pause and think before you act can make all the difference. Let's work together to plug into safety. ■



RYAN/JLANE | ISTOCK.COM



## SAVE THE DATE

### Karnes EC Annual Meeting

June 11, 2026  
Karnes City High School  
400 State Highway 123

OKSANA SAZHNEVA | ISTOCK.COM

## Always Look Up

Don't ignore the power lines around you

**CONTACT WITH OVERHEAD** power lines is a leading cause of electrical fatalities. Follow these tips from Electrical Safety Foundation International to keep safe from power line contact.

Be aware of lines around your home. Educating yourself about what's on the utility pole can help you avoid injury.

Most poles have primary overhead power lines at the top that carry electricity from substations over long distances at high voltage.

A little farther down is typically a transformer that looks like a large box or bucket on the pole; this converts energy from the overhead power line to

the safer level used in homes and buildings.

Next are the service lines that carry electricity to homes. Telecommunications lines carry services like phone, cable and internet to homes and are often the lowest lines on the pole.

Recognize the electrical service entrance to your home; this area can be dangerous if you come into contact with it.

Keep yourself and any tools at least 10 feet away from any power lines, and never touch

anything in contact with a power line. If work needs to be done around a power line, call your electric cooperative first.

Carry ladders and other long tools or equipment horizontally to avoid accidental contact with electricity.

Always assume downed power lines are live. Stay at least 35 feet—or three car lengths—away from a downed line. Electricity can jump, or arc, and cause injury or death.

If you see a downed power line, call 911 and Karnes Electric Cooperative. ■



KEVIN BRINE | ISTOCK.COM

## Make a Tornado Plan

**TORNADOES HAVE NO** season—the destructive storms have been recorded across every county in Texas and during every month of the year. But May has historically been the most active month for twisters, and it's the perfect time to make a tornado plan.

Start by determining the safest place in your home and office so you can go there quickly when a tornado warning is issued. A small, interior, windowless room, closet or hallway on the lowest level is best.



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A tornado warning means a tornado has been sighted or indicated by weather radar. Take shelter immediately.

Stay away from windows, doors and outside walls. Put as many walls as possible between you and the outside. Close windows. Get under a sturdy table and cover your body as best you can with blankets or pillows.

Be sure to have an emergency kit that contains survival basics. Visit [ready.gov](http://ready.gov) for details.

Be alert. Listen to a weather radio or newscasts for the latest information.

When there's a tornado watch, move near enough to a sturdy building so you can get there quickly if you see signs of a tornado approaching. ■



VAIVIRGA | ISTOCK.COM

## Pita With Spiced Chickpea Salad and Whipped Feta

### CHICKPEA SALAD

- 2 cans chickpeas (15.5 ounces each), drained**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 2 teaspoons cumin**
- 2 teaspoons dried dill**
- 2 teaspoons dried sumac**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper**
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes**
- 3 cloves garlic, minced**
- 4 ounces cherry tomatoes**
- ½ cup chopped cucumber**
- 1 small red onion, diced**
- 1 tablespoon fresh dill**
- 1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, chopped**

### WHIPPED FETA

- 6 ounces feta cheese**
- 2 ounces cream cheese**
- ¼ cup olive oil**

### PITAS

- 4 pita rounds**

**1. CHICKPEA SALAD** Add chickpeas, oil, lemon juice, spices and garlic to a bowl and stir to combine. Let mixture sit 15 minutes to 1 hour to allow flavors to meld together.

**2.** Add tomatoes, cucumber, onion, fresh dill and cilantro and stir to combine.

**3. WHIPPED FETA** In a blender, add feta and cream cheese and blend while slowly drizzling oil through the top of the blender until mixture is creamy and smooth.

**4. PITAS** Spread whipped feta onto each slice of pita and top with chickpea salad.

**SERVES 4**

## Be Efficient in the Kitchen With No-Bake Recipes

Your air conditioner works hard to keep your home cool, so why not give it a break with easy, efficient, no-bake recipes? Make a delicious meal for your family without breaking a sweat.

### Ambrosia

- 1 container frozen whipped topping (8 ounces), thawed**
- 3 cans tropical fruit (15 ounces each), drained**
- 2 cups mini multicolored marshmallows**
- 1½ cups shredded sweetened coconut**

1. Combine all ingredients. Mix well.
2. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

**SERVES 6**

### Tzatziki

- 2 cups plus 1 tablespoon 2% plain Greek yogurt**
- 1 cup grated cucumber**
- 1½ tablespoons lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon olive oil**
- 3 cloves garlic, minced**
- 3 tablespoons fresh dill, plus more for garnish**
- Salt, to taste**
- Ground black pepper, to taste**
- Pita chips or veggies, for serving**

1. Add all ingredients to a bowl and stir gently to mix.
2. Garnish with additional dill and serve with chips or veggies.

**SERVES 4**

# A Full House of Savings

**WHEN YOU'RE TRYING** to reduce energy use and save money, lots of little tweaks around the house can add up to big savings. Each room offers a chance to improve the energy efficiency of your whole home. Here are some small modifications you can make to reduce energy use, room by room.

## Attic

In many homes, attic insulation is one of the easiest, least expensive and most effective ways to reduce your energy use year-round. Check [energystar.gov/saveathome](http://energystar.gov/saveathome) to see how much insulation is right for your climate.

## Home Office

Plug all cellphone and laptop chargers, printers, and gaming consoles into a power strip with an on/off switch. When not in use, turn the power strip off to eliminate those energy vampires. Open the blinds on sunny days so that you don't need to turn on additional lights.

## Bedroom

Ceiling fans can help save energy year-round. In the summer, fans should rotate counterclockwise to push cool air down. In the winter, fans should rotate clockwise to help draw cool air up toward the ceiling and push the warm air that naturally rises down to you and your family. Remember that fans cool people, not rooms, so turn them off when the room is unoccupied.

## Bathroom

Cutting hot water use lowers your electric and water bills. Try taking short showers instead of baths, installing low-flow fixtures and not letting the water run unnecessarily. Also be sure to fix any leaks.

Use faucet aerators on sinks. These affordable devices mix air with water, which creates a consistent stream that uses less water.

## Living Room

Smart thermostats learn how you and your family live and automatically adjust temperature settings based on your lifestyle. This keeps you comfortable while saving money.

When possible, use task lighting instead of overhead lighting. Targeted lighting from a lamp lets you accomplish a task, such as reading, without using the energy needed to light the whole room.

## Closets and Hallways

Add sensors that automatically turn off lights when a room is empty so that lights aren't left on for hours accidentally.

## Kitchen

On the stove, make sure your burner isn't bigger than the pan, and use flat-bottomed pans to maximize surface contact with the burner. Don't preheat the oven until you're ready to use it. Minimize the number of times you open and close the refrigerator or oven door. When it's time to upgrade appliances, choose Energy Star-certified products.

## Laundry Room

When it comes to laundry, timing is important. Try to run the washer and dryer in off-peak periods, when fewer people are using electricity. Wash clothes in cold water when possible, and always clean out the dryer lint trap. ■





## CHEAP SHOTS COST A LOT

**It doesn't take a crack shot to hit an electric insulator or transformer. Careless shooters can cause major problems for your electric cooperative—and their neighbors.**

**Shooting electrical infrastructure is a serious crime with serious consequences.**

It could even be a matter of life and death to someone on a life-support system or who is hit by a stray shot.

Damage to electrical equipment is very expensive to repair. Lines may be cut or weakened from a shot, and they may sag or break, becoming a serious hazard for anyone who comes into contact with the line.

Broken insulators can cause power outages that are hard—and expensive—for co-op employees to locate.

Enjoy your sport, but be a responsible hunter.

**Karnes EC encourages you to always practice safety.**

## May Is Wildfire Awareness Month

**WILDFIRES POSE A** significant and growing threat across Texas, and this spring, according to the Texas A&M Forest Service, conditions are aligning to create heightened risk throughout the state.

“Wildfire activity has increased across the state, driven by underlying drought conditions and above-normal grass production from last year’s growing season,” said Jared Karns, Texas A&M Forest Service fire chief.

What makes this threat even more urgent is that it’s largely preventable. Nine out of 10 wildfires in Texas are human-caused, meaning our collective actions can make a real difference in protecting our communities.

Texas residents are encouraged to stay wildfire-aware year-round. During warm, dry and windy conditions, avoid outdoor activities that could spark a wildfire—such as burning debris, using equipment that creates sparks or discarding cigarettes improperly.

If you spot a wildfire, contact local authorities immediately. A quick response can save lives and property, and your vigilance could prevent a small fire from becoming a devastating blaze. ■



TOA55 | ISTOCK.COM

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**Cinco de Mayo** | Tuesday, May 5

**Military Spouse Appreciation Day**  
Friday, May 8

**Mother's Day** | Sunday, May 10

**Memorial Day** | Monday, May 25  
Our offices will be closed  
in observance of the holiday.



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## Make the Most of Ceiling Fans

When the blades are spinning, turn up the savings

**IF YOU'RE LIKE** most Americans, you have at least one ceiling fan in your home. They're decorative, help our rooms feel more comfortable and, if used properly, can lower energy costs.

Make the most of your ceiling fans with these tips.

**Flip the switch.** Most ceiling fans have a switch near the blades. In warm months, flip the switch so that the blades rotate counterclockwise, effectively producing a "wind chill" effect. Fans make the air feel cooler

than it actually is. In winter, move the switch so the fan blades rotate clockwise, creating a gentle updraft. This pulls up cooler air and pushes warm air down from the ceiling into occupied areas of the room.

**Adjust your thermostat.** In the summer, when using a fan in conjunction with an air conditioner, or instead of it, you can turn your thermostat up 3–5 degrees without any reduction in comfort. This saves

money since a fan is less costly to run than the AC. In the winter, lower your thermostat by the same amount. Ceiling fans push the warm air from the ceiling back down toward the living space, which means the furnace won't turn on as frequently.

**Choose the right size.** Make sure your ceiling fan is the right size for the room. A fan 36–44 inches in diameter will cool rooms up to 225 square feet. A fan 52 inches or more should be used to cool a larger space.

**Turn it off.** When the room is unoccupied, turn off the fan. Fans cool people—not rooms. ■



TKPOND | 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

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## 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)

# Garden Variety Show

Pull up a chair and look real close: There could be a menagerie hiding in your yard

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • ILLUSTRATION BY PETER DONNELLY

**CAROLINA SNAILSEED** often pops up in our native gardens. I let a few vines clamber up our chain-link fence. The rest I yank. That's what I was doing a few Aprils ago in a front-yard bed. Bent over, pulling on a stubborn root, I glanced at a nearby tree stump.

Could it be? I squinted and looked again, this time closer.

It was a long-legged gray spider, a kind I'd never seen before in our yard, and so well camouflaged that I inched up for an even closer look. Sensing my presence, the spider sidled on the stump.

I laughed. "I see you," I said, snapping some photos with my phone. The spider sidled back the other way. "Sorry, I still see you!" Later I learned that I'd actually met a white-banded fishing spider, a species—as its name implies—that mostly hangs out near water. How she found her way to our gardens will always mystify me.

To this day, my encounter with that spider ranks among my favorite garden adventures, the list of which continues to grow. That's what happens when you tend native plants: Mother Nature shows up.

To keep track of what I find, I use iNaturalist, an online network of users who record and identify organisms around the world through a mobile app and website. Within the 1-acre property that my husband and I own in a neighborhood in the Hill Country town of Blanco, I've documented more than 1,520 species of flora and fauna, including some surprises.

For instance, one June our velvet-leaf mallow hosted a huddle of violet-hued caterpillars with red heads. Or so I thought. They turned out to be the larvae (not butterfly caterpillars) of sawflies, which are named for the female's egg-laying appendage that saws into plants. Adult sawflies are seen less often than their chubby larvae.

Not so for a large fly that's commonly called an elephant mosquito (yes, mosquitoes are flies). Somehow I resisted the urge to swat the first one I ever saw, resting on a salvia leaf. Imagine my surprise when I learned that these iridescent mosquitoes feed on flower nectar, not blood. Plus, their aquatic larvae eat watery insects, including other mosquito larvae.

My first jagged ambush bug, lurking on a coreopsis flower, stumped me. Viewed from the side, these peazeed predators have a silhouette that resembles a humpbacked dinosaur. Concealed on a bloom, they

wait for a small butterfly, moth or bee to land. Then they grab the victim with their hooked forelegs, similar to a praying mantis', and stab their sucking mouthpart (called a proboscis) into the body.

One evening, a green dragonfly called an eastern pondhawk sideswiped my left ear at top speed. Then she landed near my feet on a rock. After taking some photos, I stuck out my hand. To my delight, she flitted onto me! So have longhorn cactus flies, red admiral butterflies, robber flies, a picture-winged fly and a scaly cricket, along with assorted bugs, beetles and spiders.

Sometimes critters have fooled me, too. Like a hefty ant perched on an esperanza bloom. Wrong—it was a juvenile Texas bow-legged bug. Another time I spotted a firefly (which are beetles) on a plateau goldeneye leaf. Nope—it was a firefly-mimicking longhorn beetle.

Other pranksters in our gardens include ant-mimicking jumping spiders, velvet ants (wingless female wasps) and Beelzebub bee-eaters, a fuzzy robber fly that looks like a bumblebee. All use mimicry to either ward off predators or trick their prey (and me).

We've seen Texas spiny lizard mothers excavate burrows in flower beds. One time I happened by an autumn sage just in time to see a checkered garter snake gulp down an earthworm. In the summer, Rio Grande leopard frogs honeymoon in our 100-gallon stock-tank pond.

Bird adventures? You bet. One June a wild turkey hung out in our backyard. That same month, a juvenile green heron practiced his fishing skills in a shallow birdbath. We still laugh at videos taken of a black-crested titmouse mom pulling fur off our annoyed cat. Yes, the titmouse survived!

Fate wasn't so kind when a red paper wasp landed on the street at my feet. I'd been en route to check our milkweed crop of antelope-horns. I crouched down, then grimaced.

The wasp mother was sawing the legs off an orb-weaver spider that she'd paralyzed with a sting. A few minutes later, she finished her gruesome task and lifted into the air, clutching her victim. Soon the legless spider would feed hungry wasp larvae.

Yes, Mother Nature can be cruel. But she can be fascinating and surprising, too. Take my advice and look closer. Soon you'll be on your own garden adventure. ■



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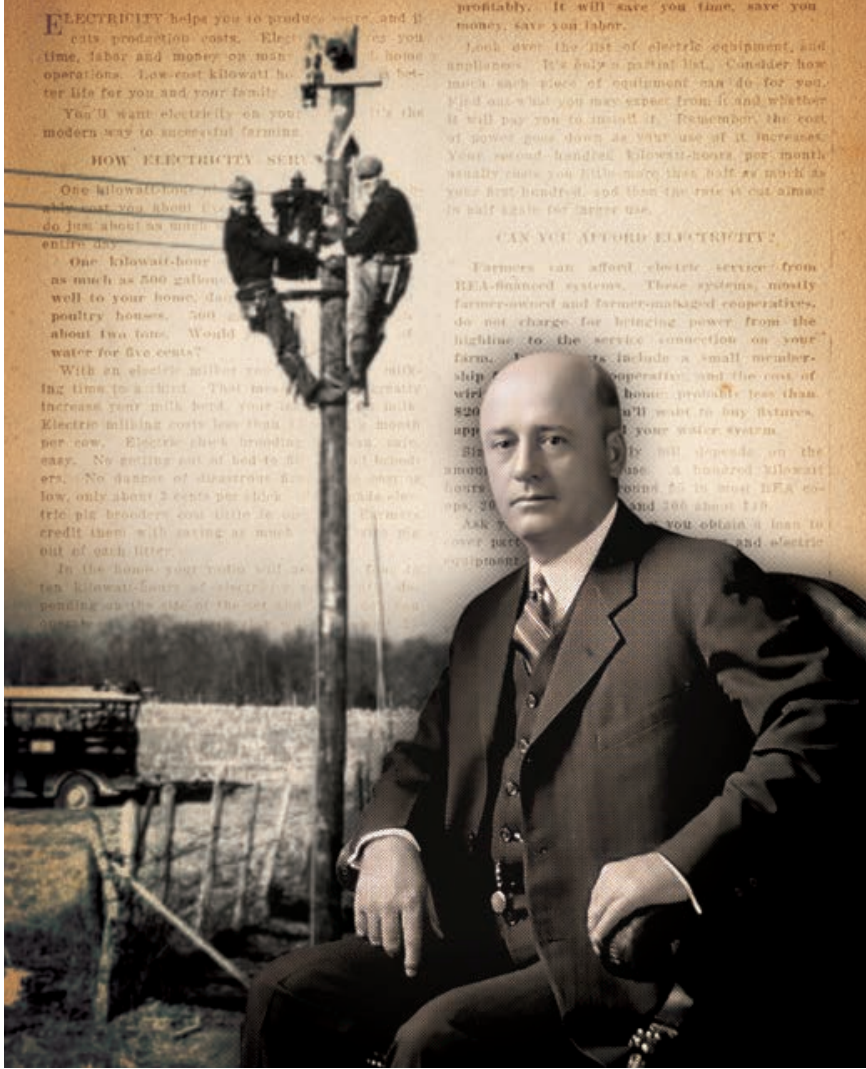
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# Power and Light

Sam Rayburn helped pull rural Texans out of the dark

BY JESSICA RIDGE

**BEFORE THE PASSAGE OF THE** Rural Electrification Act nearly a century ago, in the depths of the Great Depression, most U.S. farmsteads made do in the dark while their neighbors in cities a few miles away experienced a higher standard of living. Investor-owned utilities didn't deem it profitable to run miles of power lines across the countryside.

Without electric lights and appliances, farm families cooked over smoky woodstoves, read and studied under kerosene lamps, and performed laborious agricultural chores by hand.

By the mid-1930s, change was afoot, thanks in large part to a dedicated and diplomatic Texan intent on the empowerment of rural communities. The REA,

enacted 90 years ago this month—May 20, 1936—made available low-cost federal loans to rural landowners who had banded together in hopes of threading the countryside with electric lines.

Electric cooperatives were born, starting with the first, Bartlett Electric Cooperative in Central Texas.

Before the REA, only around 10% of U.S. farms had electricity. By 1950, the federal financing the legislation shook loose had helped electrify nearly 80% of farms. Today, more than 900 co-ops power rural and suburban residents.

A 1960 Department of Agriculture video describes electricity as “magic from nowhere and everywhere” and details “the drab, colorless days” before

its rural availability. The video colorizes a black-and-white sequence, demonstrating the life-changing force of electricity coursing through the home of the fictional family it depicts.

Similar transformations, effected many times across prewar rural landscapes nationwide, were largely enabled by the efforts and advocacy of U.S. Rep. Samuel Taliaferro Rayburn, who cosponsored the REA legislation with Nebraska Sen. George Norris.

Rayburn, born in Tennessee, moved with his family to an unelectrified Fannin County farm, in North Texas, when he was 5, in 1887.

He attended grade school through law school in Texas and served in the Legislature before catapulting to Congress in 1913, where he set records as the longest-serving speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives—17 years over 10 sessions spanning the 1930s to 1960s, accrued piecemeal during his near-half-century tenure.

Rayburn didn't forget his former neighbors. In his papers, housed at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas, a March 1938 thank-you on Fannin County Electric Cooperative letterhead notes the co-op's progress in installing its first 110 miles of line, thanks to a \$100,000 REA requisition.

In July 1940, Farmers Electric Cooperative sent its own note to Rayburn, chiefly attributing to him the REA's “birth and success.” Included was a precursor to this magazine, a monthly newsletter called the *REA Co-op Message*, which included a run-down of the co-op's recent annual meeting, a list of new members and updates about members' appliance purchases.

Readers learned that member W.C. McKay had installed an electric range at home. “Naturally,” the newsletter reads, “Mrs. McKay is very happy.”

She wasn't alone. Thanks to Rayburn, life in Co-op Country was changed forever. ■

# Mom's Favorites

Recipes perfected and passed down through the years

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This salad smells like home. Growing up, my mami had a beautiful garden where she harvested the juiciest cucumbers and tomatoes. Sliced, tossed with panela and drizzled with her homemade dressing, I could eat this salad every day. I'm thrilled to share a dish my mami and I still enjoy together.

## Tomato Cucumber Panela Salad

**2 cups halved cherry tomatoes**  
**2 medium cucumbers, diced**  
**1 package panela cheese (16 ounces), cubed**  
**½ cup olive oil**  
**2 tablespoons white vinegar**  
**2 tablespoons lime juice**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**2 teaspoons ground black pepper**  
**1 bunch cilantro, finely minced**

1. Place tomatoes, cucumbers and panela in a bowl.
2. In another bowl, whisk together oil, vinegar, lime juice, salt and pepper until well blended. Stir in cilantro.
3. Pour dressing over salad, stir to combine and store in fridge until ready to serve.

SERVES 4

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Frida Kahlo's Ensalada de Calabacin.





## Lasagna

DANI DECESARO  
TRINITY VALLEY EC

DeCesaro's Norwegian mom married an Italian man and perfected this recipe alongside her sister. It has become a wonderful memory for the entire family.

- 3 quarts plus 1/3 cup water, divided use**
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon salt, divided use**
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil**
- 9 lasagna noodles**
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) butter**
- 1 pound ground beef**
- 1/4 cup minced onion**
- 1/4 cup dried parsley flakes**
- 1/8 teaspoon garlic salt**
- 2 tablespoons flour**
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper**
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano**
- 1 can evaporated milk (12 ounces)**
- 1 can tomato paste (12 ounces)**
- 1 pound mozzarella cheese, sliced into 18 pieces**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.
- 2.** Bring 3 quarts water to a boil. Add 1 tablespoon salt and oil. Cook noodles according to package directions. Drain and place noodles on paper towels.
- 3.** Heat butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add ground beef, onion, parsley and garlic salt. Cook, breaking up ground beef with spoon.
- 4.** When fully cooked, reduce heat to simmer, and stir in remaining 1 teaspoon salt, flour, pepper and oregano until well combined.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

## Mom's Fresh Apple Bars

DIANE KORUS  
KARNES EC



Korus' mom enjoyed these bars in the afternoon with a cup of coffee, and I have to agree that these babies are the ultimate afternoon snack. Packed with fresh apples and a sinfully sweet streusel topping, these bars are a crowd pleaser.

### STREUSEL

- 1/2 cup flour**
- 1/2 cup sugar**
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, softened**

### BARS

- 2/3 cup shortening**
- 2 cups light brown sugar**

- 2 eggs, room temperature, lightly beaten**
- 1/4 teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 2 cups flour**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 2 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 1/2 cups peeled and chopped Granny Smith apple (about 1 large or 2 medium apples)**
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans**

- 1. STREUSEL** In a bowl, combine flour, sugar and butter. Mix until mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
- 2. BARS** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
- 3.** In a large bowl, beat shortening and brown sugar on medium speed until smooth. Add eggs, salt and vanilla and mix until combined, scraping down sides as needed.
- 4.** With a spatula, stir in flour, cinnamon and baking powder until well combined. Gently fold in apples and pecans.
- 5.** Spread batter into prepared pan and sprinkle with streusel. Bake 35-40 minutes or until the top is golden brown and a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**CAMPFIRE FAVORITES** DUE MAY 10

For our October issue, we're eager to pass around treats and meals to munch on while gathered around the flames. Fire off your best recipe for a chance at winning \$500.

**UPCOMING: CRANBERRY HARVEST** DUE JUN 10



RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Add evaporated milk and remaining 1/3 cup water. Cover and simmer 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in tomato paste until well combined.
6. Layer three noodles on bottom of prepared pan. Spread 1/2 meat sauce over noodles, then layer on 3 more noodles and top with 1/2 of cheese. Add remaining 3 noodles. Top with remaining meat sauce and remaining cheese.
7. Bake about 30 minutes, until cheese is melted and begins to brown.

SERVES 8

### Yankee Cake

CHUCK BURGESS  
HEART OF TEXAS EC

Burgess' mom was from Texas, his dad from New York. His dad's family shared this cake recipe with Mom. It's now a family favorite and sure to be your new



favorite too. This Yankee Cake is a cinnamony sweet surprise sprinkled with sugar and nuts.

- 2 cups flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar, divided use
- 7 tablespoons (7/8 stick) butter, softened, divided use
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup heavy cream

- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts or pecans

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
2. In a medium bowl, mix together flour, salt and baking powder.
3. In a large bowl, beat 1 cup sugar and 5 tablespoons butter at medium speed until light and fluffy. Reduce speed to low and add egg, heavy cream, milk and vanilla. Mix until combined, scraping down sides.
4. Add flour mixture and mix until combined.
5. Spread batter evenly into prepared pan. Sprinkle with remaining 1 tablespoon sugar plus cinnamon and nuts. Dot with remaining 2 tablespoons butter.
6. Bake 25–30 minutes, until edges are lightly golden and a toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## South Poles

Panna Maria museum shows off Polish heritage in a big way

BY CHET GARNER

**LOTS OF FOLKS** know Texas for its Mexican flavors, its German beer halls and its Czech kolache. But mention our Polish history, and most won't know where to start, even though Texas is home to the oldest permanent Polish settlement in America.

I'll admit, before visiting the small community of Panna Maria, I didn't grasp how deep our Polish roots run. But fortunately, I found the Polish Heritage Center ready to educate me and the rest of Texas.

Panna Maria (population about 40) sits quietly on the rolling plains of Karnes County about an hour southeast of San Antonio.

The entire community revolves around two blocks. On one sits the picturesque Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church, which dates to 1855. And on the next is the stately Polish Heritage Center, which dates to 2021. I have visited more than my fair share of small-town museums, but nothing could prepare me for what I found inside this state-of-the-art facility.

After signing my name in the guest book next to visitors from the Polish capital of Warsaw and beyond, I stepped into an immersive experience that transported me to 1854, when a group of Polish immigrants held Mass under the oak trees just outside the church and decided to call Panna Maria home. The museum went on to tell the story of the culture, faith and struggles of this community, including its influence on modern life in Texas.

The history unfolds through hand-embroidered clothing, family photos, tools and letters carried across the Atlantic. It's so well done that it would impress visitors in any big city, making it all the more amazing in tiny Panna Maria.

Texas is a patchwork of cultures, accents and traditions. Thanks to the Polish Heritage Center, one of our more overlooked threads is finally getting the spotlight it deserves. ■

ABOVE Chet stops at a painting in the Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria showing the first Catholic Mass after immigrants reached the site on Christmas Eve in 1854.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Explorations 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.

### MAY

8

**Brenham [8-9] Maifest**, (979) 451-0621, [brenhammaifest.com](http://brenhammaifest.com)

**Round Top [8-10] Fine Art Festival at the Compound**, (281) 236-3821, [bit.ly/fafatthecompound](http://bit.ly/fafatthecompound)

9

**Nacogdoches Scottish Highland Games and Festival**, (936) 371-3072, [nacscottishgames.com](http://nacscottishgames.com)

**Palestine Mother's Day Lunch Train**, 1-855-632-7729, [texasstaterailroad.net](http://texasstaterailroad.net)

**Stonewall Williams Creek (Albert) School Open House**, (830) 685-3321, [historicschools.org](http://historicschools.org)

14

**Giddings [14-16] Lee County Fair**, [info@leecountyfairtx.com](mailto:info@leecountyfairtx.com), [leecountyfairtx.com](http://leecountyfairtx.com)

15

**Columbus [15-16] Magnolia Days Festival**, (979) 732-8385, [magnoliadays.org](http://magnoliadays.org)

**Grapevine [15-17] Main Street Fest**, (817) 410-3185, [grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

16

**Fredericksburg Classic Truck Show**, (830) 990-4433, [pecangrovestore.com](http://pecangrovestore.com)

**Greenville Knights of Columbus Mayfest**, (903) 455-9062, [donvinson75402@gmail.com](mailto:donvinson75402@gmail.com)

17

**Fredericksburg Thomas Pandolfi**, [fredericksburgmusicclub.com](http://fredericksburgmusicclub.com)

21

**Grapeland [21-23] Salmon Lake Park Gospel Bluegrass Festival**, (936) 687-2594, slpbluegrass.com

**Kerrville [21-June 7] Folk Festival**, (830) 257-3600, kerrvillefolkfestival.org

22

**Granbury [22-24] Memorial Day Weekend Festival**, (682) 936-4550, granburysquare.com

**Kerrville [22-24] Texas Masters of Fine Art & Craft Show**, (469) 223-4162, texasmasters.com

23

**Chappell Hill Artwalk on Main Street**, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

**Hondo Heritage Hike**, (830) 660-6908, bit.ly/hondohike

**Levelland [23-25] Panhandle Cutting Horse Association Show**, (325) 518-1424, panhandlecha.com

29

**Corsicana Big Bad Voodoo Daddy**, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

JUNE

5

**Fort Worth [5-7] Hadestown**, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

**Yoakum [5-7] Tom Tom Festival**, (361) 293-2309, yoakumareachamber.com

**San Antonio [5-August 1] Fiesta Noche del Rio**, (210) 226-4651, fiestanochesa.com

**TCP** *Submit Your Event*

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

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Upper Antelope Canyon, fine art giclée print, 2025, 12" x 19", Bobby Greeson



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# Caught Napping

If you find yourself catching a catnap, needing 40 winks on the fly or sawing logs around your siblings, you're in good company. Usually, if you snooze you lose. But these readers won't be losing sleep anytime soon.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

**1 PAUL LAUDER**  
FARMERS EC

"After a hard morning competing in the livestock show at the State Fair of Texas, a young competitor and her pet take a well-earned rest."

**2 REAGAN FERGUSON**  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

"A number of neighbors went to the CF Ranch in Clarksville to help with their cattle drive. Following the drive, this young lady laid claim to a few bales of hay."

**3 SHAWN DEAN**  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

"My granddaughter took this of her horse's new colt."

**4 GABRIELLE ETHINGTON**  
PENTEX ENERGY

"Some friends raise kunekune pigs on a small farm outside of Nocona. I photographed this cutie napping in the front pasture area. It looks so happy."



## Upcoming Contests

- RODEO** DUE MAY 10
- TAILGATING** DUE JUN 10
- RIDE THE RAILS** DUE JUL 10



ENTER ONLINE

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



## Mother's Days

They give a lot to their kids, but sometimes moms need a little bit back

BY CAYT CALHOUN

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA GODEASSI

A PANG OF FEAR HIT as the gurney wheeled me away from my family. Months of testing brought me here, and within the hour, I would become my mom's kidney donor.

Until that point, it struck me as odd when people asked if I was afraid. Why? I love her. That's enough. And it was enough to bat away intrusive thoughts as the anesthesia took hold.

Those fleeting moments of anxiety paled in comparison to years of uncertainty.

I understood the crushing weight of losing a parent—my dad died before I turned 2. Between his death and the deterioration of my mom's health, I tumbled through my adolescence fearing I'd lose *both* my parents before adulthood.

My mom received the IgA nephropathy

diagnosis when I was 10. At the time, I didn't understand how to pronounce it, let alone grasp the complexities of an inflammatory kidney disease that has no cure and can be fatal.

But chronic illness doesn't give you time to understand. It creeps in and presents itself with a slew of medications, revolving appointments and the enormously draining toll of it all. Despite everything, she expended energy she didn't have on my behalf. It seemed effortless at the time. I know better now.

Back then it was easier to accept things at a blithe glance—because being anything other than willfully ignorant meant facing a hard reality. I convinced myself that her active role in my life meant all was well.

But I couldn't pretend anymore. For a decade, I watched the quality of my mother's life ebb and flow until her kidney function dwindled to a measly 19%. She had two options: dialysis or surgery. With no known viable donor, she was forced to choose the former.

It had been us against the world for as long as I could remember. What if she lost the ability to do the things she loved? What if I lost her? The scenarios I conjured in my mind felt suffocating.

Watching how nightly dialysis altered her life was heartbreaking. At that point, I didn't have a choice. The voice in my head said the least I could do was try to give back to the person who gave me everything. So when co-workers, professors, peers and doctors asked if I was comfortable with donating a kidney at 20, I said yes emphatically. I don't believe it was selfless. I selfishly wanted more time with my mom.

Luckily, we got it.

We're now approaching the 10th anniversary of the donation, and I'm beyond grateful for the opportunity to have been her donor. There may be a world out there in which I wasn't qualified. There isn't a world where I wouldn't do anything for my mom. ■



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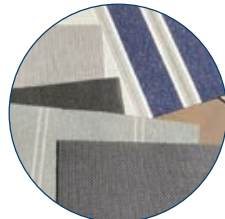
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