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SEPTEMBER 2026

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around the state



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Mobility scooters keep you independent, making daily life easier and more enjoyable. From errands to visiting friends, they help you stay active and connected. Mobility scooters open new opportunities and let you enjoy life your way.

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The ATTO SPORT folding travel scooter delivers a perfect blend of style, innovation, and performance. It is designed for those who value independence and sophistication

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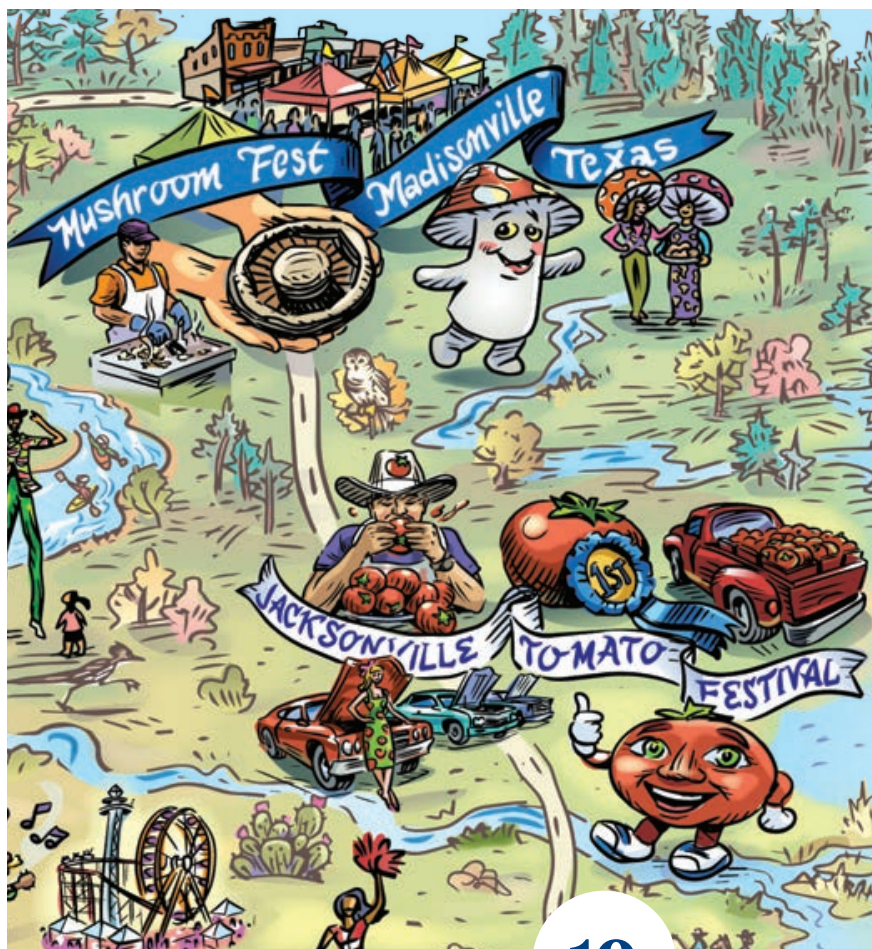
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September 2026



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06 Making Space for Everyone

Light pollution blotting out the stars? Head to your local planetarium.

By Melissa Gaskill
Photos by Tiffany Hofeldt

The Fungus Among Us

The good times just mushroom when small-town festivals celebrate local produce.

By Pam LeBlanc
Illustrations by Jim Starr

ON THE COVER

Visitors enjoy a show at the Burke Baker Planetarium in Houston.
Photo by Tiffany Hofeldt

ABOVE

Mushrooms and tomatoes are among the dozens of locally grown products celebrated at street festivals.
Illustration by Jim Starr

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Among the Trees



Big Jake, the mascot of the Texas State Forest Festival, demonstrates ax throwing.

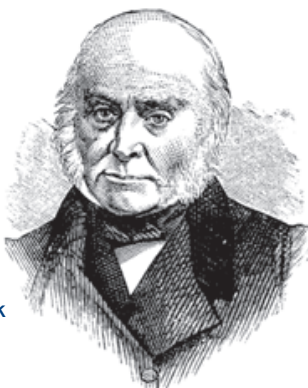
WHEN THE FOUR-DAY Texas State Forest Festival kicks off September 17 in Lufkin, it continues a tradition that began in 1938. The event, in the heart of the Pineywoods, features a variety of activities, including a carnival, barbecue competition, music and chain saw carving.

In 2022, Texas sawmills produced enough lumber to make two-by-fours that could reach the moon and back.

Did you know? Texas has 59 million acres of forestland, more than any other state except Alaska. About 93% of that is privately owned.

Hair Apparent

Only five elected American Presidents—John Adams; John Quincy Adams, right; Martin Van Buren; James Garfield; and Dwight Eisenhower—were bald or balding. Considering that 85% of men suffer hair loss by age 50, that's perhaps an astonishing record. Something to think about on **National Bald is Beautiful Day, September 13.**



TCP Contests and More

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FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Barns

RECOMMENDED READING

Learn about William Johnson McDonald, the eccentric banker who funded the McDonald Observatory in West Texas against his family's wishes. Find our story from December 2020 on our website.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

When I was a kid ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some responses to our July prompt: **Need a hobby? Learn to ...**

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Appreciate and utilize all that the state parks have to offer.

KIT VAUGHN
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CRISTI SWINNEY
TAYLOR EC
TRENT

Letterboxing: a secretive treasure hunt activity that combines hiking, puzzle solving and stamp carving.

STEVE YATES
PEDERNALES EC
WIMBERLEY

Visit our website to see more responses.

JULY 2026 A Big Leap From Doodles

"I probably have the only one of Jeffie Brewer's works in San Angelo. It survived a wildfire while being relocated from Alto, New Mexico, to Lubbock."

ROBIN LONG
CONCHO VALLEY EC
SAN ANGELO



Spotting His Critters

My mom and I recently visited a friend in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I think we ran into Jeffie Brewer's Orange Cat on an art walk [A Big Leap From Doodles, July 2026]. Now I know the artist's story. How fun!

Lisa King
Pedernales EC
Austin

Our regional bike trail network in east-central Illinois has commissioned several sculptures to place alongside the trails. People love them and even set their routes by the distance between critters. There are designated "critter loops" riders enjoy.

Thanks, Jeffie, for making our rides more fun and whimsical.

Betsy Carlson-Ward
Via Facebook

Historic Washout

I remember that Houston Astros rainout because I was at home waiting for my dad to come home from work while listening to what was supposed to be the start of the game on the radio [Currents, Under the Weather, June 2026]. They announced the game was called, noted the historic nature of the event and Dad didn't get home until about 11 p.m.

Michael Knight
Via Facebook

Artifact No-No's

As an archaeology steward for the Texas Historical Commission, I feel it important to remind readers that in the state of Texas, it's illegal to search for and recover artifacts—be they projectile points or stone tools—on private property without permission and on public lands at all, ever [He Kept Digging, May 2026].

The penalties can be severe, including imprisonment. Readers can research this topic on THC's website.

Françoise Wilson
Central Texas EC
Gillespie County

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letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
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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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MAKING **SPACE** FOR EVERYONE

BY MELISSA GASKILL • PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

THIS PAGE The wonders of the night sky are always accessible at the Burke Baker Planetarium in Houston.

OPPOSITE, FROM TOP With more than a dozen planetariums around the state, visitors have access to celestial sites that can stir the imagination. Burke Baker was one of the first planetariums in Texas when it opened in 1964.

Light pollution blotting out the stars? Head to your local planetarium

In the 1950s, Harlingen Air Force Base used a domed planetarium building to teach pilots navigation by the stars. When the base closed in 1962, the building was donated to what is now the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, and it eventually fell into disrepair.

But in 2008, H-E-B funded renovations that added a digital projector system and, in 2012, a new dome. Now regular folks of all ages can visit and get a front-row seat to the stars in Edinburg.

“H-E-B asked that it be free and open to the public,” says Christian Hernandez, program specialist at the UTRGV planetarium. “They wanted to inspire a new generation, and I think they made good on that desire.”

The Milky Way shines high above in September, with the constellation Pegasus rising in the east. Venus will be bright in early evening, with Jupiter most visible at dawn. But if it’s cloudy or you live near a big city or industry, you won’t be able to see any of it.

At a planetarium, you can enjoy these constellations and planets as well as other astronomical wonders from a comfy chair with no worries about light pollution from cities or satellites, cloudy skies, heat or cold, bugs, or the hard ground. And in Texas—with at least 15 permanent planetariums



across the state—chances are good that there’s one just down the road from you and with technological advances you might not expect.

Space Over Time

The first modern planetarium opened in Munich, Germany, in 1925, displaying 4,500 stars and the planets of our solar system. Five years later, the first facility in the U.S., the Adler Planetarium, opened in Chicago. More quickly followed in Philadelphia, Los Angeles and New York City. Texas got its first, Fort Worth’s 40-foot-diameter Noble Planetarium, in 1955, and soon Houston and Abilene had their own.

Planetarium popularity soared after the Soviet Union’s Sputnik 1 satellite launched in 1957 and during the 1960s race to the moon. These days, as artificial light drowns out more of the night sky, folks flock to planetariums to see what they’re missing outside.

Those early planetariums used mechanical star projectors that beamed light through slides patterned with tiny holes to depict celestial bodies on a domed ceiling. Gears and motors simulated the movements of stars and planets, creating astonishingly realistic night skies.

Such machines, made by Zeiss, a German company that produced the original Munich projector, and Pennsylvania-based Spitz Laboratories, which developed its first system in the 1940s, remain in use at many planetariums.

But now most facilities have digital projector systems that





Sunset at the Burke Baker Planetarium, where, indoors, it can always be nighttime.

“Under the dome, phenomena that can seem abstract or distant become tangible and awe-inspiring. It’s like a time machine, looking back at how the universe was.”

blend multiple high-resolution images into an uninterrupted scene covering the entire dome. These systems can produce the likenesses of millions of stars and extremely detailed 3D objects and events in deep space. Advances in sound and control systems and improved dome surfaces help make planetarium experiences even more immersive and realistic.

For example, the Stephen F. Austin State University Planetarium in Nacogdoches, which opened in 2018, features a state-of-the-art 4K Digistar system, says Director Dan Bruton.

Abilene’s Morgan Jones Planetarium upgraded in 2004 from its original Spitz Star Projector to a digital projector, says Jason Barber, planetarium director, and in 2019, it installed a laser system.

“With modern projectors, you can go into the stars, you can model the entire Milky Way,” Barber explains. “It’s kind of like a video game, but the shape of a dome creates a 3D effect, so you feel like you’re there. It’s like being in a spaceship.”

Beyond Space

Nowadays, planetarium experiences go well beyond tours of the night sky, popular as those are. You can fly visually through space and time and view immersive films about the Great Barrier Reef, dinosaurs or Mars. Experience a laser light show set to music from artists like Pink Floyd, Queen and Taylor Swift.

The H-E-B Planetarium in South Texas shows educational films about space, Hernandez says, and others just for entertainment.

Bruton says SFASU designed its planetarium to connect the university with its East Texas community and make science accessible and engaging for all ages. Astronomy students at the university keep track of what’s currently visible in the sky—perhaps a constellation, planet or comet—and program the Digistar system to show it. Immersive shows include *Dark Universe*, which explores dark matter, dark

energy and the structure of the universe, and *Antarctica*, a dive into one of the most extreme environments on Earth.

Abilene presents monthly public shows, and Barber’s favorite is one produced by the European Southern Observatory in Chile, called *Unveiling the Invisible Universe*. It uses actual time-lapse imagery of stars, not a computer model, he says. Another, *Messengers of Time and Space*, shows how astronomers use land-based telescopes along with space-based facilities like NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope, currently orbiting the sun 1 million miles away from Earth, and Hubble, circling 300 miles above Earth since 1990.

“Planetariums give people a sense of perspective,” Hernandez says. “It’s one thing to talk about the scale of the universe, but that 360-degree dome screen does an amazing job of letting you feel it. Watching a film about searching for the edge of the solar system, it really hits you how big the solar system is.

“Films that go into the universe, dark holes and cosmic matter really put into perspective that we are a blue dot in a grand tapestry of planets and stars. It’s an important and humbling experience.”

Bruton agrees. “Under the dome, phenomena that can seem abstract or distant become tangible and awe-inspiring. It’s like a time machine, looking back at how the universe was.”

So grab one of those comfy chairs at your local planetarium. You’re bound to have a stellar experience. ■



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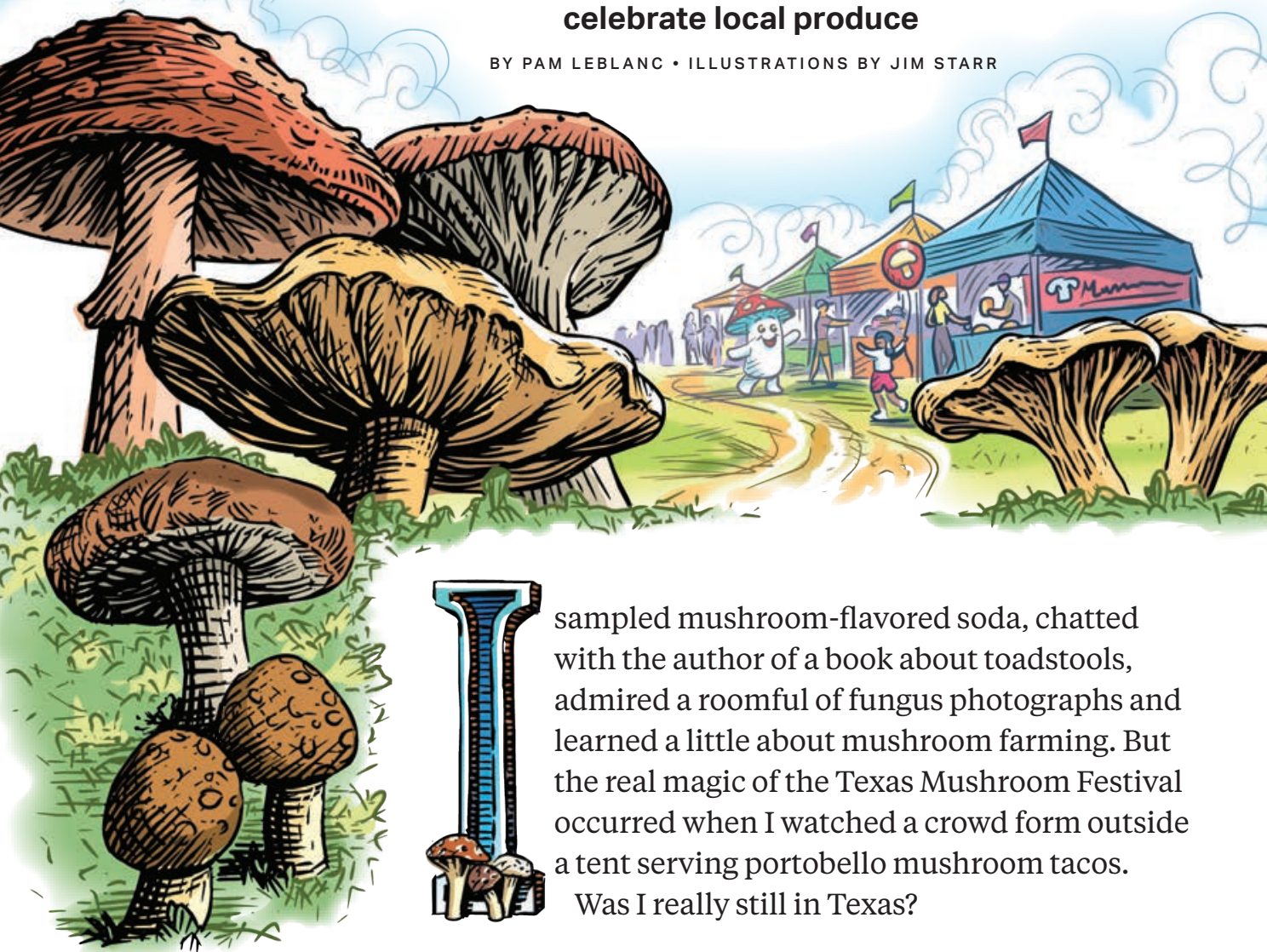
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THE FUNGUS AMONG US

The good times just mushroom
when small-town festivals
celebrate local produce

BY PAM LEBLANC • ILLUSTRATIONS BY JIM STARR



I sampled mushroom-flavored soda, chatted with the author of a book about toadstools, admired a roomful of fungus photographs and learned a little about mushroom farming. But the real magic of the Texas Mushroom Festival occurred when I watched a crowd form outside a tent serving portobello mushroom tacos. Was I really still in Texas?



A quick glance at the boots- and hat-wearing folks surrounding me as I strolled the courthouse square in Madisonville assured me I hadn't wandered off course. This city of 4,400, located 40 miles northeast of Bryan, is home to one of several farms operated by California-based Monterey Mushrooms, and in 2005, the Texas Legislature named it the official Mushroom Capital of the Lone Star State.

Madisonville clearly loves fungus, and its annual celebration draws mobs of mycophiles.

The Texas Mushroom Festival is one of dozens of street festivals around the state that celebrate local produce and growers. You can toast tomatoes in Jacksonville, salute strawberries in Poteet and Pasadena, honor onions in Weslaco, praise peaches in Stonewall and Weatherford, recognize rice in Winnie—and a whole lot more.

Many of the events have deep roots in Texas, which is known as a leading producer of specialty crops such as pecans, sweet potatoes, blueberries, watermelons and citrus. Each has its own quirky traditions.

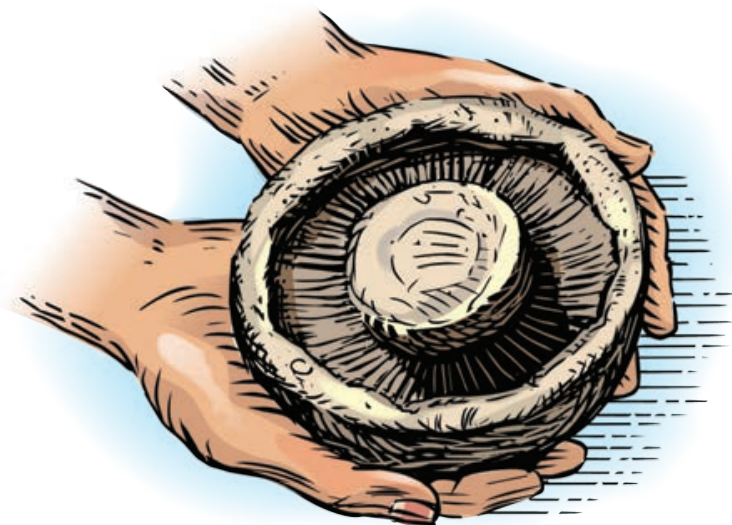
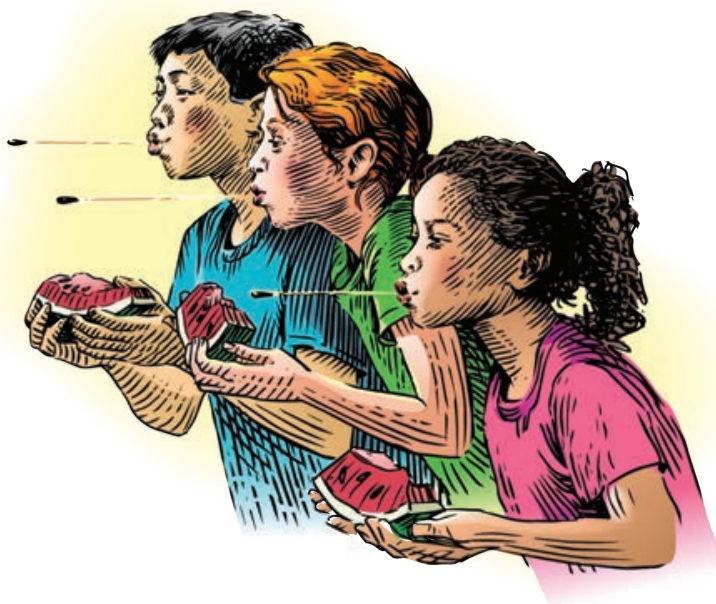
The Texas Citrus Fiesta in Mission, which started in 1932 as a nod to the Rio Grande Valley's winter harvest of grapefruit and oranges, has long included a style show featuring elaborate gowns made from citrus leaves, stems, fruit and peels that have been pulverized, dehydrated, blended and microwaved.

Visitors race to see how many tomatoes they can peel—using only their teeth—at the Jacksonville Tomato Fest. Growers compete to see who can bring the best price for their harvest during the auction at the Poteet Strawberry Festival. The Texas Onion Fest in Weslaco draws more than 25,000 attendees, all who come to celebrate the sweet Texas 1015 onion, the state vegetable of Texas, named for its suggested planting date of October 15.

Washer pitching, mutton bustin' and a full-blown rodeo are part of the action at the Stonewall Peach JAMboree, which also features peach pit spitting and peach eating contests. And at the Luling Watermelon Thump, which dates to 1954, visitors can pucker up for the watermelon seed spitting contest or square off in an (impressively messy) watermelon eating competition.

With all that to choose from, I couldn't resist the idea of spending a fall day in a small town, focusing on something that grows from a microscopic spore into one of nature's most perfect pizza toppings.

The Texas Mushroom Festival officially began in 2001 under a single tent, with a few vendors, a sole musician and about a dozen fungus-themed T-shirts. This year's event, set for October 17, is expected to draw between 10,000 and 15,000 visitors and 150 vendors. The day starts with the Shiitake 5K Run and includes such attractions as a quilt show, an automobile showcase, beer and wine tasting, live music, a kids' zone, silent auction, and mushroom picking contest.



"It just kind of sparked into this monster," says festival director (and confirmed mushroom lover) Dennon Hudson, who was watching the action at last year's event from a sidewalk at the edge of the square, where she waxed poetic about edible fungus. "I love mushrooms any way—fried, grilled, sautéed, raw. And we have lots of pickled mushrooms here as well."

But mushrooms are an acquired taste for some. A few minutes after arriving at the festival on a muggy October afternoon, I spotted Miss Mushroom, Allie Brewer of

Centerville. The 20-year-old pageant winner, wearing a bedazzled silver crown, a rose-colored shirt, gold sandals and a red sash, confessed she doesn't much like them.

"But I'd be up for trying some of them for sure," she added quickly. Then she showed me her finds from a few laps through the festival's mushroom market—a pair of earrings, a shirt and a lavender lemonade snow cone.

Next, I wandered over to the Monterey Mushroom tent, where white, thumb-shaped shrooms sprouted from a mound of soft, dark soil. The farm's growing manager, Armando Juarez, told me that the company's local facility, located about 5 miles south of town, grows white, portobello and specialty mushrooms such as shiitake and oyster. It also makes dried mushrooms. In all, the facility produces more than a half-million pounds of the fleshy, spore-bearing fruits of fungus each week.

"They're extremely healthy," he told me, noting that mushrooms contain vitamin D and potassium. They're also low in calories and rich in fiber.

I learned a few other facts about mushrooms at the festival. Besides coming in handy for cooking—and dang, those portobello tacos were tasty—they're used for medicinal purposes and have been for thousands of years.

At its booth, Viking Farms, based in nearby Normangee, was selling an array of tinctures that purport to ease symptoms of menopause, improve mental clarity and boost recovery from injury. It also was selling a colorful lineup of gourmet mushrooms used for cooking, including pink and blue oysters, black pearl kings, shiitakes, and lion's manes, which look more like softball-sized pompoms than something you'd toss in a sauté pan.

I also learned that unless you're making soup or a liquid-based one-pot meal, you don't have to wash mushrooms. That just makes the caps slimy. Instead, brush off any dirt and wipe them with a damp paper towel.

At another booth I sampled mushroom coffee, which I can only describe as "earthy." (I'll stick to hot tea, thanks.) I perused a display of mushroom honey, a rack of mushroom jerky and bottles of mushroom kombucha. One vendor peddled energy shots made with a root-like fungal structure called mycelium, which looks like a wad of unspooled thread.

I chatted with Alisha Gabriel, author of the picture book *Fungi Are ... More Than Mushrooms*, and spent a few minutes listening to singer Wade Phillips belt out a few numbers next to the courthouse steps.

That's a lot of mushroom madness.

I ended my day at the Texas Mushroom Festival with a full belly and a newfound respect for the funky fungus. Who knew a *lowly* mushroom could do so many things?

The experience reminded me of the importance of Texas agriculture. Food doesn't magically appear in the grocery store; it comes from farms. And Texas farmers work hard to bring their crops to market.

Get out and celebrate them. If you're not into mushrooms, get fired up for Hill Country peaches or East Texas yams. And as a bonus, you'll get a side of small-town Texas, delivered with pride. ■

Best of the Fests

Across Texas, communities celebrate their annual harvests with old-fashioned festivals. Here are some of the better known.

Texas Citrus Fiesta
Mission, January

Texas Onion Fest
Weslaco, March

Poteet Strawberry Festival
Poteet, April

Pasadena Strawberry Festival
Pasadena, May

Jacksonville Tomato Fest
Jacksonville, June

Texas Blueberry Festival
Nacogdoches, June

Stonewall Peach JAMBoree & Rodeo
Stonewall, June

Watermelon Jubilee
Stockdale, June

Luling Watermelon Thump
Luling, June

Holland Corn Festival
Holland, June

Parker County Peach Festival
Weatherford, July

Gorman Peanut Festival
Gorman, September 12

Grapefest
Grapevine, September 17–20

Texas Rice Festival
Winnie, September 30–October 3

Floresville Peanut Festival
Floresville, October 6–10

Groves Pecan Festival
Groves, October 8–11

Avocado Festival
Pharr, October 10

East Texas Yamboree
Gilmer, October 14–17

Texas Mushroom Festival
Madisonville, October 17

Golden Sweet Potato Festival
Golden, October 24





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EACH SEPTEMBER, WE celebrate Labor Day, a nationwide tribute to the contributions American workers make to the strength and prosperity of our country.

Labor is defined as an expenditure of physical or mental effort, especially when difficult or compulsory. The employees of Karnes Electric Cooperative know that definition well.

When the lights go off—whether due to thunderstorms, wildfires or ice storms—our lineworkers leave their families to work tirelessly in harsh and dangerous conditions to restore your power. Other employees handle phone calls and dispatch crews to get electricity flowing to your home as quickly and safely as possible.

But that doesn't mean the job is a laborious punishment. It's a labor of love.

When the weather gets rough and the calls come in, employees who were safe at home often call in to see if there's anything they can do to help. We've had member service representatives simply show up to help answer calls during a crisis.

Our employees do this because they care about what they do. They care about the membership—their own friends, family and neighbors. And nothing is more important than making sure that every member is safe and sound—with the power humming—even during inclement weather.

And it's not just when the lights are off that our employees work hard. Their dedication is evident every day.

Our lineworkers go through extensive training to ensure their safety and that of their fellow crew members. Along with our office staff, they maintain our system, ensuring you have a reliable flow of power. Karnes EC is always here to educate you about the dangers of electricity, and through *Texas Co-op Power* and other avenues, we pass along tips to help keep you safe and save you money by making energy-conscious decisions.

We don't just do this because it's our job. We do it because we care about you, our members, who are our friends, family and neighbors.

Today I want to ask you to thank a co-op worker if you see one. Thank them for their commitment, their talent, their hard work and their service to the membership of this cooperative. After all, even though our offices will be closed September 7 for Labor Day, if your power goes out, we'll be on our way to fix it, holiday or not. ■



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Labor Day

Monday, September 7
Our offices will be closed in observance of the holiday.

Patriot Day

Rosh Hashanah Begins
Friday, September 11

National Voter Registration Day

Tuesday, September 15

Autumn Begins

Tuesday, September 22

ROMOLO TAVANI | GETTY IMAGES.COM



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karnesec.org



SEE THE VIDEO

EXPERIENCE THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME

Hunt Safely This Season

WITH THE ARRIVAL of dove season, Karnes Electric Cooperative encourages members to be aware of electrical equipment while hunting. Shooting electrical infrastructure is dangerous and can cause power outages and result in expensive repairs.

Every year, members experience power and internet service disruptions when shotgun pellets hit electric and fiber lines.

Keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors.

Keep clear of electrical equipment, and don't shoot at or near power lines or insulators.

Be vigilant in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.

Never place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment.

Don't shoot at birds perched on electrical wires.

Don't use electrical poles or towers to support shooting equipment or transformer boxes to steady a shot.

Know the effective range of your gun, and always identify your target before putting your finger on the trigger.

Never shoot at sound or movement—assume it's another hunter until you can clearly see an animal. ■



VISUALSPACE | GETTYIMAGES.COM



DAVE HUGHES | GETTYIMAGES.COM

Keys to a Safe Harvest

NATIONAL FARM SAFETY and Health Week is September 21–25, and Karnes Electric Cooperative would like to use the opportunity to remind members that preparation and awareness are the keys to a safe harvest.

Harvest time is one of the busiest times of the year for farmers—and among the most dangerous. We encourage farm managers to share the following information before taking to the fields to keep themselves, other farmworkers and their families safe from farm-related electrical accidents.

Start every morning by planning your day's work. Know what jobs will be near power lines and devise a plan to keep assigned workers safe. Even if clearance was safe last year, something as simple as soil buildup could make it hazardous this year.

Keep yourself and equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines in all directions at all times. Even if you don't make direct contact with a line, electricity can arc.

As in any outdoor work, be careful not to raise any equipment, such as ladders, poles or rods, into power lines. Remember, even nonmetallic materials such as lumber, tree limbs, tires, ropes and hay can conduct electricity.

Use care when raising augers or the beds of grain trucks. It can be difficult to estimate distance—especially in a mirror—and sometimes a power line is closer than it looks. Use a spotter to make certain you stay a safe distance away from power lines.

Always lower portable augers or elevators to their lowest possible level, under 14 feet, before moving or transporting them, even if you're only moving a few yards.

Be aware of increased height when loading and transporting modern tractors, which are larger with higher antennas.

Never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. If power lines near your property have sagged over time, call the cooperative to repair them.

Don't use metal poles when breaking up bridged grain inside and around bins.

Use qualified electricians to make repairs on any electrical systems.

If you're on a piece of equipment that makes contact with a power line, do not exit the equipment. When you step off, you could become the electricity's path to ground and receive a fatal shock. Call 911 and Karnes EC. Wait until cooperative workers have de-energized the line and confirmed that it's safe for you to exit.

If the vehicle is on fire and you must exit, jump clear of it with both feet together. Hop as far from the vehicle as you can with your feet together. Keeping your feet together can help prevent you from getting shocked. ■



SCHOOL SAFETY ABCs

Safety comes first:

Look left, right, then left again before crossing the street. Cross in front of the bus only after the driver signals it's OK to do so.

Find a safe place away from traffic to wait for the bus.

Stay away from the bus until it comes to a complete stop and the driver signals to enter.

Drivers who encounter a school bus with flashing red lights must stop in both directions, unless separated from the bus by a median.

Texting while driving is illegal and particularly dangerous in school zones.

Karnes EC encourages you to always practice safety.

PHOTO: SJLOCKE | ISTOCK.COM

Multigrain Pecan Waffles

2 cups low-fat buttermilk

½ cup old-fashioned rolled oats

⅔ cup whole-wheat pastry flour

⅔ cup all-purpose flour

⅓ cup chopped pecans

¼ cup whole-grain cornmeal

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1 tablespoon canola oil

2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1. In a medium bowl, mix buttermilk and oats. Set aside 15 minutes.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together flours, pecans, cornmeal, baking powder, baking soda, salt and cinnamon.
3. Stir eggs, oil and vanilla into the buttermilk-oat mixture. With a rubber spatula, mix in dry ingredients just until moistened.
4. Coat a waffle iron with cooking spray and preheat. Spoon in enough batter to cover three-quarters of the surface (about ⅔ cup for an 8-inch round waffle iron). Cook until waffles are crisp and golden brown, 4–5 minutes. Repeat with remaining batter. Serve immediately.

SERVES 6

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

ANGIE MOSIER





TEXAS DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Hurricane Preparedness Guidelines

Hurricane Season Is June 1–November 30

If you are under a hurricane warning, find safe shelter right away.

When a hurricane is 36 hours from arriving:

- ▶ Turn on your TV or radio in order to get the latest weather updates and emergency instructions.
- ▶ Restock your emergency preparedness kit. Include food and water sufficient for at least three days, medications, a flashlight, batteries, cash, and first-aid supplies. Learn how to build an emergency kit at ready.gov/build-a-kit.

When a hurricane is 18–36 hours from arriving:

- ▶ Bookmark your city or county website for quick access to storm updates and emergency instructions.
- ▶ Bring indoors loose, lightweight objects that could become projectiles in high winds (e.g., patio furniture and garbage cans); anchor objects that would be unsafe to bring inside (e.g., propane tanks); and trim or remove trees close enough to fall on a building.

When a hurricane is six to 18 hours from arriving:

- ▶ Turn on your TV or radio, or check your city or county website every 30 minutes for the latest weather updates and emergency instructions.
- ▶ Charge your cellphone so you will have a full battery in case you lose power.

When a hurricane is six hours from arriving:

- ▶ If you're not in an area that is recommended for evacuation, plan to stay at home or where you are, and let friends and family know where you are.
- ▶ Close storm shutters, and stay away from windows. Flying glass from broken windows could injure you.
- ▶ Turn your refrigerator or freezer to the coldest setting and open only when necessary. If you lose power, food will last longer. Keep a thermometer in the refrigerator to be able to check the food temperature when the power is restored.

To stay safe during a hurricane:

- ▶ If told to evacuate, do so immediately. Do not drive around barricades.
- ▶ If sheltering during high winds, go to a Federal Emergency Management Agency safe room, International Code Council 500 storm shelter, or a small, interior, windowless room or hallway on the lowest floor that is not subject to flooding.
- ▶ If trapped in a building by flooding, go to the highest level of the building. Do not climb into a closed attic; you may become trapped by rising flood water.

To stay safe after a hurricane:

- ▶ Listen to authorities for information and special instructions.
- ▶ Do not touch electrical equipment if it is wet or if you are standing in water. If it is safe to do so, turn off electricity at the main breaker or fuse box to prevent electric shock.
- ▶ Avoid wading in flood water, which can contain dangerous debris. Underground or downed power lines can also electrically charge the water.



DIVISIÓN DE ADMINISTRACIÓN DE EMERGENCIAS DE TEXAS

Preparación para huracanes

La temporada de huracanes es del 1 de junio al 30 de noviembre

Cuando un huracán está a 36 horas de llegar:

- ▶ Encienda su televisor o radio para obtener las últimas actualizaciones meteorológicas e instrucciones de emergencia.
- ▶ Reponga su kit de emergencias. Incluya alimentos y agua suficientes para al menos tres días, medicamentos, una linterna, pilas, dinero en efectivo y suministros de primeros auxilios. Aprenda como construir un kit de emergencia en ready.gov/build-a-kit.

Cuando un huracán está a 18–36 horas de llegar:

- ▶ Marque como favorito el sitio web de su ciudad o condado para el acceso rápido de las actualizaciones de tormentas e instrucciones de emergencia.
- ▶ Traiga adentro objetos sueltos y ligeros que puedan convertirse en proyectiles con vientos fuertes (por ejemplo, muebles de patio y botes de basura); sujete objetos que no serían seguros para llevar adentro (por ejemplo, tanques de propano); y recorte o retire los árboles que están lo suficientemente cerca como para caer en un edificio.

Cuando un huracán está a 6–18 horas de llegar:

- ▶ Encienda su televisor o radio, o visite el sitio web de su ciudad o condado cada 30 minutos para obtener las últimas actualizaciones meteorológicas e instrucciones de emergencia.
- ▶ Cargue su teléfono celular para que tenga una batería llena en caso de que pierda energía.

Cuando un huracán está a seis horas de llegar:

- ▶ Si no se encuentra en un área recomendada para la evacuación, planifique quedarse en su casa o donde se encuentra y avise a sus amigos y familiares donde se encuentra.
- ▶ Cierre las contraventanas y aléjese de las ventanas. Los vidrios que vuelan de las ventanas rotas podrían dañarle.
- ▶ Ajuste la temperatura de su refrigerador o congelador a la posición más fría y ábralos solo cuando sea necesario. Si pierde la energía, la comida durará por más tiempo. Mantenga un termómetro en el refrigerador para poder verificar la temperatura de los alimentos cuando se restablezca la energía.

Para mantenerse a salvo durante un huracán:

- ▶ Si se le indica que evacue, hágalo inmediatamente. No maneje alrededor de las barricadas.
- ▶ Si se refugia durante vientos fuertes, vaya a una habitación segura de la Federal Emergency Management Agency, refugio contra tormentas del International Code Council 500 o una habitación o pasillo pequeño e interior sin ventanas en el piso más bajo que no esté sujeto a inundaciones.
- ▶ Si queda atrapado en un edificio por inundación, vaya al nivel más alto del edificio. No suba a un ático cerrado porque usted puede quedar atrapado por las crecientes inundaciones.

Para mantenerse a salvo después de un huracán:

- ▶ Escuche a las autoridades para obtener información e instrucciones especiales.
- ▶ No toque el equipo eléctrico si está mojado o si está parado en el agua. Si es seguro hacerlo, apague la electricidad en el interruptor principal o en la caja de fusibles para evitar una descarga eléctrica.
- ▶ Evite vadear en el agua de la inundación, que puede contener desechos peligrosos. Las líneas eléctricas subterráneas o caídas también pueden cargar el agua eléctricamente.



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Well-placed trees can save you up to 25% on your home's air conditioning bill, and a shady, grassy yard can be much cooler than a sunny, paved yard. Plus, mindful landscaping can provide erosion control and clean the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen.

Plant deciduous trees on the south and southwest sides of your house to provide shade from the sun in the summer. After the trees lose their leaves in winter, the sunshine will help heat your home. Plant evergreen trees and shrubs on the north and northwest sides of your home to provide shade year-round.

Evergreens also provide a windbreak, so plant them where they will protect the home from cold wind in winter. For maximum protection, plant windbreaks at a distance from your home of two to three times the expected height of the mature tree.

Windbreaks have the added benefit of reducing noise and smells, adding privacy, and creating wildlife habitat.

In more temperate areas, consider arranging landscaping features to direct summer breezes through the house.

Before planting trees or other plants, consider their proximity to the house and power lines.

Avoid planting any trees too close to the home if they require frequent watering.

If there are overhead power lines in the neighborhood, plan to leave plenty of space between what will be the tree's mature size and the lines.

To identify the location of underground power lines and other utilities, call 811 before you dig. ■

Karnes Electric Cooperative

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Toll-Free 1-888-807-3952

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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

Keeping Watch

Dedicated volunteers help keep Galveston's beaches a safe haven for fun in the sun

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTO BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

A **YELLOW FLAG** flaps from a pole along the Galveston Seawall, a notice to beachgoers that the surf is up slightly and they should stay alert if they venture into the water.

Robert Krout points out the marker, then leads the way down the steps onto a sandy beach streaked with sargassum. As part of the city's Wave Watchers program, Krout and about 30 other volunteers patrol these beaches, monitoring for people in trouble and talking with visitors about how to stay safe.

Krout, retired chair of the music therapy department at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and a part-time ukulele instructor, signed up to attend the city's first Wave Watcher Academy 10 years ago after reading a notice about the program in the Galveston newspaper. He had worked as a pool lifeguard in California and New York and enjoyed strolling the seawall.

As a Wave Watcher, he figured, he could help his community at the same time.

"One of the reasons I moved to Galveston was to be near a beach," says Krout, 70. "It's a great volunteer opportunity and a reason to talk to people."

Wave Watchers spend a week each year in training, where they learn about hazards such as venomous marine life and dangerous currents and how the professional first responders of the Galveston Island Beach Patrol operate. When Krout reports for duty, he wears a yellow whistle around his neck and packs a waist belt with bandages, antiseptic wipes, aloe vera gel, a CPR mask, insect repellent, hand sanitizer and water.

It's early in the season and skies are cloudy, so the beach isn't busy today. But as we walk past two children playing in the surf, Krout's eyes scan the beach, looking for their parents. Once he sees they're paying attention, we move on.

Farther down, we spot a venomous Portuguese man-of-war, puffed up like a blue plastic baggie on the sand. The jellyfish-like creature can deliver a powerful sting, even if it's dead. Krout, who knows fresh water can worsen the pain, carries a bottle of saline to douse any injuries.

Wave Watchers don't enforce beach rules but act as a force multiplier for the beach patrol's guard staff of about 80, says Patrol Chief Austin Kirwin. He hopes to expand the program.

"It's been very beneficial for us, just having local citizens who are already on the beach keeping an eye out," he says. "We train them on what to look for and how to spot a rip current and give beach safety talks."

Galveston sees an average of six to eight drownings each year. Many occur at night, often near places like jetties, where rip currents form. "The more trained eyes we have out there, the better it is for the whole community," Kirwin says.

Unless there's an emergency, lifeguards stay in their stands, where they focus on what's happening in the water. But Wave Watchers can walk the beach, interacting with visitors and dispensing advice, like what to do if you're caught in a rip current. (Don't fight it; let it carry you out, then swim parallel to shore to escape.)

They never enter the water to make rescues and can't provide medication, but they alert Beach Patrol to problems. They also help with crowd control in case of an incident, reunite lost children with their parents and remind beachgoers to tread carefully if they walk on the jetties.

The volunteers concentrate their efforts between the Galveston Fishing Pier and East Beach, a 10-mile stretch that includes Stewart Beach, where thousands congregate on summer weekends.

"They're a huge sigh of relief," says Genevieve Weber, a lifeguard working a stand just west of Pleasure Pier. "Things unfold so quickly out here. Everything happens in a matter of seconds."

For Wave Watchers, it's all about keeping people out of dangerous situations before they happen—and, sometimes, cheering up someone who's having a bad day. For that, Krout carries a pouch filled with shark's teeth he's found on the beach. If you get stung by a jellyfish, he might just hand you one. ■

Robert Krout is one of about 30 volunteers in Galveston's Wave Watchers program who patrol beaches looking for people in trouble and urging safety.



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The Line in the Sand

Where does West Texas begin? The 100th meridian, more or less

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY THE BRAVE UNION

IF YOU EXAMINE any good map of Texas, you'll notice a natural division of East and West Texas that runs from the eastern edge of the Panhandle down to Abilene and San Angelo and on past Uvalde to Carrizo Springs and Laredo.

On the west side of that line is arid land, and on the east side, it's wetter and greener. It becomes increasingly dry as you go west and wet and humid as you go east.

This line is better known as the 100th meridian, and it maintains this calculus of wet and dry lands all the way up into Canada.

John Wesley Powell, famous for exploring and mapping the Colorado River and the Grand Canyon over 150 years ago, was one of the first conservationists to see that the 100th meridian served as a demarcation.

"Passing from east to west across this belt a wonderful transformation is observed," he wrote. "On the east a luxuriant growth of grass is seen, and the gaudy flowers ... make the prairie landscape beautiful.

"Passing westward, species after species of luxuriant grass and brilliant flowering plants disappear; the ground

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



gradually becomes naked, with bunch grasses here and there; now and then a thorny cactus is seen, and the yucca plant thrusts out its sharp bayonets."

Powell, for whom Lake Powell in Arizona and Utah is named, would become the head of the U.S. Geological Survey in 1881. He used his knowledge of the West to create a prescriptive map for water management.

Powell took his map to a Senate committee in 1890 and suggested dividing the Western U.S. into water districts that would be managed by the people living along the rivers rather than the states. He advocated for need over greed.

The senators practically rioted, as this flew in the face of the fever dream of Darwinian development that had dominated the Western states. The gold must be mined, the forests harvested, the rivers dammed and the railroads built.

Powell argued for sustainability and good stewardship of the Earth. Powell was against big dams—ironic, given that his namesake lake was created by Glen Canyon Dam. He preferred smaller, more democratic irrigation systems that he believed would be more efficient for the land and serve more people more equitably.

As we know, the arid West was not developed as Powell envisioned, but it's interesting to consider what might have been if Powell had had his way.

What's more interesting to me are the facts on the ground these days. The geological truths that defined the 100th meridian in Texas a century and a half ago are now truer for the 98th meridian, running just west of Fort Worth, east of San Antonio and west of Corpus Christi. This tells us that the Texas water challenges of the future will be far greater than any our ancestors faced. ■

Pancakes and Waffles

Breakfast will never be the same after tasting these morning staples

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Growing up, there was always a jar of applesauce in our fridge. One morning we were greeted with apple pancakes, and I haven't looked at applesauce the same since. These are thicker and cakier than your typical pancake, but isn't cake for breakfast simply sweeter?

Apple Pancakes

TOPPING

4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter,
plus more for serving
2 medium apples, cored and diced
¼ cup brown sugar
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon salt

PANCAKES

1½ cups complete buttermilk
pancake mix
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 cup cinnamon applesauce
¼ cup water, plus more as needed

- 1. TOPPING** In a skillet over medium heat, melt butter. Add apples, brown sugar, cinnamon and salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the apples start to soften and the sugar is dissolved and syrupy, 3–5 minutes. Remove from heat until ready to serve pancakes.
- 2. PANCAKES** Preheat oven to 200 degrees. In a bowl, combine pancake mix and cinnamon. Stir in applesauce and water until just moistened. If batter is too thick to pour, add water. Preheat and lightly grease a nonstick skillet or griddle over medium heat.
- 3.** Pour ¼ cup batter onto skillet or griddle, repeating as allowed for pan size. Cook each pancake until bubbles form on the surface. Flip and cook until the second side is golden brown, 1–3 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low if the pancakes are cooking too quickly.
- 4.** Keep cooked pancakes warm in preheated oven, and repeat with remaining batter. Serve warm with butter and reheated apple topping.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Poblano Breakfast Scramble.





Oatmeal Waffles

BEVERLY ANTHES
FANNIN EC

Anthes' easy waffles are a delicious breakfast. They're crisp on the outside and fluffy inside. Serve warm, topped with fresh fruit or maple syrup.

- 1½ cups flour
- 1 cup quick-cooking oats
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1½ cups milk
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- ⅛ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter, melted
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. In a large mixing bowl, stir together flour, oats, baking powder and cinnamon.
2. In a small mixing bowl, whisk together milk, eggs, vanilla, butter and brown sugar.
3. Add wet ingredients to flour mixture and stir to combine.
4. Preheat and lightly grease waffle iron. Pour batter into waffle iron, close and cook according to manufacturer's directions. Keep cooked waffles warm in preheated oven, and repeat with remaining batter.

SERVES 6



\$500 WINNER

Sweet Potato Waffles

TRACEY STEWART
SAM HOUSTON EC



This is the most delicious way to transform dinner leftovers into brunch. Hearty, crispy and lightly spiced, I was blown away by these waffles. After testing this recipe, you can surely find me cooking up an extra batch of mashed sweet potatoes to whip up these waffles on the weekend.

- 2½ cups flour
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

- 1 cup mashed sweet potatoes
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup (1 stick) melted butter, cooled
- Maple syrup, for serving

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. In a large bowl, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt and cinnamon.
2. In another large bowl, whisk together sweet potatoes, buttermilk, eggs, vanilla and butter.
3. Add the flour mixture to the sweet potato mixture and stir to combine, being careful not to overmix. If the batter is too thick, gradually add 2–4 tablespoons water.
4. Preheat and lightly grease waffle iron. Ladle batter onto waffle iron, being careful not to overfill, close and cook according to manufacturer's directions.
5. Keep cooked waffles warm in preheated oven, and repeat with remaining batter.
6. Serve warm with maple syrup.

SERVES 4

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

LEMONY DELIGHTS DUE SEP 10

When life gives you lemons, what do you make? Submit your delicious citrus treats for a chance at an easy-peasy \$500. Watch for the recipes in February 2027.

UPCOMING: WINNER, WINNER CHICKEN DINNER DUE OCT 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

Pineapple Upside Down Pancake With Pineapple Cream Syrup

JAN BOX
TRINITY VALLEY EC

Dessert for breakfast? Sign me up! I loved the presentation of these pancakes. They do take a little patience when flipping, but once you get the hang of it, these pancakes are so much fun to make—and even better to eat.

1 can pineapple slices (16 ounces) in syrup
1 cup sugar
4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
6 tablespoons heavy cream
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 cups prepared pancake batter
Maraschino cherries, for topping
Whipped cream, for topping

1. Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Drain pineapple slices, reserving syrup. To a



saucepan, add reserved syrup and sugar. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, at a soft boil about 25 minutes or until syrup turns golden. Remove from heat and stir in butter, heavy cream, salt and cinnamon.

2. Preheat and lightly grease skillet over medium-high heat. Pour about ⅓ cup pancake batter onto skillet.

Don't Overdo It

Take care to mix pancake or waffle ingredients just until combined. A few lumps in the batter are OK. But overmixing overworks the gluten, which results in a dense pancake. Go easy and enjoy tender, fluffier pancakes and waffles.

—Vianney Rodriguez

3. Cook until bubbles form on the surface of the pancake. Place a pineapple ring into batter and press slightly. Flip pancake and press into skillet and finish cooking. Keep cooked pancakes warm in preheated oven, and repeat with remaining batter.

4. Serve warm with a cherry, pineapple syrup and a dollop of whipped cream on each pancake.

SERVES 6

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SEPTEMBER 2026 **TEXAS CO-OP POWER** 29



COURTESY CHET GARNER

The Mother of All State Parks

Explore history amid peace and quiet along the Leon River

BY CHET GARNER

EVERYONE WHO VISITS Texas' first official state park feels like they've been let in on a quiet secret. This 400-acre hideaway between Temple and Waco doesn't get the attention (or crowds) of Hill Country destinations like Enchanted Rock State Natural Area or Garner State Park.

But from its quiet perch along the Leon River, Mother Neff State Park waits patiently, like a front porch swing, inviting you to slow down and breathe in some fresh air—and maybe put your phone away for a little while.

The story of this park—and really our entire state park system—goes back to Isabella “Mother” Neff and her son, Gov. Pat Neff. The family owned this stretch of riverfront land that became a local hot spot for picnicking, swimming and fishing long before a “state park” was even a thing. When Mother Neff died in 1921, she made a very Texas-sized decision to leave the land to the state so everyone else could enjoy it too. Not a bad legacy.

I started my visit by hitting the limestone trails, winding beneath a canopy of oaks before dropping into a shady ravine. That's where I found one of the park's rock shelters—massive stone overhangs that Native American tribes used for thousands of years. Turns out, good real estate along the Leon River has always been in demand.

From there, I made my way to the park's iconic stone water tower, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The climb to the observation deck on top isn't exactly Mount Everest, but it's enough to earn a view of the sprawling valley below—and justify a solid snack afterward.

Mother Neff State Park may not be the biggest or flashiest, but it just might be the most meaningful—a place where history, nature and a mother's generosity quietly collide. ■

ABOVE Chet at Mother Neff State Park, which used to be the property of Gov. Pat Neff's family. Neff held office in the 1920s.

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.

SEPTEMBER

6

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

10

Abilene [10–19] West Texas Fair and Rodeo, (325) 677-4376, westtexasfairrodeo.com

Corsicana [10–13, 17–20] The Guys, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

11

Brenham [11–19] Washington County Fair, (979) 836-4112, washingtoncofair.com

12

Chappell Hill Airing of the Quilts, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Fairfield Show of Wheels, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Luling Luling Foundation Youth Grill-Off, (830) 875-2438, lulingfoundation.org

Stephenville Morgan Mill Arts and Crafts Fair, (972) 467-8646, bit.ly/mmartsandcrafts

18

Royse City [18–19] North Texas Antique Tractor & Engine Club Show & Pull, (214) 934-2414, north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net

19

Azle Silver Creek Lord's Acre, (817) 607-8039, facebook.com/silvercreekmc

Blanco Classic Car Show, (512) 632-0648, blancoclassiccarshow.com



Pick of the Month

Salt Festival

Grand Saline, September 24–26

gssaltfestival@gmail.com

facebook.com/gssaltfest

Celebrate the heritage, community and spirit that define this corner of East Texas. The festival includes street dances, cornhole and horseshoe tournaments, yoga, a parade, petting zoo, classic car show, 5K race, and three nights of live music. Country music artist Tracy Byrd, above, headlines Saturday night.

Fredericksburg Classic Car & Truck Show, (830) 990-4433, pecangrovestore.com

Fort Worth [19–20] Bluey's Big Play, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

25

Giddings [25–26] Texas Word Wrangler Book Festival, (979) 542-2716, www.giddingspubliclibrary.org

26

Bertram Oatmeal Festival, (512) 882-2992, oatmealfestival.org

Bryan Brazos Valley Beekeepers Association Bee School, (979) 218-3070, bvbeeks.org

MORE EVENTS >

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



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WWW.HISTORICSCHOOLS.ORG



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

SEPTEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

Fairfield Breakfast With Santa, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Lakehills Medina Lake Cajun Festival, (830) 460-0600, cajunfestival-medina-lake.com

Kerrville [26-27] Supertri Kerrville, kerrvilletri.com

27

Giddings Texas Wendish Fest, (979) 366-2441, texaswends.org

Luling Quilts & Cars, (512) 567-5091, facebook.com/quiltsandcars

Meyersville Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church Fall Festival, (361) 275-3868, stspeterpaulalloysius.org

OCTOBER

1

Smithville [1-Nov. 15] Airing of the Quilts, (979) 540-9222, bit.ly/airingofthequilts

2

Stephenville [2-3] Town N Country Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (817) 676-5165, bit.ly/townncountryquiltguild

3

Granbury Romancing the Monarch, (817) 579-3280, lakegranburymastergardeners.org

5

Corsicana [5-29] Piece-makers' Quilt Guild of Corsicana Quilt Show, corsicanaquiltguild.com

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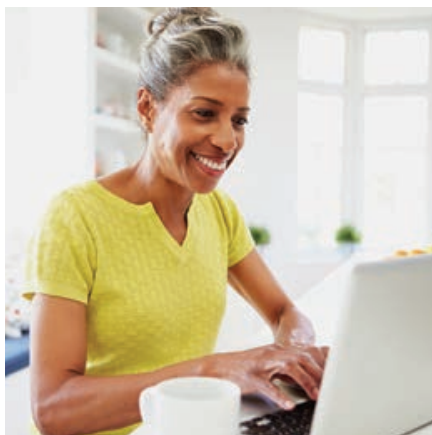
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1

1 MIKE ZARELLA
PEDERNALES EC

"Youngsters gather on the arena railings for a better view of the opening ceremonies of the Blanco County Fair & Rodeo."

2 HOLLY BUFKIN
BIG COUNTRY EC

"Unwavering grit as this paint bronc shows the untamed heart that defines rodeo."

3 BOB NORRIS
PEDERNALES EC

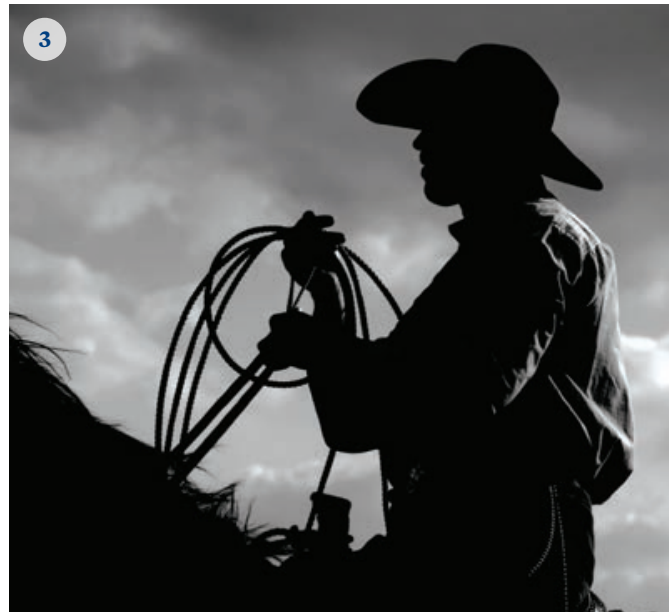
A silhouette of a cowboy at a rodeo.

4 LAURA BREWER
COSERV

North Texas Fair & Rodeo cowboys wait their turn to ride.



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

BARNs DUE SEP 10

SWAMPs DUE OCT 10

IN THE GARDEN DUE NOV 10



ENTER
ONLINE

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



Speaking of Long Commutes

Finding silver linings—and snacks—when it's hard to find childcare

BY ERICA FLOCKE

ILLUSTRATION BY
GWEN KERAVAL

"HOW WAS YOUR day today?"

No response. "Did you have fun?" Still nothing.

At the stoplight on Ranch Road 12 and Hunter Road in San Marcos, I laughed to myself and thought about how silly this one-sided conversation must sound. I glanced in the mirror clipped to the backseat headrest and caught my 13-month-old daughter's grin. She can't talk yet, but I can't wait for the day she finally answers back.

I live and work in Wimberley, a town that prides itself on being family friendly. And it is—except when it comes to daycare. There's only one option in town for babies her age, and I've been on the waitlist for more than a year. So every weekday we make the 30-minute drive to San Marcos, where she goes to daycare. That

adds up to two hours of commuting each day: one hour with my daughter, one hour solo.

We've learned to make the most of it. Together we listen to audiobooks and albums I think she should know. While some babies get *The Wheels on the Bus*, mine gets Turnpike Troubadours. I like to tell myself it's making her smarter, or at least building character. Only time will tell.

I narrate the drive like a tour guide: "Look at that bird!" or "We're going over the river." She probably understands none of it, yet she looks at me and smiles like she's clued in anyway.

Some days, traffic crawls along so slowly that I have to break out the emergency snack stash I keep in the car. Fruit bars or a lone teething cookie. By the time we reach the next stoplight, she's happily munching or asleep.

I notice the same cars each morning and afternoon, their drivers as familiar to me as neighbors at this point. I wonder about the people inside. Do they have a baby in the backseat listening to a Lyle Lovett album for the very first time too?

I imagine a tiny community of parents and children, each of us on our own little journey, connected by the same roads, the same traffic lights, the same shared struggle of making it work.

Sometimes I think about it more broadly. In a state as rural as Texas, countless parents are on even longer drives for childcare, and I can't help but wonder how they fill those hours.

I know this is just a phase. We won't be commuting forever, and one day I know I'm going to miss these drives and how my baby smiled at me from the backseat. But for now, I think my daughter knows every curve of Ranch Road 12 better than most grown-ups. When she does learn to talk, she'll probably have plenty to say about it. ■



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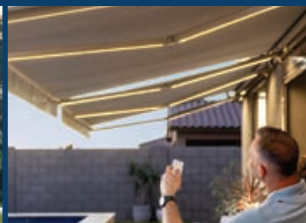
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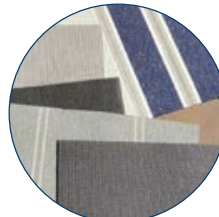
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