

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

4.8 ★★★★★

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



"I have my old phone number! And I'm saving almost \$100 each month over my old phone company which relies on copper wires." **Karen, 78**



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

community phone

How It Works... Easy as 1-2-3

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Alford, 84, Navy Veteran



1



Home Phone Base Plug our home phone base into a power outlet.

2



Home Phone Plug a phone into the jack of our home phone base.

3



Local cell towers Automatically connects to local cell towers.

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or Visit: TryCommunityPhone.org

May 2026



12

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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Mother's Days
By Cayt Calhoun

ON THE COVER

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

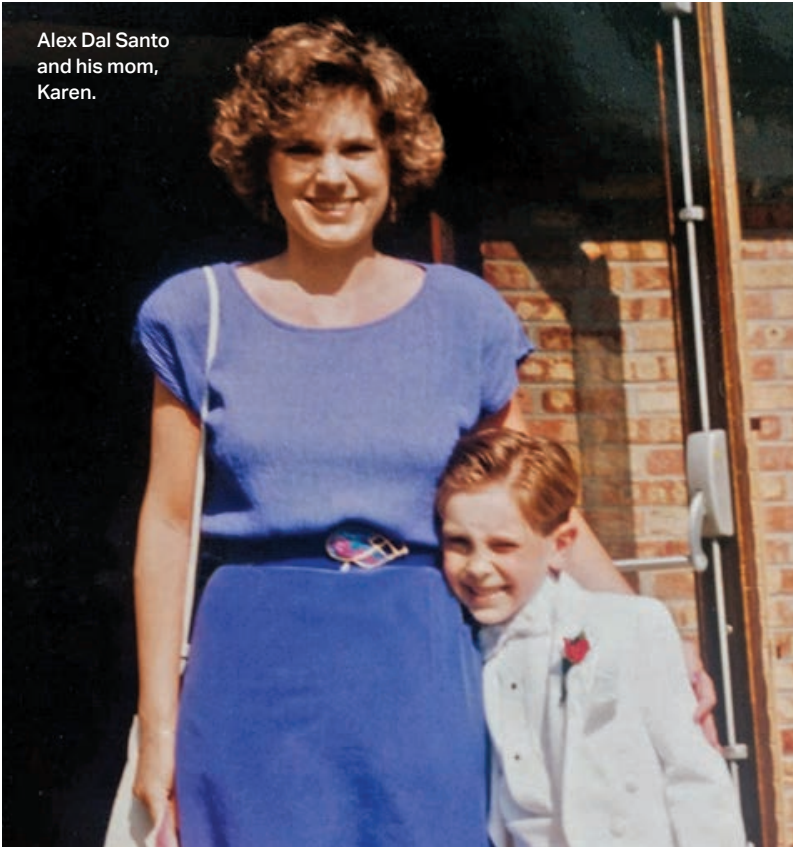
Photo by Erich Schlegel

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.



ENTER ONLINE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Moms are ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our 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

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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.

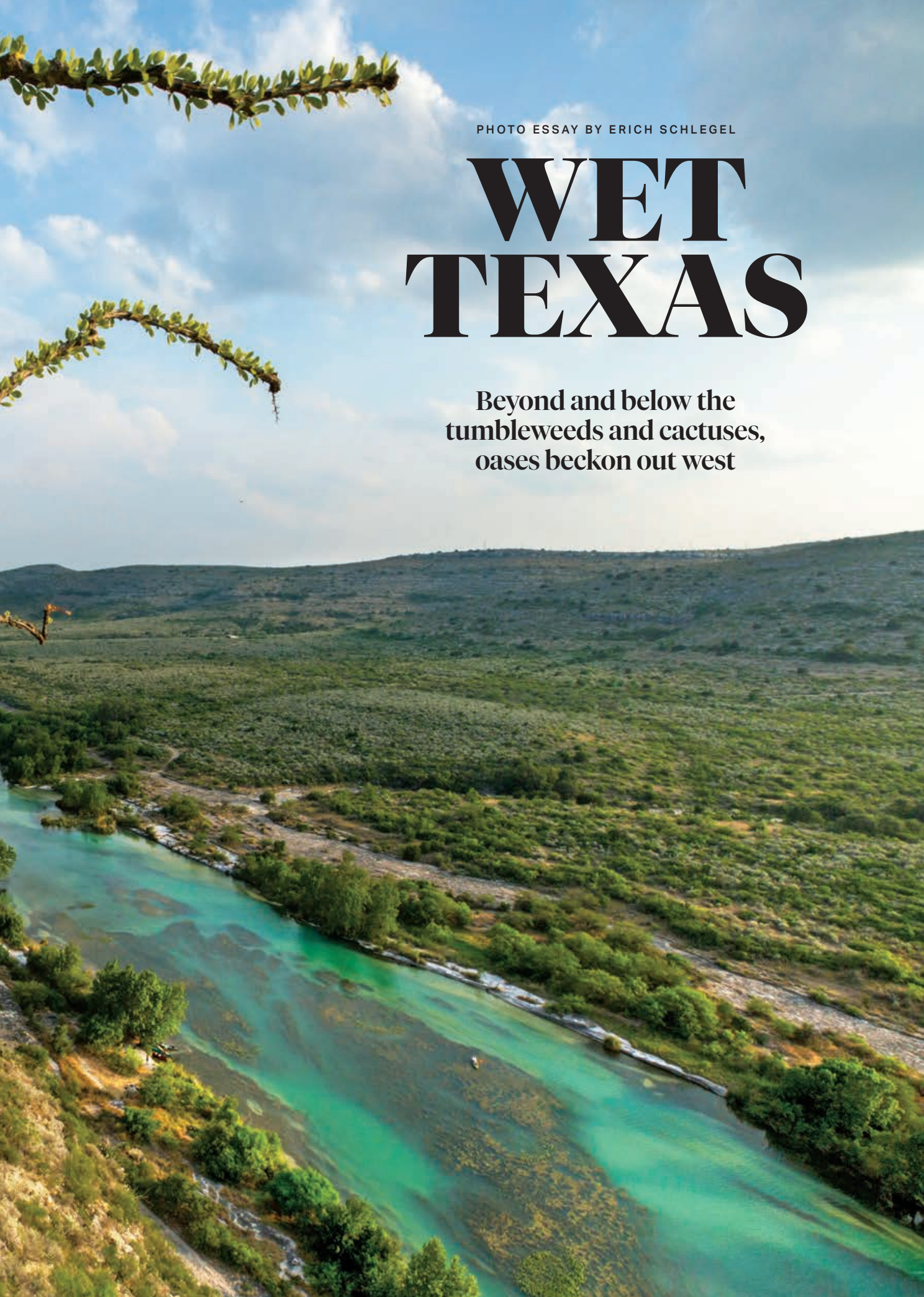
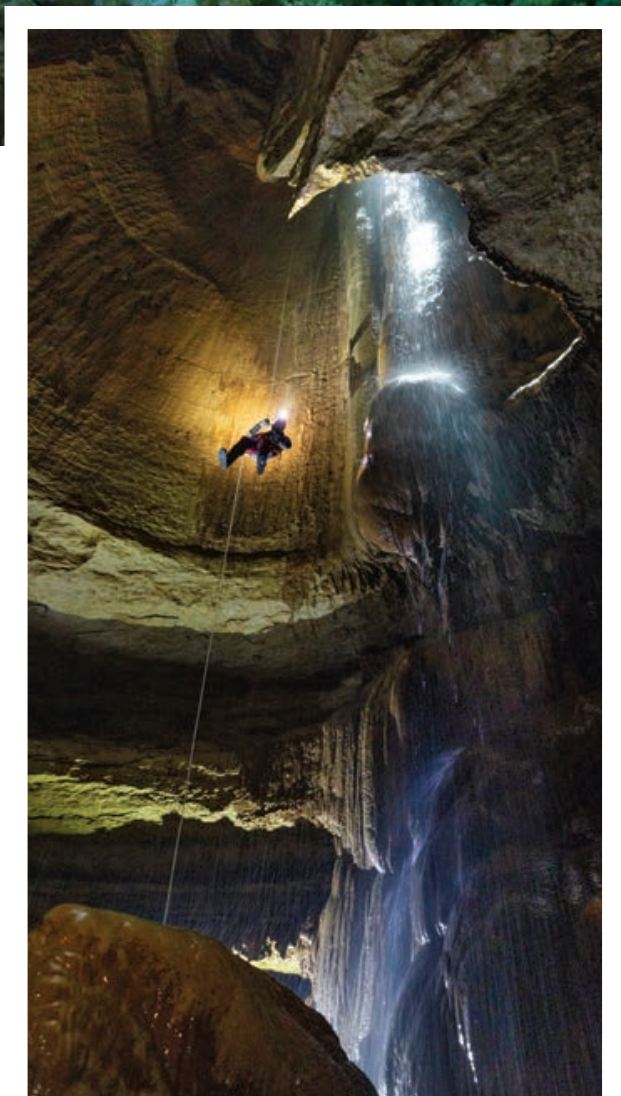
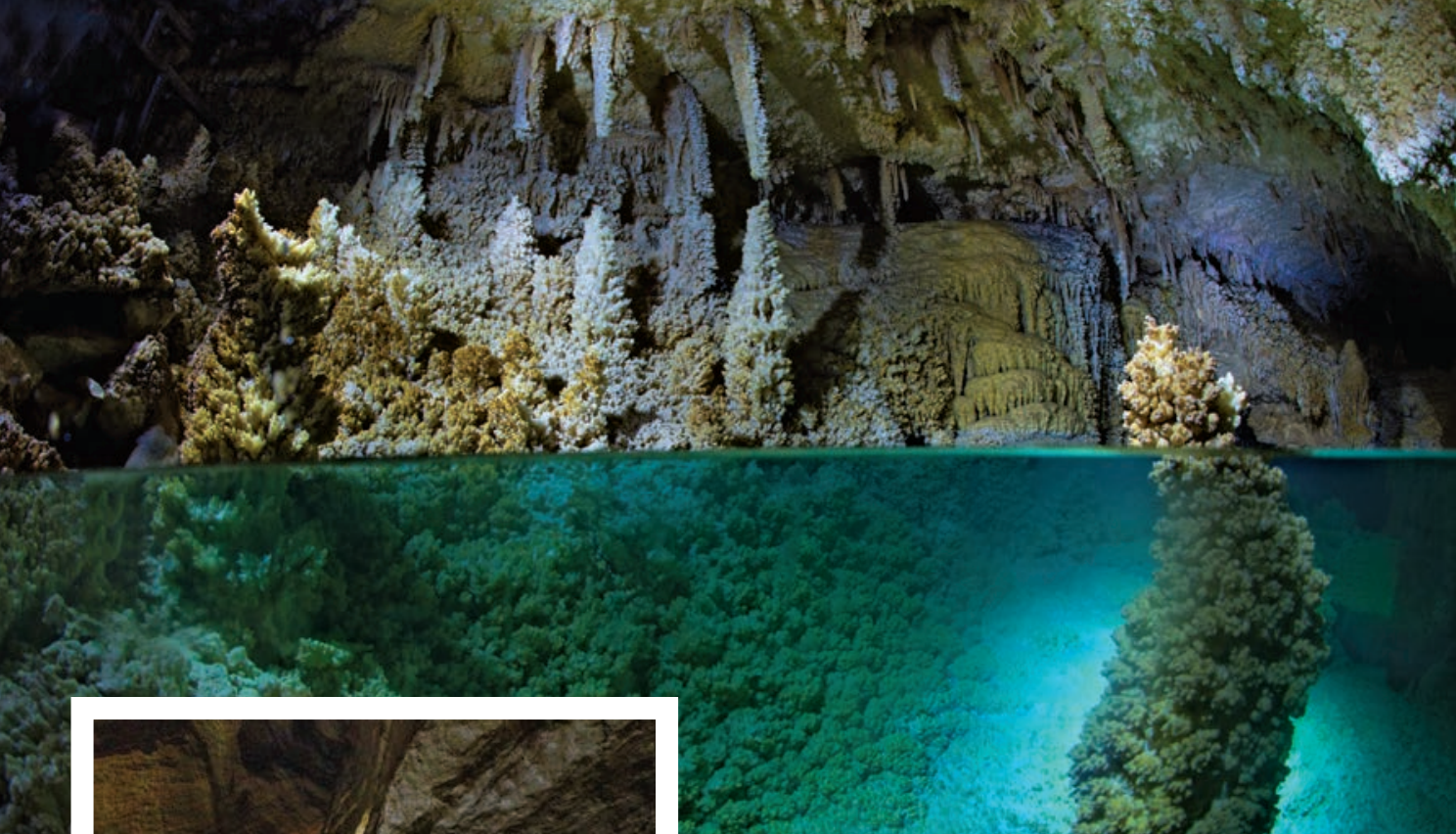
An aerial photograph of a wide river with vibrant turquoise water, winding through a lush green valley. The surrounding landscape is covered in dense vegetation, with rolling hills in the distance under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, a tree branch with green leaves hangs from the top left corner.

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 structure is visible on the rocky bank. A small, dark figure of a person can be seen in the water near the bottom center of the frame.

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.

 Scan the QR code or visit gaultfilm.com to learn more about *The Stones Are Speaking* and for streaming options.



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| 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 |
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| 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 |
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Turning the Page ...

WITH SPRING BLOOMING all around and days getting longer, Houston County Electric Cooperative is looking at its own new beginning. On May 1, we will move about 50 yards to the west of our current headquarters and into our new office and warehouse facility.

I imagine some of members have questions about the need for a new facility and wonder how we can justify the cost. It has been a long, deliberate process led by our board. In fact, the board delayed action on a new building multiple times after major storms over the past decade.

Our board could have continued focusing on short-term, get-by solutions. We could have continued operating in a facility that floods on a regular basis where we maintain a funnel system above our ceiling tiles to divert and catch water when it rains. The foundation is cracked in so many places the building constantly shifts. We could continue plumbing repairs, adjusting doors to open and close properly, rolling backwards in chairs and tying drawers closed so they do not fall open.

Thankfully our Houston County EC Board of Directors has a vision of service—not only a vision to serve members today but to serve future generations. Our board prioritizes safety, reliability and affordability, and they understand how critical it is to reflect those same values where Houston County EC employees operate. It is difficult to demand service restoration during a storm when our members are without power while employees fight to keep offices from flooding.

The new facility incorporates Houston County EC's focus on service to our membership throughout the design. We have a hardened dispatch area capable of operating in almost every imaginable condition. We have a drive-thru window for member convenience. We have a safe working environment allowing employees to focus on serving you opposed to repairing our office building. We have training space, and we have community room space for public use.

The project remains on budget at \$16 million, and our board remains committed to providing affordable service. We will do our best to minimize any financial impact to members. The new facility is an asset that will enable high-quality service for decades to come.

We will tear down the old office for parking space. Many of us have spent many hours, days and years behind these walls serving our members. These walls have carried us through every emergency event you can imagine—the pandemic, tornadoes, hurricanes, ice storms and rolling blackouts. It has been our home away from home.

As we tear down our old facility, we are turning the page to a new chapter of Houston County EC service. Please bear with us a bit longer as we finish construction. Parking will be limited for the next few months. You might use this as an opportunity to try out our new drive-thru window.

We look forward to inviting you to come tour your “new” cooperative this fall. ■





Pardon Our Mess

We appreciate your patience as we move into the new HCEC headquarters! During this transition, parking will be limited until our new lot is completed in fall 2026. For your convenience, our drive-thru is open for quick and easy payment transactions. We can't wait to welcome you to tour the new facility soon!

ACILO | ISTOCK.COM

Calendar Photo Contest



ALL PHOTOS MUST BE TAKEN IN THE HCEC SERVICE TERRITORY. WE ARE LOOKING FOR PHOTOS THAT BEST REPRESENT THE PLACE WE CALL HOME!

for entry form & more information:
houstoncountyelec.com/calendar-contest

SUBMISSIONS DUE: AUGUST 7, 2026

Houston County Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

CONTACT US

P.O. Box 52
Crockett, TX 75835
Local (936) 544-5641
Toll-Free 1-800-657-2445
Web houstoncountyelec.com

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24/7

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1-800-970-4232

ABOUT HOUSTON COUNTY EC

HCEC owns and maintains more than 5,100 miles of line to provide electric service to more than 15,000 members in Anderson, Angelina, Cherokee, Freestone, Houston, Leon, Madison, Trinity and Walker counties.

BUSINESS HOURS

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

BOARD MEETING

Fourth Tuesday, 4 p.m.*

*Subject to change. To verify, please call.

MEMBER SERVICE

For general information during business hours: (936) 544-5641 local, 1-800-657-2445 toll-free

- To report an outage, press 1.
- To update your contact information, press 2.
- To speak to a member services representative regarding your account, press 4.
- Para hablar con un representante de habla español, presione 5.
- To connect, disconnect or transfer service, press 6.
- To report outdoor lighting issues or other nonemergencies regarding your electric service, press 7.

VISIT US ONLINE

houstoncountyelec.com



Check us out at
TexasCoopPower.com/houston



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

Dorothy H. Goodrum Scholarship Recipients



Cameron Bridges
Slocum High School



Madisyn Burleson
Lovelady High School



Addison Carney
Lovelady High School



Quannah Dudley
Centerville High School (Leon Co.)



Zoey Eason
Slocum High School



Tristin Eddins
Apple Springs High School



Taylor Finch
Central High School



Emily Henderson
Homeschool



Nathaniel Horne
Horne Family Homeschool



Lillian Largent
Centerville High School (Leon. Co)



Shawna Merchant
Lovelady High School



Sophie Oldham
Apple Springs High School



Colton Rains
TX Virtual Academy Hallsville



Sam Rains
Lovelady High School



Brylee Ryder
Buffalo High School



Carter Sbrusch
Slocum High School



Coy Smith
Kennard High School



Skylar Stevenson
Kennard High School



Claire Stewart
Homeschool



Curt Tucker
Latexo High School

PINE-ING FOR FUN!



There's something special about summertime in East Texas — the way the sunlight filters through tall pines, the hum of crickets in the background, and the feeling that adventure is never too far down the road. You don't have to pack a suitcase or hop on a plane to find something memorable. In fact, some of the best getaways are waiting just beyond your own backyard.

Right here, behind the Pine Curtain, beauty is within reach - and so are the moments that matter most.

From quick day trips to easy overnight escapes, roll the windows down, take the scenic route, and get ready to rediscover the place we call home — one weekend at a time.

RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

Easy outings & hidden gems just minutes from home - no planning required



CADDO MOUNDS

Address: 1649 State Road 21, Alto, TX 75925

Hours: Tuesday–Sunday, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Closed Mondays

Website: thc.texas.gov/historic-sites/caddo-mounds

Admission: Adult \$5, Senior/Veteran/Teacher/First Responder \$3, Child (6-17) \$2, Child (5 and under) Free

Information: Visitors can explore the history of the Caddo people—who settled in the Neches River Valley over 1,200 years ago—through guided and self-guided tours, featuring a large village site and hundreds of artifacts showcasing their advanced and well-organized society.



SAM HOUSTON MEMORIAL MUSEUM

Address: 1836 Sam Houston Avenue, Huntsville, TX 77340

Hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 9:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Sunday, 12:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m., Closed Mondays & Holidays

Website: www.samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com

Admission: Adult \$6, Senior (65+) \$5, SHSU Faculty/Staff \$4, Children (6-18) \$4, Children (5 and under)/SHSU Students with ID/Veterans Free

Information: The Sam Houston Memorial Museum, established in 1936 as a Texas Centennial project, sits on land originally purchased by Sam Houston in 1847. Today, the 15-acre site offers a glimpse into his legacy and the rich history of the property.



NARANJO MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Address: 5104 South First Street, Lufkin, TX 75901

Hours: Monday - Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Sunday, 1:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Website: naranjomuseum.org

Admission: Adult \$8, Child (4-18) \$5, Child (3 and under) Free

Information: Explore prehistoric wonders at Naranjo Museum of Natural History, where families can get up close to dinosaur fossils, ancient artifacts, and hands-on exhibits that bring the story of life on Earth to life for all ages.



HONORABLE MENTIONS

Ratcliff Lake, Ratcliff
Crockett Skate, Crockett
Salmon Lake Park, Grapeland
Texas State Railroad, Palestine
The Curious Museum, Palestine
Texas Prison Museum, Huntsville
Fort Boggy State Park, Centerville
Mission Tejas State Park, Grapeland
Crockett Lakeside Resort & Marina, Crockett
Sam Houston Statue & Huntsville Visitor Center, Huntsville

HIT THE ROAD (AND BE HOME BY SUPPER)

Pack up the car and enjoy a full day of adventure, all within a short drive.

AGGIELAND SAFARI

Address: 18075 FM 974, Bryan, TX 77808

Hours: Thursday - Monday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Website: aggielandsafari.com

Admission: Pricing dependent on desired package

Information: Feed zebras, llamas, and bison (and 300+ other animals) from your vehicle, then, explore the Walkabout Adventure Zoo with 50 + species and educational exhibits. Animal Encounters are also available for an unforgettable up-close experience with your favorite animals!



DISCOVERY SCIENCE PLACE

Address: 308 N. Broadway Ave. Tyler, TX 75702

Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Website: discoveryscienceplace.org

Admission: Adult \$10, Child/Student \$10, Military \$7, Senior (65+) \$8

Information: A dynamic, hands-on children's museum where young minds can examine, explore, play, and discover wonder in the world around them. It features state-of-the-art exhibits, including immersive play that ignites curiosity through fun, interactive experiences.



DR PEPPER MUSEUM

Address: 300 South 5th Street
Waco, TX 76701

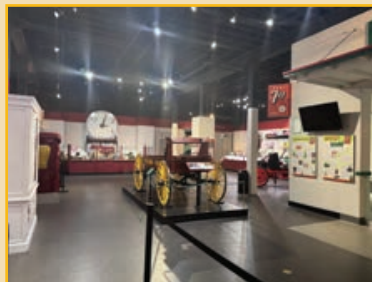
Hours: Monday - Thursday, 10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. and Friday - Sunday, 10:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Website: drpeppermuseum.com

Admission: General Admission (5+) \$12, Children (4 and under) Free

Information: Visitors can expect a fun, interactive look at the history of one of America's most iconic soft drinks. Housed in a historic bottling plant, the museum features multiple floors of exhibits filled with vintage memorabilia, old advertisements, and stories about how Dr Pepper was

created and grew into a global brand.



STAYCATION

Don't want to travel? No worries - here are some fun ideas to do at home!

HAVE AN INDOOR/OUTDOOR SCAVENGER HUNT

Hunt for small toys, junk drawer items, or even phrases in a book!



ARTS & CRAFTS!

So many options for arts & crafts with simple things at home! Make homemade playdoh, puffy sidewalk paint, bubble paint, mud pie slime, and so much more!



PAINT & HIDE ROCKS IN YOUR TOWN!

Paint and hide rocks in public areas throughout your town to inspire kindness!

PLAY BALLOON TENNIS

Grab a few fly swatters and blow up some balloons to enjoy an easy game of tennis!



GO CAMPING INDOORS

Clear a space large enough to make a blanket fort, and make s'mores!

MAKE AN OBSTACLE COURSE!

Use outdoor items to make obstacles, and provide popsicles as prizes, of course!

PLAY "MINUTE-TO-WIN-IT" AT HOME!

Search the web for activities using common household items! Cut up a cereal box and create a puzzle, or "bowl" with cups and a ball! The ideas are endless!

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 peazoid 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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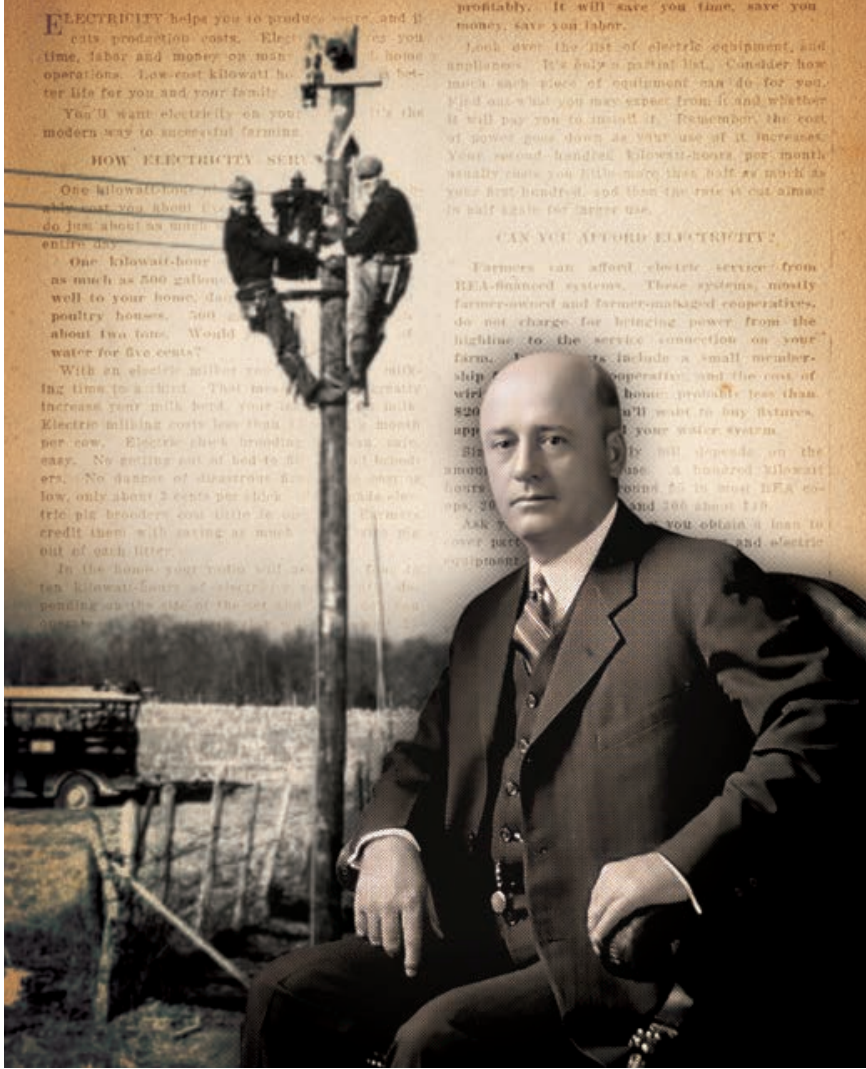
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Power and Light

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. ■

SAM RAYBURN: TEXAS STATE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION. LINEMEN: FROM THE BOOK THE NEXT GREATEST THING

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, 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 cinnamon 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

WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS BEGINS WITH YOU

Have your "Go Kit" packed and ready.

Create defensible space around your home.

Identify two evacuation routes incase one becomes compromised.

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




tfsweb.tamu.edu/PreventWildfire

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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

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

9

Nacogdoches Scottish Highland Games and Festival, (936) 371-3072, nacscottishgames.com

Palestine Mother's Day Lunch Train, 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

Stonewall Williams Creek (Albert) School Open House, (830) 685-3321, historicschools.org

14

Giddings [14-16] Lee County Fair, info@leecountyfairtx.com, leecountyfairtx.com

15

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

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

16

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

Greenville Knights of Columbus Mayfest, (903) 455-9062, donvinson75402@gmail.com

17

Fredericksburg Thomas Pandolfi, 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

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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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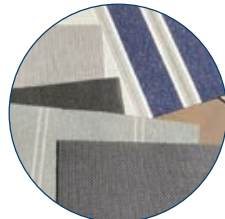
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