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APRIL 2023

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April 2023



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Matt Lowery is proud of how the ribs at LJ's BBQ stack up.
Photo by Wyatt McSpadden

ABOVE

The Hallettsville home of Blanche and Roy Cavarretta hoards their gourds.
Photo by Julia Robinson

Rising Stars

WE SALUTE a select group of Texas co-op employees this Lineworker Appreciation Day, April 10. Apprentices from Pedernales Electric Cooperative in Johnson City dominated at two competitions in 2022 that spotlighted and promoted lineworker skills and safe work practices.

PEC's Phillip Stapp finished first among 96 apprentices at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo in July, claiming the top prize for the co-op for the fourth consecutive rodeo. Co-workers Crispen Davis placed third and Cole Compton fifth. Then, at the International Lineman's Rodeo in October in Kansas, PEC's Zackery Gough, below, beat out 365 competitors to claim first place. Davis was close behind in second place, and Stapp was 14th.



“The hardest thing in the world to understand is income taxes.”

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

FINISH THIS SENTENCE I DROVE ALL NIGHT TO ...

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 February prompt: **Rainy days make me ...**

Get in the kitchen and make soup or dumplings and do some baking.

ELAINE GARNER
VIA FACEBOOK

Want to curl up with a cozy blanket and a good book.

MARGIE HARGROVE
BOWIE-CASS EC
DAINGERFIELD

Glad I'm retired from delivering mail so I can sit on my porch and enjoy it.

TANIS WILLIAMS
WOOD COUNTY EC
FRUITVALE

Want to make oatmeal, hot cocoa, tomato soup and grilled cheese.

KIMBERLEY BAILEY RIGGS
VIA FACEBOOK

Remember when it was dry and I promised not to curse rainy days.

MARK BROWNING
SAN HOUSTON EC
GOODRICH

Visit our website to see more responses.



April 8 National Empanada Day

Writer Vianney Rodriguez shared that empanadas were among her favorite types of pan dulce in *Sweet Memories*, from December 2020.

Funny How Time Slips Away

Willie Nelson, the musical genius from the Hill Country who has won 10 Grammys, written more than 2,500 songs and turned plenty of others' tunes into hits of his own, turns 90 on April 29.

Here are the favorite songs of TCP's writers and editors:

Chris Burrows: *City of New Orleans*

Alex Dal Santo: *On the Road Again*

Travis Hill: *Hello Walls*

Jessica Ridge: *Pancho and Lefty*

Tom Widlowski: *Seven Spanish Angels*

TCP Watch Willie perform each of these songs on our website.



Holy Smokes!

SEEMS ONLY FITTING that the world's longest barbecue marathon took place in Texas.

Pitmasters from Panther City BBQ in Fort Worth grilled for 40 hours, 49 minutes and 17 seconds July 13–15, 2022, to set the record. Chris Magallanes, above, and two others cooked 450 pounds of hamburgers, 300 pounds each of tablitras (beef short ribs) and fajitas, and 100 pounds each of onions and peppers.

The food was donated to the community, including to first responders and a hospital.

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Caught Cuisine

"I discovered hundreds of sundew plants growing in my backyard in Kountze. Let's just say I had no problem with ants in my yard!"

EDWARD ROWLAND
CECA
EASTLAND COUNTY

Kitty Hawk's Mark

My first carrier landing in an A-7 Corsair aboard the USS Kitty Hawk was in November 1968, and my last landing after 130 combat missions in Southeast Asia was August 16, 1969 [*Breaking Up*, February 2023]. There's nothing like your first carrier deployment, especially if it's to a combat zone.

Mike Scott
Tri-County EC
Granbury

It's heartwarming to know that 95% of her will be recycled and that her armor will be incorporated into a new U.S. ship [*Breaking Up*, February 2023].

DAVID HURLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

We just booked a guided trip through the ship channel [at right]. Our guide told us a few things about the retired carrier, but you filled in all the blanks.

Randy Carroll
Wood County EC
Winnsboro



COURTESY RANDY CARROLL

Honoring the 442nd

My parents—U.S. citizens—were among those who lost their assets and possessions when all those of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast were ordered into internment camps without due process and without any evidence of a crime [*Rescue of the Lost Battalion*, February 2023].

Two of my uncles served in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Thank you for remembering the loyalty, valor and tremendous sacrifice of the Japanese Americans of the 442nd.

Jeanne Makihara
Guadalupe Valley EC
Cibolo

Indianola Relocated

After the destruction of Indianola by hurricanes and subsequent fires, many of the homes were dismantled and moved to nearby Cuero and Victoria for a safer location [*Important Entry*, February 2023]. A search of the internet reveals addresses where visitors can see these old homes in a restored setting.

Jeri Porter
Pedernales EC
Fischer

TCP WRITE TO US

letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

Texas Co-op Power

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Fruits of Their Labor



How passionate artists
turn gourds into richly
embellished works of art

FROM LEFT Michael Ford's pieces sometimes incorporate multiple gourds. Ford, a former graphic artist for the Texas Department of Transportation, has been turning gourds into art since 2013.

With one hand, Wimberley artist Michael Ford grips what looks like a glossy beige birdhouse shaped like an hourglass and etched with black tendrils. Then he gives it a shake. *Boom, boom—BOOM.* The deep rumbles startle passersby at the Lone Star Gourd Festival in Fredericksburg. Like me, they're dumbfounded.

"This is a thunder gourd," says Ford, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. When shaken, a spring vibrates a drumhead, creating ominous notes that emanate through holes in the gourd.

"It's very functional. If your company stays too long, just duck into a hallway with your gourd," Ford says, grinning, then shakes it again, setting off more thunderous booms. "Then tell your guests, 'Uh-oh, storm's coming. Better leave while you can!'"

Ford's joking, of course. But he's dead serious about the art form that he calls his passion—much like his fellow gourd artists all over Texas. Using an array of techniques, they create bowls, holiday décor, birdhouses, masks, sculptures, jewelry, lamps and miniature hobbit homes, to name



a few examples. There are simple designs, like painted gourds, and richly embellished pieces that can sell for thousands of dollars.

But wait—what is a gourd? Is it just a smooth pumpkin? Well, close. Gourds and pumpkins, along with squash, melons and cucumbers, are members of Cucurbitaceae, a plant family that produces hard-shelled fruits that humans have used for food, ornaments and utensils over thousands of years. Experts believe gourds are the only plants that have been grown around the world since prehistoric days.

Historians in Peru have unearthed ancient gourd fragments associated with early humans. For generations, Peruvian artist Ana Poma and her neighbors in Cochas Chico have passed down the tradition of carving and burning intricate designs onto gourds as a way of storytelling. “Families teach their children,” says Poma, a vendor and teacher at the Fredericksburg festival. “I learned as a child from my mother, uncles and grandparents.”

For some artists, though, not just any gourd will do. Forget using our thin-skinned Texas natives, such as buf-

falo and balsam gourds. Instead, many artists prefer hard-shelled and decorative gourds available in endless shapes, sizes and thicknesses. Thicker shells (three-eighths of an inch thick or more) are sturdier for carving and burning. Standard gourd shapes, designated by the American Gourd Society, include cannonball, basketball, martin house, dipper, club and banana.

Many artists order their gourds from professional growers, such as the Wurtz Gourd Farm in Arizona and the Welburn Gourd Farm in Southern California. Some grow their own. John and Rickie Newell, Central Texas EC members near Llano, grow gourds. At the festival, Rickie—an artist who displays her work at the Llano Art Guild and Gallery—has a bin piled high with gourds for sale, ranging from 50 cents to \$12. Typically, gourds are priced according to their widest diameter. Those that have been cleaned on the outside and/or had their seeds and pulp scraped out cost more.

“We plant our gourds around April 15,” Rickie says. “Then we harvest when they’re dead in the field from October up to Christmas and dry them in a metal cage.”



Get a Gourd Look

See for yourself at Central Texas shows this year.

Southwest Gourd & Fiber Fine Art Show,
May 18–July 1,
Kerrville

Lone Star Gourd Festival,
Sept. 29–30,
Fredericksburg

Hill Country Collectables,
year-round,
Wimberley



Choosing a gourd is just the first step for many artists, and gourd shows are an ideal place to learn about the craft and expand skill sets. This Texas show is one of a handful of annual events held across the U.S. that attract hobbyists and professionals alike. Artists and vendors welcome questions, and many sell basic supplies. The Texas Gourd Society, the nonprofit organization that sponsors and organizes the annual Lone Star Gourd Festival at the Gillespie County Fairgrounds, is also a resource for crafters. Across Texas, the society has regional chapters called “patches.”

“We learn techniques from each other, like leather stitching,” says Sherry Nelson, a member of the Guadalupe Gourd Patch in Kerrville. “In the gourd world, though, you never copy someone’s work. Instead, you can use their technique as an inspiration to create something new.”

On her gourds, Nelson, a Central Texas EC member, uses various methods, such as burning; carving; painting; applying alcohol dyes; and attaching horns, beads and cactus fibers. “Pyrography is my favorite,” she says. “I can draw with my wood burner for hours. It’s very relaxing.”

Like many gourd artists, Roy and Blanche Cavarretta, who live in Hallettsville and are members of San Bernard EC, started out by growing gourds and turning them into birdhouses. Then, while traveling in New Mexico, they viewed a gourd art exhibit at an art festival. “We had no idea so many things could be done with them,” Roy recalls. “It set us on a

CLOCKWISE FROM IMMEDIATELY ABOVE Roy Cavarretta’s Standing Tall, Jill Robinson’s Chasing Dreams and a James Medders spiraling piece. Rickie Newell continues work on her angel with wings. Robinson’s Green Goddess. Blanche and Roy Cavarretta’s hobby has them “on a journey we never could have imagined.”



journey we never could have imagined. There's not a day goes by that we're not working on a gourd."

That was 11 years ago. The Cavarrettas still grow gourds. They've also become master gourd artists who've won countless awards. "At art shows, you enter at the novice level," Roy explains. "When you win at that level, you advance to intermediate, then advanced and master."

Together, the couple market their work as Gravel Road Arts. On her urn-style gourds, Blanche primarily uses pyrography, transparent dyes and a weaving stitch called closed coiling. Flowers, hummingbirds, dragonflies and inlaid gemstones adorn many of her pieces. Similarly, Roy uses pyrography and dyes along with chip carving using a gouge. His designs lean toward contemporary and Southwestern themes, such as his Spirit Doll that won Best of Show at the Fredericksburg festival.

The People's Choice award went to Chasing Dreams, a large kettle gourd intricately crafted by Austin's Jill Robinson. "I use a lot of random techniques," she says of her striking designs. "On this one, I used enameling, wood-burning, stipple carving and alcohol inks along with real cactus fibers and carved cactus fibers."

Visit with Robinson and other gourd artists, and you'll quickly pick up on their camaraderie and deep love for the craft. When artist James Medders of Morgan Mill lost the use of his left hand, Roy Cavarretta rigged a carving vise

that could hold a gourd in place for his friend. Soon Medders, a United Cooperative Services member, was back to woodburning, carving and painting on his gourds. Using a method called pine needle coiling, he also stitches longleaf pine needles into elaborate designs.

"Once I got started in gourd art eight years ago, I had a passion," says Medders, who has also won awards. "Why? I don't know. I just do. Sometimes my wife tells me, 'Put that gourd down! We've got somewhere to go.'"

Meanwhile, across the exhibit hall at the festival, a hands-on art area called the Imagination Station beckons newbies of any age. From a big pile of gourds, I choose a little one cut open like a bowl. Then I plunk down at a table with metallic paints, rhinestones, a paintbrush and a sponge.

"One of our goals is to pass on gourd art to young people so it won't die out," says Rona Thornton of Austin, who's overseeing the area. "I take the Imagination Station to garden clubs, schools and military bases. It's fun to see people who think they're not artistic create their own piece."

That would be me—I'm definitely no artist. But wait! Before long, my plain gourd has transformed into a sparkly urn. Wow, I *am* an artist.

Thornton smiles. "Anything's possible with a gourd," she says. ■

TCP See more gourds in this story on our website.



Barbecue joints in Brenham, a town famous for ice cream, are attracting crowds of their own



MAKE NO BONES

Leonard Botello IV always wanted to have a roadside barbecue shack. So when a hole-in-the-wall barbecue restaurant 3 miles west of downtown Brenham on U.S. 290 went up for sale, Botello bought the 1,200-square-foot red metal building.

He grew up in a family of restaurateurs in Lake Jackson and initially swore he'd never follow the same path. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a biology degree in 2013. But after a visit to Austin's La Barbecue, Botello was blown away by the simplicity of the barbecue. Right away he started experimenting with his uncle's pit and later drove to Ohio to pick up his first offset smoker, a \$4,000 Craigslist purchase.

"It's like one big science project every single day because everything's completely different," Botello says. "Every cow is different. Every piece of wood is different. The weather is different."

He opened Truth Barbeque in July 2015 and added a covered patio next to his roadside barbecue shack on the outskirts of Brenham.

While Brenham is best known as the home of Blue Bell Creameries, there's more to the city's culinary scene than ice cream. The small town, population 18,000, has a handful of barbecue restaurants that are building impressive résumés. Two of these spots—Truth Barbeque and LJ's BBQ—are just a mile and a half apart, and both made *Texas Monthly's* list of the 50 Best BBQ Joints in 2021.

At either place, the owners and pitmasters could be stationed behind the counter slicing up the Texas trinity—brisket, sausage and ribs—each cooked with their own personal style and accompanied by an array of delectable sides. Brenham's location, halfway between Austin and Houston, makes it an easy day trip or weekend destination for barbecue. Come hungry and be prepared to loosen your belt.



OPPOSITE FROM TOP The staff at LJ's BBQ and a spread at the restaurant. ABOVE Preparing servings of LJ's ketchup-based sauce, which balances sweetness with apple cider and white vinegars.

HONORING MAMAW

LJ'S STARTED in an unlikely place—the backroom of a downtown liquor store, where Matt Lowery, his cousin Leah Cook and her husband, Corey Cook, were selling lunches on a table at a side entrance in 2016. Pitmasters Lowery and Corey Cook were preparing the food at Leah's parents' house.

The trio moved their business to the current brick-and-mortar location, a concrete building with a red metal awning on West Main Street in 2017. Most days the parking lot is full and one of the three pitmasters—Lowery, Cook and Josh Jalomo, who joined the team in 2020—is behind the counter chopping brisket for one of their signature side dishes: brisket mac and cheese.

"It's just mac and cheese with chopped brisket on top," Corey Cook says. "It's no more simple than that. It's one of the most popular items."

The idea for the restaurant was hatched when Lowery began cooking barbecue and doing small catering gigs in 2014, when he was in graduate school at the University of Houston, studying hotel and restaurant management. After graduation, he was visiting the Cooks in Brenham when they began brainstorming an idea for a business. In 2015 they started doing pop-ups before moving to the backroom of the liquor store.

The trio decided to name the restaurant for their grandmother, Laura Jean, who lived in Brenham.

"One day, Leah said, 'How about we call it LJ's after our mamaw?'" Lowery says. "It just seemed like a good way to pay homage to her and had a great story."

LJ's main focus is locally sourced ingredients, from the post oak they burn to the collard greens they serve. "We get our collard greens from a local farmer here that's about 5 miles away from our restaurant," says Lowery about their twice-weekly deliveries from Whitehurst Farm. "The greens you order here at LJ's literally are in the ground no more than 24 to 48 hours before."

The brisket is seasoned with a salt and pepper rub. "It's simple, but it's done well," Lowery says. All the meat is cooked on one of four smokers—one 1,000-gallon and three 500-gallon offsets tucked behind the restaurant. In addition to brisket, sausage and ribs, LJ's also serves up pulled pork and turkey. All the meats pair well with their ketchup-based sauce that Cook calls the "perfect balance" of sweet mixed with apple cider and white vinegars. Peach cobbler and banana pudding are the stars of the dessert menu.

With so many options, deciding what to order can be tough. Lowery suggests starting with a three-meat plate, piled high with brisket, ribs and sausage.

"Obviously, the turkey is the hidden gem," Cook says. "But the first thing that you want to try are those."



to kind of complement the meat,” Botello explains.

His most popular sides are collards, corn pudding and potato tot casserole, a family recipe. But save room for the triple-layer cakes for dessert—each slice weighs a pound. Using another Botello family recipe, head baker Kiki Wilkins makes 12 rotating varieties of cake, including triple-chocolate, carrot, strawberry, tres leches and banana caramel.

Truth debuted on *Texas Monthly*’s list in 2017, earning the No. 10 spot. But getting there wasn’t easy.

“I remember cooking three briskets a day and then nobody showing up,” Botello says. He initially chose Brenham to avoid being drowned out in bigger markets like Austin and Houston. Truth gained traction quickly, partially thanks to its photogenic plating that made Botello’s barbecue ripe for social media. In 2019 he opened a second location, in Houston.

Success hasn’t changed how Botello does business. He’s still behind the counter cutting meat, and his dad is often at the register. “I like to be hands-on [and] talk to customers,” explains Botello, who always ensures sauce bottles are clean and facing the correct way. “I like to be approachable.”

Botello enjoys the questions and interactions. “When

they ask you questions, your brain starts to work a lot harder,” he says. “And you realize how much information you have locked up here that you’re just doing [by] second nature. So it’s good for them, and it’s good for me.”

He teaches barbecue classes one Sunday a month, inspired by the openness of Wayne Mueller, a third-generation pitmaster and the owner of Louie Mueller Barbecue in nearby Taylor. One day, while Botello was eating, Mueller sat down beside him and started sharing his knowledge unprompted, including his temperature for cooking meat—often a secret in the barbecue world.

“Even though these are trade secrets, I could give them to you,” explains Botello. “But it’s like Jimi Hendrix or Stevie Ray Vaughan teaching somebody how to play a guitar. They’re never going to be able to recreate that no matter how many answers you give them.” ■

FROM TOP A sampling from the menu at Truth Barbeque. Owner Leonard Botello IV, left, is often found behind the counter cutting meat as his father works the register.



MOMENT OF TRUTH

AT TRUTH BARBEQUE, Botello’s Central Texas-style preparation consists of a simple rub made in-house and post oak to smoke the meat. To expand his skills and menu, Botello also serves up a rotating menu of less conventional dishes—smoked boudin, pastrami brisket and Carolina whole hog, a popular Saturday-only menu item. The meats are accompanied by a choice of three sauces: a traditional tomato base, tangy mustard or white barbecue. The latter two are his tribute to Carolina-style barbecue. “Our sauces are a smidge more vinegary than most sauces, but it’s just

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The Power Behind Your Power

Lineworker Appreciation Day is April 10

YOU'VE LIKELY NOTICED Houston County Electric Cooperative's crews out and about, working on power lines and other electrical equipment in our community. It's no secret that line work is tough—but it's essential, even when conditions are challenging. This month, as we celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day on April 10, I want to share some interesting facts about electric linemen with you.

The work can be heavy, in more ways than one. Did you know the equipment and tools that a lineman carries while climbing a utility pole can weigh up to 50 pounds? That's as heavy as 6 gallons of water. And speaking of utility poles, Houston County EC linemen climb poles up to 60 feet tall. Linemen must be committed to their career—because it's not just a job, it's a lifestyle. The long hours and ever-present risks can truly take a toll. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics lists line work among the 10 most dangerous civilian jobs in the U.S.

Linemen work many nights, weekends and holidays in taxing weather conditions. The job requires years of training and hands-on learning. That's because working with high-voltage equipment requires specialized technical skills, experience and an ongoing mental toughness. Shortcuts aren't an option, and there is

precious little room for error in this line of work.

During severe weather events that bring major power outages, linemen are among the first ones called. They must be ready to leave the comfort of their homes and families unexpectedly, and they don't return until the job is done, often days later. That's why a lineman's family must also be dedicated to service.

Nationwide, there are more than 120,000 electric lineworkers. Houston County EC has 32 linemen who are responsible for keeping power flowing 24/7, 365 days a year. To do this, they maintain 5,200 miles of power lines across nine counties.

Being a lineman may not seem like a glamorous job, but it's essential to the life and well-being of our community. Without the exceptional dedication and commitment of these hardworking men, we simply would not have the reliable electricity that we need for everyday life.

So the next time you see a lineman, please thank them for the work they do to keep power flowing, regardless of the time of day or weather conditions. After all, linemen are the reason you have power. ■



Celebrate HCEC's Lineworkers With a Sweet Treat

Please join us for cookies in the Houston County Electric Cooperative Community Room as we recognize our very own linemen **Monday, April 10, from 2:30–3:30 p.m.** Have your chance to share your appreciation for our critical first responders.



Houston County Electric Cooperative

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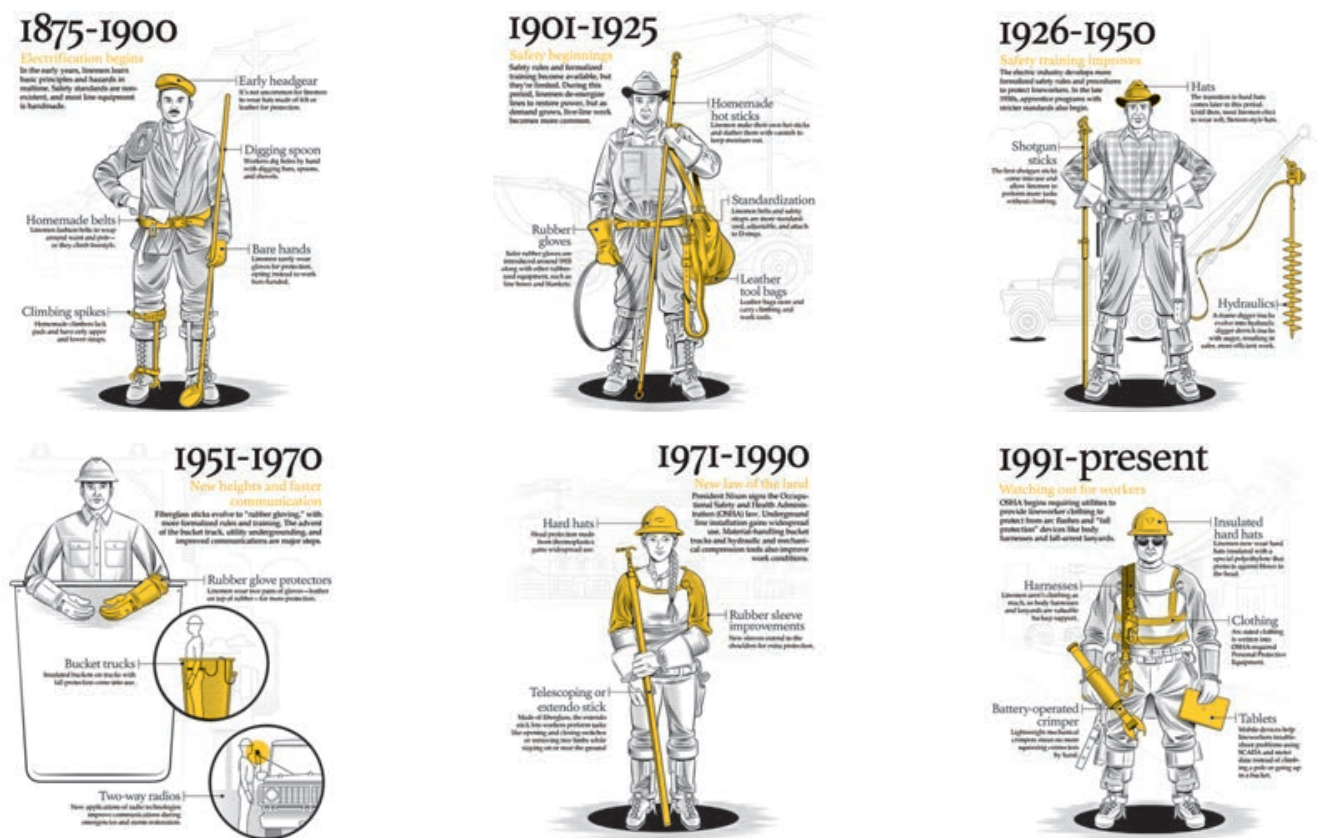
- To report an outage, press 1.
- To update your contact information, press 2.
- To speak to a member services representative regarding your account, press 4.
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- To connect, disconnect or transfer service, press 6.
- To report outdoor lighting issues or other nonemergencies regarding your electric service, press 7.

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Hard Hats, Heights and Heroes

HERE ARE SOME THINGS you probably didn't know about lineworkers:

They wrestle wild weather. All lineworkers are trained to respond to major outages, working in the aftermath of extreme weather such as severe storms, tornadoes and ice.

Clothes matter and not in the fashion sense. While on the job, line technicians wear specific safety gear known as personal protective equipment. PPE can include hard hats, rubber sleeves and gloves (made to protect the wearer from 30,000 volts of electricity), steel-toe boots, climbers for scaling poles, and climbing belts that can weigh up to 30 pounds.

It's natural to aim high. Lineworkers frequently work perched on a 40-foot pole, sky-high in an elevated bucket truck or on transmission towers at heights of up to 120 feet—often in challenging or hazardous conditions such as rain, winter weather or sweltering heat. But no matter how extreme the

situation, strict safety procedures are always in place.

Slang is standard. Have a knuckle-buster handy? What about a lobster claw, kettle or booger wire? Lineworkers frequently use lingo for tools and tasks—it's passed down from one generation of lineworkers to the next.

Animals come with the job. A common cause of power outages is animal interference, especially squirrels and snakes.

Numbers matter. Thirty-two Houston County Electric Cooperative lineworkers make up the team. They are responsible for constructing, operating and maintaining equipment and more than 5,000 miles of power lines in HCEC's service territories: enough to drive to Maine and back and then some!

Line work is a tale as old as time. The lineman profession began in the 1840s with the introduction of the telegraph. Lines were installed on trees, and eventually poles, to allow for long-distance communication. ■

The People Behind Your Power

Carter Allen
B.B. Arvizu
Jason Avery
Jasper Barnett
Riley Barrett
Ross Beshears

Jeremy Bobbitt
Ryan Bobbitt
Trevor Brooks
Jeff Brown
Wacey Brown
Duane Burleson

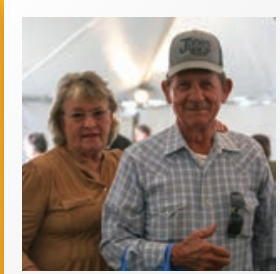
Justin Currie
Donny Davis
Cody Duke
Justin Farr
Beaver Franklin

Jeremy Frizzell
Kraig Goolsby
J.T. Goyens
Huntter Hollis
Tim Johnson

Damon Knowles
Allen Lawrence
Perry Little
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Find members with unique stories to share



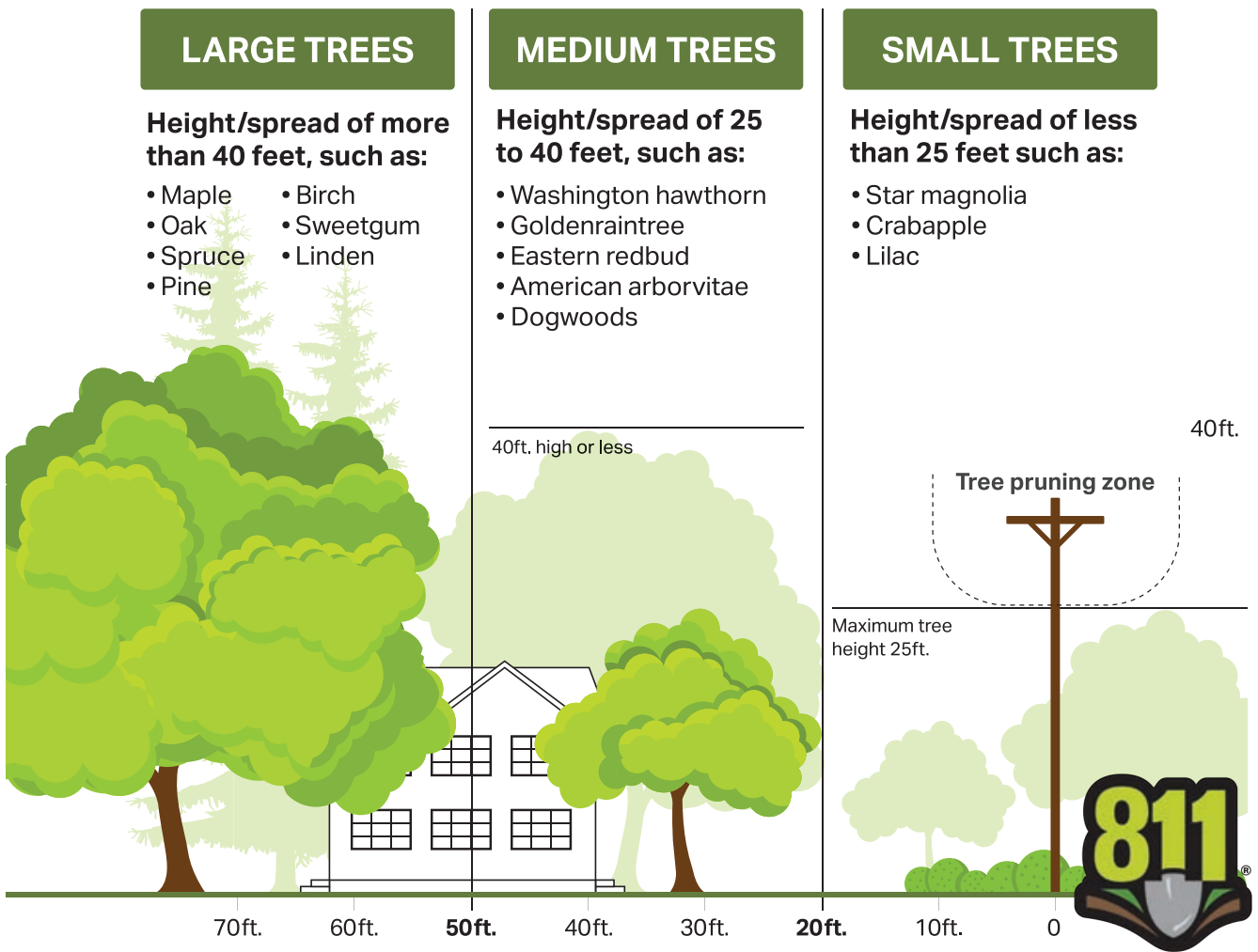
HCEC

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Do you know someone with an inspiring tale, quirky hobby, or unique small business? We want to showcase the complex lives our members lead and shine a spotlight on their efforts!

Do you know an HCEC member willing to share what sets them apart?
Email kbond@houstoncountyelec.com with details.



5 Reasons To Plant a Tree in Your Yard

HOT SUMMER DAYS aren't far off. Why not start thinking about planting some shade trees in your yard to keep your family cool?

Here are five benefits of shade trees around a home.

1. Planting shade trees strategically can shield your home from hot sunrays in the summer. The less heat and light that comes through your windows, the cooler your home will be, and that means you can rely less on air conditioning. That can lead to lower electric bills.

2. A hedge of trees and plants adds privacy to a backyard patio. But trees don't only prevent others from seeing in; they can block an unsightly view and even diffuse noise from nearby streets and parks.

3. Beautiful trees can boost your property value—by up to 15%, according to some nurseries. That makes planting a good investment.

4. Trees that flower and those with leaves that change colors beautify your landscape.

5. Trees benefit the environment. They absorb carbon dioxide from the air, which slows the buildup of the gas in the atmos-

phere. The root systems help hold and aerate the soil, filter groundwater and allow the trees to draw in chemical nutrients that otherwise could leach into the environment. Decaying leaves, needles and other tree debris enrich the soil, providing nutrients for grasses and other vegetation.

Remember when planting trees to take some safety precautions.

Always call 811 before you dig to identify underground utilities. You don't want to strike an underground power or gas line or fiber cable. Doing so could injure you or cause widespread outages.

Consider the full-grown size of the tree you're planting, giving it plenty of space away from overhead electric lines. Trees that grow into or near lines pose a hazard; branches can fall into and damage the infrastructure or cause fires.

Place trees far enough away from your home to reduce the risk of falling branches or big roots causing structural damage. ■

Reining in Controlled Burns

PROPERLY CONTROLLED BURNS can have many benefits for agricultural land. However, if burns are not managed safely, they can cause property damage, power outages, injury and even death. Houston County Electric Cooperative urges you to make safety a priority with these tips on special precautions to take around power lines.

First, make yourself aware of laws and regulations. Only those who are experienced with fire and burn paths should conduct a burn. Avoid burning near public roads or airports, as this can create a dangerous visibility hazard. Alert those who potentially may be affected by the burn—including neighbors, the local fire department and law enforcement. Depending on local regulations, you may also need to obtain a permit.

Be sure you have good firebreaks. Use natural features such as streams or roads when possible, or remove ground litter to expose soil.

Relative humidity should be between 30% and 60% for a controlled burn. Humidity is usually highest at daybreak and lowest midafternoon.

Take special note of power poles and lines. Burning a power pole could cause a widespread power outage and be costly for the individual responsible for the fire.

Cut down grass and weeds and water the area near the poles to keep fires away. Be careful to keep water streams out of power lines.

If a power pole catches on fire, call the fire department and your cooperative immediately—even if you think you can put out the fire yourself. Creosote, a preservative on the inside of a pole, could still be burning the pole from the inside out. In addition, burning poles can create shock or electrocution hazards to those who may be nearby or spark fires in unintended directions from downed lines.

Finally, keep additional environmental factors, such as temperature and wind direction, in mind. Winds in the area should be blowing in a steady direction as to not let the fire get out of control. Typically a modest wind, about 4–12 mph, can move the fire without excessive hazard. If winds are higher than 12 mph, delay the burn.

As environmental factors are subject to change, check forecasts and actual conditions before you begin a controlled burn.

The best tip we can give: Do your research and be careful. ■




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Jalapeño Popper Hard-Boiled Eggs

- 6 hard-boiled eggs**
- 3 heaping tablespoons cream cheese, softened**
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise**
- 3 strips cooked bacon, crumbled**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, finely chopped**
- Pinch salt**
- Pinch pepper**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, thinly sliced, for garnishing**
- 1 strip cooked bacon, crumbled, for garnishing**

1. Peel the hard-boiled eggs. Slice each egg in half lengthwise and carefully scoop out the yolk. Arrange the egg white halves onto a serving tray and set aside.
2. Place yolks in a mixing bowl. Add cream cheese, mayonnaise, crumbled bacon, chopped jalapeño, salt and pepper. Using a fork, stir the mixture until it is well-blended and creamy.
3. Spoon the filling into the egg halves or transfer the yolk mixture to a pastry bag (or a plastic bag with a small tip cut off the corner) and pipe into the egg halves.
4. Garnish each egg with a thin slice of jalapeño and a bit of bacon. Serve immediately or cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to serve.

MAKES 12

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



The Bluebonnet Painter

Julian Onderdonk's moniker captures only part of how his ethereal South Texas landscapes flourish

BY RHONDA REINHART

MUCH LIKE CLAUDE MONET had his waterlilies—the subject of the French impressionist's most celebrated series of paintings—Julian Onderdonk had his bluebonnets. Born in San Antonio in 1882, Onderdonk painted sweeping landscapes of his native South Texas, producing majestic scenes of sun-kissed dusty roads, blooming coreopsis fields and golden sunsets. But it was his series featuring Texas' state flower that had early 20th-century Texans clamoring for an Onderdonk canvas.

"He became known as the bluebonnet painter, but that wasn't how he identified himself. That was just one of the things he painted," says Harry Half, a San Antonio-based art dealer who specializes in early Texas art. "But he captured the color of the bluebonnets so well. And he did an amazing job of capturing the special light that we have in South Texas. With Julian's work, sometimes you almost feel like you can tell the temperature of the day he painted. That's really an innate talent."

COURTESY THE WITTE MUSEUM

Julian Onderdonk's painting
Cactus Flowers hung at the White
House during President George
W. Bush's administration.

Onderdonk's father, Robert Jenkins Onderdonk, taught art in Dallas and San Antonio, helped found several influential Texas art organizations, and painted a 1903 work titled *Fall of the Alamo* that resides in the Texas Governor's Mansion. But the younger Onderdonk didn't rely on his genes alone. While still a teenager, he traveled to New York, where he studied with the likes of William Merritt Chase, the revered American impressionist.

Onderdonk spent nearly a decade on the East Coast, where he developed his penchant for plein-air, or open air, painting but returned to San Antonio in 1909. This homecoming was a turning point in the young artist's career. Once he started depicting the distinctive surroundings of his childhood home—he'd hike out through the neighboring hills armed with an easel, canvas and paints—people began to take notice.

"He was very popular with a lot of the old San Antonio families," says Halff, who wrote the catalogue raisonné on Onderdonk and whose great-grandparents once purchased a painting from the artist. "His smaller works were great wedding gifts, and a lot of them are still with the same families who bought them from Julian. He also got extraordinarily high prices for that period."

According to Halff's research, Onderdonk's large pieces would go for around \$450—"essentially the cost of a Model T"—while his smaller works cost in the neighborhood of \$75 to \$100. Today, depending on the size and subject matter (bluebonnets still reign supreme), an Onderdonk painting could garner anywhere from \$30,000 to several hundred thousand dollars. "It's still the price of a car," Halff says. "It just might be a Ford or a Ferrari."

For art lovers with not-so-deep pocketbooks, classic Onderdonk works can be viewed at a host of major Texas museums, including the Dallas Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and the Witte Museum in San Antonio. The largest selection of Onderdonk works—close to 100—resides at the Witte, including two paintings that hung in the White House during President George W. Bush's administration: *Cactus Flowers* and *Chili Queens at the Alamo*.

Marise McDermott, president and CEO of the Witte, says *Dawn in the Hills* is her favorite Onderdonk work in the museum's collection. The painting is a celestial scene of a Texas daybreak that Onderdonk completed just before his

death of an acute intestinal obstruction and appendicitis at age 40 in 1922. "He died literally as this painting was drying," says McDermott. "I just can't even believe how beautiful it is. It's so ethereal."

The Witte also houses Onderdonk's archives and his painting studio. The museum moved the structure, which an Onderdonk descendant donated, from its original location on West French Place and installed it on the museum grounds. The Witte's ties to the Onderdonk family trace back nearly a century. Eleanor Onderdonk, Julian's younger sister, served as the museum's curator from 1927 until 1958.

"She was responsible for so much of the Witte Museum's art, including her brother's," says McDermott, a member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. "She was very close to him and had a beautiful sense of why he was unusual."

An artist in her own right, Eleanor once wrote of her brother: "It is evident that Julian was after something that no one else had ever gotten—an interpretation of the Southwest landscape, its essence in form and color so elusive and so subtle that the average person misses the closeness of values in the unity of color, live gray tones that vibrate. ..."

"It is impossible to look at any of Julian's paintings and not see the man who looked at nature with wide-open eyes, analyzed, studied and then created." ■

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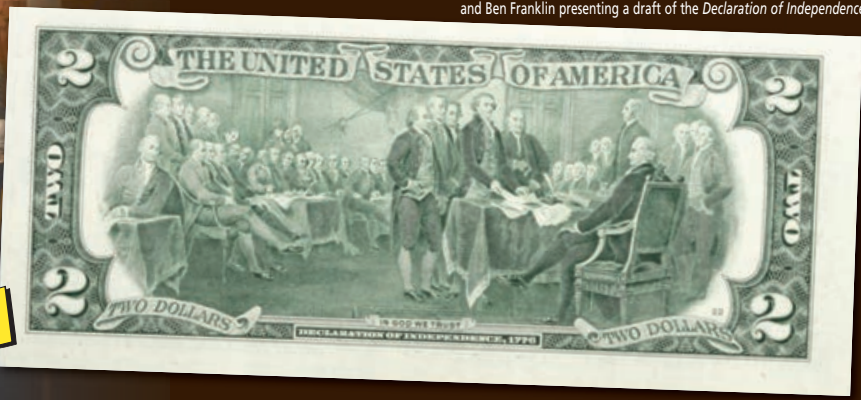
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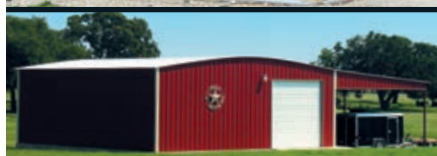
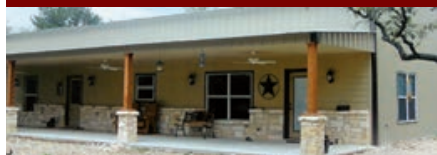
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This knife boasts a full tang blade, meaning the blade doesn't stop at the handle, it runs the full length of the knife. According to Gear Patrol, a full tang blade is key, saying "A full tang lends structural strength to the knife, allowing for better leverage ...think one long steel beam versus two."

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Grounded in Mystery

Some believe Jacob Brodbeck made the first powered flight in history—but there's little proof

BY MARTHA DEERING • ILLUSTRATION BY DANA SMITH

NEARLY 40 YEARS before the Wright brothers made their famous first flight on a North Carolina beach in 1903, a German immigrant named Jacob Brodbeck flew a homemade airship in a field near Luckenbach in 1865.

At least he might have.

Many details have been lost to history, and uncertainty abounds. The Texas State Historical Association Handbook of Texas includes a passage about the feat, though it acknowledges the flight might have occurred in San Antonio—and perhaps even in 1868. An official Texas historical marker in Luckenbach affirms the flight with no mention of the year and somewhat vaguely pins the accomplish-

ment as occurring north of San Antonio.

Iris Brodbeck Macek, who is a great-granddaughter of Brodbeck, self-published *Wings Over Luckenbach*, a partially fictionalized account of the man and his life. In it, she acknowledges the perplexity of that flight: "Good stories never go away. Stories inspired by true events laced with mystery become even more memorable. Jacob Brodbeck's story is one of these."

Brodbeck, a professor, inventor and talented musician, was a German immigrant who settled in Fredericksburg, where he became a schoolmaster. He was captivated by the idea of manned flight. In Fredericksburg he made small

models of airships powered by tightly wound springs, an idea that grew out of his attempts to invent a self-winding clock. He took a model to local fairs where it drew attention from other mechanically minded innovators. Their interest prompted Brodbeck to offer shares in his invention.

In an 1865 article in a San Antonio newspaper, he wrote: "For more than 20 years, I have labored to construct a machine which should enable man to use, like a bird, the atmospheric region as the medium of his travels. I have therefore concluded to collect subscriptions ... in order to build a large Air Ship."

He set the price of one share at \$5 to be repaid with interest when he sold the patent.

The airship featured a cockpit, helicopterlike propeller, compass and barometer. The TSHA writes that the airship rose 12 feet over a Luckenbach field September 20, 1865, and traveled about 100 feet before the spring that powered it completely unwound. A hard landing followed in which the craft was destroyed, but Brodbeck walked away without serious injury. His investors, who had hoped to make a fortune when he sold the patent, were not game for another try.

A photo purports to show the wrecked airship, though what happened to it after that day remains a mystery.

In spite of his failure, Brodbeck contributed much to pioneer Texas, serving as Gillespie County surveyor and later as county commissioner. In 1967, Gov. John Connally declared him the Father of American Aviation. ■

Incredible Eggs

A prized ingredient that's as versatile as it's cracked up to be

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

Eggs are such an essential part of our daily kitchen landscape, and yet we often forget how versatile they are. Fruit curds are a wonderful way to celebrate eggs. Here, tart grapefruit is mixed with honey for a luscious spread that can be served for breakfast or on top of angel food cake.

Grapefruit Curd

½ cup grapefruit juice

¼ cup honey

2 eggs

2 egg yolks

5 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces

1. Fill a small saucepan with 2 inches of water and set over medium heat to simmer.
2. In a heatproof bowl that can sit on the saucepan, whisk together grapefruit juice, honey, eggs and egg yolks.
3. Set the bowl over the simmering water and cook, whisking until honey is melted and liquid is a uniform consistency.
4. Add the butter a few pieces at a time, whisking to melt and combine. Once the first pieces are almost completely melted, add the next few pieces. Keep adding butter and whisking until all the butter is incorporated. The curd should be smooth and noticeably thicker, coating the back of a spoon. It will thicken more as it cools; do not overcook. If desired, press the curd through a sieve to remove any lumps.
5. Pour into a jar, cover and chill at least 2 hours to set before serving.

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Cheese Quiche.





Zucchini Crescent Pie

JUDY SEWARD
HAMILTON COUNTY EC

Perfect for brunch or as a dinner side, this veggie-filled dish is a crowd pleaser. Slicing the zucchini thinly helps it bake into the filling along with the cheese.

- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
- 4 cups thinly sliced zucchini
- 1 cup chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ teaspoon dried basil
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella or Muenster cheese
- 1 can crescent rolls (8 ounces)
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- Grated Parmesan cheese, for topping

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Heat a skillet over medium and add butter to melt. Once melted, add the zucchini and onion and cook until very soft, about 10 minutes. Stir in parsley, basil, oregano, salt and pepper.
2. In a bowl, beat eggs, then stir in cheese. Stir into vegetable filling.
3. Coat a 7-by-11-inch baking dish with nonstick spray. Unroll the crescent roll dough but do not separate. Press the dough into the bottom and partially up the sides of the dish, sealing any holes in the seams. Spread mustard evenly on dough.
4. Pour vegetable filling over the dough. Bake 18–20 minutes, until golden brown and filling is set. Let cool 10 minutes, then sprinkle with Parmesan and serve.

SERVES 6

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



\$500 WINNER

BLT Egg Salad

PAIGE STAFFORD
PEDERNALES EC



Egg salad lovers, this one's for you. Bacon and sun-dried tomatoes add savory flavor to this classic sandwich filling. Any mustard from yellow to grainy Dijon works well for this spread.

SERVES 4–6

- 6 eggs
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar or lemon juice
- 6 slices cooked bacon, coarsely chopped
- ¼ cup sun-dried tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 2–3 green onions, diced
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

1. To hard-boil, place the eggs in a medium pot and fill with water until they are covered. Add vinegar and a dash of salt. Bring the water to a boil, then cover and reduce heat to low. Cook the eggs 8 minutes, drain and place the eggs in an ice bath to cool.
2. Once completely cooled, peel the eggs and chop into bite-size pieces. Place in a bowl along with the remaining ingredients. Stir well to combine, then taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Serve with crackers or vegetables or as a sandwich.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

NO-BAKE DESSERTS DUE APRIL 10
How do you beat the heat and still offer a flourishing finish? Send us your favorite no-bake desserts by April 10 for a chance to win \$500.



Spicy Sausage and Egg Boats

PATRICIA STEHLING
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Egg boats make for a fun presentation at breakfast. Add your favorite vegetables, such as bell pepper, mushrooms or spinach, to the filling.

4 demi baguettes or large bolillos

8 ounces breakfast sausage

8 eggs

½ cup heavy cream

Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

1 cup shredded cheddar cheese

4 green onions, sliced

4 jalapeño peppers, seeded and diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Scoop out the centers of the breads to create a boatlike shape, leaving an edge all around.

2. Cook sausage and set aside. In a bowl, beat eggs, then whisk in cream and salt and pepper. Stir in the sausage, cheese, green onions, jalapeños and garlic.



3. Spoon mixture into bread boats. Bake 25–30 minutes, until eggs are set and no longer runny.

SERVES 4–6

TCP These great dishes just scratch the surface of what you can do with eggs. Check out our website, where you'll find hundreds of reader recipes that feature eggs, many incorporating them in hard-to-resist baked goods.

Egg-zact Replacements

BY MEGAN MYERS

Many recipes default to using large eggs. But what if you don't have any large eggs on hand? Use this handy guide for subbing different sizes of eggs in recipes.

You can replace **one** large egg with **one** egg of any other size.

Replace **two** large eggs with **two** medium, extra-large or jumbo eggs; or **three** small eggs.

Replace **three** large eggs with **two** jumbo eggs, **three** medium or extra-large eggs, or **four** small eggs.

Replace **four** large eggs with **three** jumbo eggs, **four** extra-large eggs, or **five** medium or small eggs.

You can also replace whole eggs with liquid eggs: 1 cup of liquid egg equals about five large eggs.



JASON RISNER PHOTOGRAPHY

Fredericksburg

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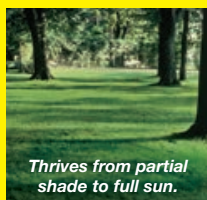
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1100	+400	10	\$110.00	\$40.00	32%
2000	+1000	20	\$180.00	\$65.00	46%
3000	+1500	30	\$240.00	\$75.00	52%

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Meteoric Fall

Odessa crater marks the site of a space rock's collision with Earth

BY CHET GARNER

IT'S NOT OFTEN you can say "it came from outer space" and actually mean it. But that's what happened some 62,000 years ago, when an object fell from the sky and crashed just southwest of what is now Odessa. In search of an extraterrestrial experience, I grabbed my tinfoil hat and headed west.

My pulse quickened as I drove through cactus and mesquite in search of one of the largest meteorite impact craters in the U.S. Once there I stared at an empty field just slightly lower (about 15 feet) than the surrounding desert. "Hmm," I thought. "Where's the massive crater?" I needed some explanation.

Inside the visitor center, I learned how a 25-foot space rock hurtled toward Earth at 27,000 mph. It pierced the atmosphere and shattered into thousands of pieces that crashed into the land with the force of 19,000 tons of dynamite. The impact stretched over 2 square miles, with this largest crater measuring at least 500 feet wide and 100 feet deep. It has perplexed cowboys and scientists alike since it was first documented in 1892.

Over time, the crater became a mere shadow of its former self as dust and silt filled in the hole, leaving a simple depression marked by a rim of jagged rocks. In the 1940s, scientists dug a 165-foot shaft into the center to see if a large meteorite remained. They found fragments—the largest weighing 300 pounds.

While it may not be as impressive as it once was, it's the only crater of its kind in America that visitors can walk through. I set off on foot imagining what it might have been like when the meteorite smashed into this exact location. I would have been pulverized in an instant. It was an appropriately existential thought for such an extraterrestrial place. ■

ABOVE The Odessa crater spreads out behind Chet.

TCP Follow along as Chet walks onto the very site of an extraterrestrial event. See the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details.

APRIL

07

Canton [7–8] Tractor Show and Swap Meet, (214) 837-8861, lonestarihc25.org/canton

Addison [7–9] Dallas Reggae Festival, (832) 277-3874, dallasreggaeifest.com

08

Kerrville EasterFest, (830) 896-1155, kerrvillechamber.biz

San Marcos Easter Egg Hunt and Festival, (512) 392-4295, heritagesanmarcos.org

Stonewall Easter at the Farm, (830) 644-8107, tpwd.texas.gov

15

Burton Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, texascottonginmuseum.org

Corpus Christi Explore the Shore, (361) 749-5246, tpwd.texas.gov

Fredericksburg Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Department Fish Fry, (830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

Gonzales Spring Plant Sale, (830) 672-8531, gonzalesmastergardeners.org

Grapevine New Vintage Wine and Gallery Trail and Art Show, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Kerrville Spring Native Plant Sale, (830) 257-4837, riversidenaturecenter.org

Stephenville Wine and Art Walk, (817) 715-1682, facebook.com/stephenville-downtownmerchants

20

Chappell Hill [15-16]
Bluebonnet Festival,
 (979) 836-6033,
chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com

Lubbock [15-16] Arts
Festival, (806) 744-2787,
lubbockartsfestival.org

21

Dale [20-23] Old Settler's
Music Festival,
oldsettlersmusicfest.org

Henderson [21-22] East
Texas Antique Tractor
and Engine Club Show,
 (903) 646-3769

McKinney [21-22] Tom
Cotter, (214) 769-0645,
thecomedyarena.com

Terrell [21-22] Kaufman
Quilt Show, (972) 979-9152,
kaufmanquiltguild.org

Fredericksburg [21-23,
28-30] The Play That Goes
Wrong, (830) 997-3588,
fredericksburgtheater.org

Ingram [21-23, 28-30, May
5-7] The Gods of Comedy,
 (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

22

Brenham One Night in
Memphis, (979) 337-7240,
thebarnhillcenter.com

Grapevine Spring Into
Nash, (817) 410-3185,
grapevinetexasusa.com

Helotes Fiesta Dachshund
Dash, (844) 703-6943,
ddrtx.org

The Colony Coach Cox's
Kid Chase, (972) 625-1106,
visitthecolonytx.com

Tyler Ruthie Foster,
 (903) 595-7274,
libertytyler.com

MORE EVENTS >

TCP Submit Your Event

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

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Pick of the Month

Conroe Crossroads Music Festival

Conroe, April 13–16
conroecrossroads.com

Experience 40 shows across eight venues over four days in one city! A wide variety of musical genres are represented in the lineup, and daytime activities are free and fun for the whole family.

APRIL EVENTS CONTINUED

27

Alvin [27–29] Frontier Days, (832) 868-1478, alvinrotary.org

28

Gun Barrel City [28–29] Quilt Show, (903) 391-3241, gunbarrelquiltersguild.org

McKinney [28–29] James Camacho, (214) 769-0645, thecomedyarena.com

Seguin [28–29] Yellow Rose Fiber Fiesta, (210) 422-0619, yellowrosefiberfiesta.com

Saint Jo [28–30] The Real West Symposium, therealwest.org

29

Hillsboro Wine and Photography Art Walk, (843) 442-7424

Ingram Stonehenge Celtic Festival and Highland Games, (830) 367-5121, hcac.com

Johnson City JCTX Jazz and Art Festival, (830) 868-7111, johnsoncitytx.org

Kerrville Hill Country Chorale Spring Concert, (830) 321-0303, hillcountrychorale.org

Nacogdoches [29–30] Sacred Heart Catholic Church Multicultural Festival, (936) 564-7807, sacredheartnac.org

Waco [29–30] Central Texas Comic Con, ctxcomiccon.com

Llano [29–30, May 5–7] The Savannah Sipping Society, facebook.com/llanocommunitytheater

MAY
05

Brenham [5–6] Maifest, (979) 337-7580, brenhammaifest.com

Burnet [5–6] Utopiafest, utopiafest.com

Milam [5–6] Trade Days, (430) 558-7134, milamsettlers.org

Port Aransas [5–6, 12–13] PalmFest, (361) 444-3631, palmfestporta.com

06

Hilltop Lakes Kentucky Derby Gala, (713) 503-0470, hilltoplakes.com

Quitaque Experience Caprock, (806) 455-1492, tpwd.texas.gov

The Colony Up, Up & Away Festival of Flight, (972) 625-1106, visitthecolonytx.com

Willow City Willow City Volunteer Fire & Rescue Department's Fundraiser, (830) 456-3785, willowcityfd.com

Riding the River

Texans love to make a splash. So stock the cooler and grab your river shoes—it's time to dive in and test the waters.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 STEVE COYLE
PEDERNALES EC

"Taking in sunset on Galveston Bay with a squall line approaching from the north."

2 WENDY ALLEY MLADENKA
SAN BERNARD EC

A family day of kayaking on the Colorado River near Beason's Park in Columbus.

3 ANGELA RIED
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

The Frio River in Garner State Park.

4 TAWNIE AND MICHAEL WAYNE SOLISE
BANDERA EC

Stopping for a drink at sunset in Bandera.



1



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

DUE APR 10 Hoof and Horn

DUE MAY 10 Night Sky

DUE JUN 10 Helping Out



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Riding the River photos from readers.



A memorial created in 2017 stood across the street from where the fertilizer plant exploded in West.

Rise Up West

10 years after a deadly explosion, the town is stronger than ever

BY JEFFREE WYN ITRICH

AS THE SAYING GOES, I wasn't born here, but I got here as soon as I could. And *here* is the small Czech town of West, north of Waco. I knew about this charming town long before I followed my Texas roots to settle here in the land of my forebears, who go back to the post-Civil War period.

I remember with razor-sharp clarity the night I watched a story on the evening news detailing how 30 tons of ammonium nitrate exploded in a West fertilizer plant on April 17, 2013, at 7:51 in the evening. Five years later, my husband and I settled in West. It was only then that I understood the full scope of the explosion that registered as a 2.1 magnitude tremor and blasted a crater in the ground nearly 100 feet wide and 10 feet deep.

Fifteen people died in the tragedy, 12 of them volunteer firefighters who

responded to a fire—later determined to be intentionally set—before it triggered the explosion that turned the scene into a war zone. In moments, 350 homes were destroyed or damaged, a nursing home came down like a tornado had roared through, and the emergency medical services building buckled and fell. Tommy Muska, the mayor then and still today, estimated that there was \$200 million in damage to the city and its schools and businesses.

The destruction was so severe that many outsiders projected it would be West's demise. Those outsiders, however, didn't grasp the soul of this town. "The city of West will not be defined by the explosion but by the resilience and the spirit of the citizens to rebuild their community," Muska said last fall. And that is exactly what has happened, in a remarkably short period of time.

Anyone who visits West these days won't find any physical evidence of blast damage. In the 10 years since the disaster, there have been more than 1,000 residential and commercial building permits issued, 82 new homes and three new schools built, 123 remodels completed, and over \$10 million in infrastructure improvements made. Currently, there are five subdivisions being built, in all price ranges.

A person has to wonder: How did this small town pull itself up by its bootstraps in the face of such overwhelming tragedy?

In short, the blast brought people together in unexpected ways. Their resilience and staunch faith made them stronger and more united than ever. They are a people who have proved themselves unshakable, even in the face of profound heartache and grief.

Perhaps Muska said it best when 10 years ago he proclaimed, "This town will not die on my watch." He was not alone in his commitment. The entire town lived it, believed it and made sure West would not only survive but would thrive.

And indeed it has. ■



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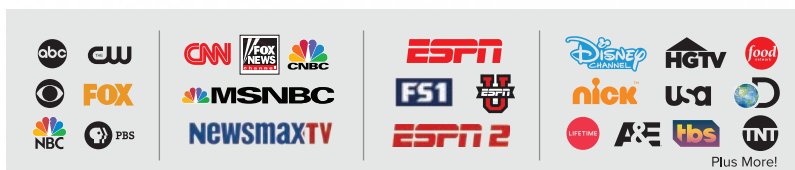


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