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IN MINEOLA?

THERE'S NO KNIFE
LIKE BOWIE'S

A PIONEERING
ARCHITECT INSPIRES

Texas Coop Power

FOR FAYETTE EC MEMBERS

FEBRUARY 2024

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The pieces fall into
place for Texas
puzzle-makers



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February 2024



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*Story by Sheryl Smith-Rodgers
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RECOMMENDED READING
National Women Physicians Day is February 3. Read *Dr. Sofie Herzog* in our archive and you'll meet a doc who cared for the people of Brazoria a century ago.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Campfires remind me of ...

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 December prompt: **Can't I have just one more ... ?**

Fishing trip with my dad.

RODNEY WHEELER
BLUEBONNET EC
LYTTON SPRINGS

Chance, officer.

SHELIA WORTHEY
TRI-COUNTY EC
FORT WORTH

Hour of sleep.

MARY MION-WEBB
VIA FACEBOOK

Moment of peace and quiet.

DAVIE LEE GILES
COSERV
MCKINNEY

Martini.

SANDRA HOLT
VIA FACEBOOK

Visit our website to see more responses.

Nasty Norther

THE COLDEST TEMPERATURE ever recorded in Texas happened in mid-February—but it wasn't during our recent icy winters.

On February 12, 1899, it dipped to minus 23 degrees in the Panhandle town of Tulia. This was during a norther that killed 40,000 cattle across the state overnight. In February 1933 thermometers also fell to minus 23 in Seminole in West Texas.

Will You ... ?

Many wedding experts refer to the time from Thanksgiving to Valentine's Day as "engagement season," with as many as 40% of proposals happening during these months.



DECEMBER 2023 How Texas Became a Desert

“Absent is my favorite John Wayne movie with a Texas storyline—*Red River*, loosely based on the creation of the legendary Chisholm Trail.”

BILL “COWBOY” LAMZA
SAN BERNARD EC
HEMPSTEAD



NICOLAS VARGO | DREAMSTIME.COM

More Desert Classics

This reminds me of a Davy Crockett movie starring Fess Parker [*How Texas Became a Desert*, December 2023]. When Crockett came from Tennessee to Texas, he would have passed through the Piney Woods of East Texas, right?

Well, in the movie, they get to the border, and Crockett says, “Well, there she is—Texas!” And they look out upon a mountainous desert land.

My wife and I almost fell on the floor laughing.

David Winkler
Pedernales EC
Dripping Springs

Another Somber Memory

I taught with Kathy Cox in 1963 [*A School Day Like No Other*, November 2023].

While we were glued to the TV, Father Baker came in and told us that they were taking all the kids into the church to pray for the president. The younger kids really didn’t comprehend what was

happening, but my sixth graders were pretty aware, and most of them were in tears.

Father came into the church a few minutes later to tell us that the president had died. After more prayers, the kids were all sent home early.

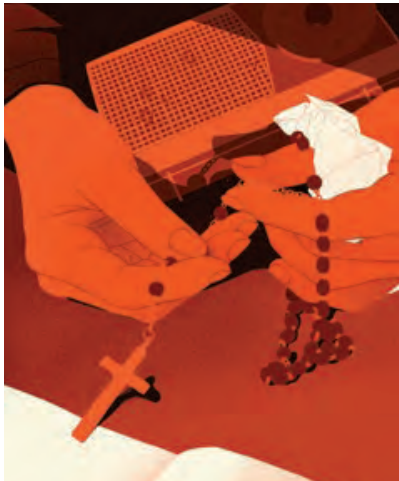
Diane Shalala Fritel
Wolford, North Dakota

Frankly, Almost a Texan

As someone who has followed Texas music for roughly 72 years, I never thought of Frank Zappa as having much to do with Texas [*Art and Parts*, December 2023]. I always pictured him as the ultimate California dude.

Joe Brannen
Sam Houston EC
Livingston

EDITOR’S NOTE It’s true Zappa wasn’t really a Texan, but in some circles he was considered an honorary Austinite because of his repeated appearances at the Armadillo World Headquarters in the 1970s.



STEPHANIE SHAFER

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

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BY CHRISTINE SWITZER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID MOORE

Later, Gators?

Finding everything else during a search for the elusive gators of the Mineola Nature Preserve

‘WHERE are the alligators?’ I can hear the frustration in my 8-year-old son’s voice as we scan the serene water of Beaver Pond in the southwest portion of Aquatic Loop. This is our second visit to the Mineola Nature Preserve, and we’ve just learned that some of the ponds are home to alligators.

Fifteen minutes earlier, we had passed a slightly winded hiker on Beaver Pond Trail, an old logging path that harks back to the land’s integral role in the East Texas timber belt a century ago.

The hiker smiled, greeted us and said his name was James. He chatted enthusiastically about the nearly 20-year-old preserve that spreads over close to 3,000 acres along the north banks of the Sabine River in Wood County, north of Tyler. James said he has been hiking at the preserve every week for a few years and loves this nature space.

“Most people don’t know about this place,” James said. He told us he thinks the preserve is one of the best nature areas in East Texas, with bird-watching and stargazing, catch-and-release ponds, plus many trails for horseback riding. Several hiking trails crisscross through the wetland areas around the ponds, and he said we might see wild animals at the preserve too, like beaver, deer and bobcats.

Then he asked, “Have you seen the alligators in the beaver pond?”



SOON we're leaning over the splintered railing of the wooden footbridge that spans Beaver Pond. I hear dragonflies and damselflies darting over the water and the occasional plip-plop of a fish leaping to catch one.

But no alligators in sight.

Once on the verge of extinction, the American alligator can now be found throughout the eastern third of Texas, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The reptile has made a dramatic comeback over the past 50 years and is now a protected game animal in Texas.

"There are a couple of large ones who hang out at the beaver pond," James told us. "They like to sleep a lot at the bottom of the pond, but I've seen them several times."

I wonder to myself if they look like floating logs in the middle of the pond. Or if they lurk in the shady areas around the bridge, with only nostrils visible above the water.

"I'll be right back!" I call to my husband and move toward the opposite side of the pond, past the warning signs admonishing in bright red letters: "Beware of Alligators." I take a few pictures of a lone white egret standing amid a clump of soft rush.

"Don't stand too close to the bank," my husband calls. "Alligators move fast. Faster than you think."

'MAMA, a snapping turtle!" My son points to a partially submerged log, its distinctive beak stretched into the sunshine.

Several months have passed since our previous visit, but we haven't forgotten our conversation with James, so we search once again for the resident alligators in Beaver Pond.

Late spring humidity presses in on us. We hear the buzz of cicadas, grasshoppers and bees among the coral honeysuckle, purple coneflower and blue larkspur. We give wide

berth to the soggy, loamy sands banking the pond, where spring rains have left the ground saturated.

Once on the bridge traversing the pond, we look out over turquoise water shimmering like a dark mirror in the afternoon sun. Giant cutgrass clusters around the bridge. In the center of the pond, we see the remains of abandoned railroad trestles from when trains transported East Texas lumber to far points in the state.

"I don't see any alligators," my son says. Unfortunately, neither do I.

"You should probably go around 3 or 4 in the afternoon," my friend Laura advises. She has heard my story about looking for the preserve's reptile residents, and she has responded in typical Texas Master Naturalist fashion. She has looked things up on the iNaturalist website.

"According to iNat," she continues, "most of the alligator sightings in the preserve have been mid-afternoon. Maybe you'll have more luck then."

Alligators are native to this part of the state, but I haven't seen one in the wild yet in the 10 years I've lived in North Texas. We plan another visit to the preserve, hoping we will finally glimpse the elusive crocodilian.

'OH, NO! my son exclaims. "Not the alligators again!" With the steady increase of summer heat indices in East Texas, his enthusiasm for alligator hunting has definitely cooled.

We crunch over the gravel of the city-owned and -managed park's Rawhide Trail, under the welcome shade of thorny locust, willow oak and sugar hackberry trees, our faces shiny from the late June heat.

As we approach Beaver Pond, I hear the low, resonant bugle of a bullfrog and the cry of a hawk overhead. Summer blooms of climbing prairie roses and meadow pinks cluster alongside the path. Ahead of us, half a dozen monarchs the size of my palm scatter in a swirl of tangerine.

Leaning over the railing of the now-familiar bridge, we scan the tranquil, algae-laden water for any signs of an enormous reptile. A tiny green anole darts away from us on the splintered wood. We watch a great blue heron lift off in flight above our heads.

"No," I say. "Not the alligators." ■

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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PUZZLING TIMES

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • PHOTOS BY DAVE SHAFER

These Texas puzzle-makers help folks while away the hours and fill their kitchen tables with beauty

GROWING UP, JB Manning remembers putting puzzles together with his grandmother at her home in Minnesota.

“She always had a puzzle spread out on the table,” he says. “She enjoyed working on them, and they became an activity that we all did with her.”

Jigsaw puzzles have been drawing people together for centuries. Most historians credit British mapmaker John Spilsbury for creating the first puzzles in the 1760s. He pasted hand-colored European maps onto thin mahogany



boards and cut them into pieces along political borders. His “dissected” maps were marketed as educational tools to teach children about geography.

In the 19th century, dissected puzzles evolved into jigsaw puzzles, named for the bladed tool used to cut the pieces. Only the wealthy could afford to buy the handcrafted wooden creations. But as manufacturing improved, makers began to utilize plywood and then sturdy cardboard, which reduced costs and enabled mass production. Interlocking pieces were introduced to keep puzzles together.

Fast-forward to the COVID-19 pandemic, when game-makers reported in April 2020 that puzzle sales nationwide skyrocketed more than 300%. Stuck at home, people took to their kitchen tables to pass the time and relieve stress.

In Texas, two small companies have cut out their own niches with special touches that make their puzzles stand out from the ordinary.

Outside San Marcos, in Wimberley, Manning—who owns the Wimberley Puzzle Co.—often worked long hours during

the pandemic to make and ship 100 puzzles a day. Orders have since returned to a daily average of 15 to 20 puzzles. The more relaxed pace suits Manning, who quit a stressful corporate job in Houston in 2011.

He then began traveling through national parks with his digital Nikon camera. While crisscrossing states in 2014, he bought a postcard, wrote on it, cut it up and mailed it in an envelope.

“Puzzle postcards were my original idea,” says Manning, a Pedernales Electric Cooperative member. “But I decided they’d be hard to sell. I got the idea about puzzles while I was sitting on an outcrop that overlooked a waterfall at Glacier

CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE A signature of JB Manning’s puzzles is including pieces with whimsical shapes—and he signs a piece in every order. A buck-shaped piece stands out in a field of bluebonnets. A computerized laser cutter navigates the myriad shapes of Manning’s creation. It also cuts the pieces for his plywood boxes.

JIGSAW PUZZLES

have been drawing people together for centuries. Most historians credit British mapmaker John Spilsbury for creating the first puzzles in the 1760s.

National Park. I decided I'd use my own photos of places that people know, have been to or want to go."

He moved to Wimberley in 2017 and set up his workshop. The Wimberley Puzzle Co. released its first puzzles, made of sturdy cardboard and packaged in cardboard boxes, early the next year. They featured such iconic Texas scenes as wildflowers along the Willow City Loop near Fredericksburg, Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park, and Fischer Dance Hall between San Antonio and Austin.

That fall, Manning bought a travel trailer and set up a mobile workshop. He continued on the road, taking photos while making and shipping his products.

When the pandemic closed parks, Manning returned to Wimberley. He couldn't find cardboard when supply chains slowed to a crawl in 2021. So he transitioned to Baltic birch plywood to make his puzzles and matching boxes with sliding lids.

Today his computerized equipment includes a large-format printer and a laser cutter. The wooden puzzles, which range from 130 pieces up to 1,000, are usually made to order. His nine-page online catalog has grown to include striking scenes (and animals) from other states, national parks, Route 66 and even Africa, where he traveled in 2014.

From the start, Manning's puzzles have included whimsical pieces that help tell the puzzle image's story. For instance, his best-selling Bluebonnet Sunset, photographed near Navasota, between Houston and College Station, features pieces shaped like a butterfly, dove, bee, live oak and flowers. As a special touch, he always signs a piece, such as one shaped like Texas.

Manning tucks a folded envelope inside each box with information about his company and how customers can order a lost piece. He also includes a small wooden easel for displaying the box lid or glued puzzle as desktop art.

FINE ART of a different kind inspired siblings Ericka Chambers of Little Elm and William Jones of Sachse—towns in the Metroplex—to tap into their roots and launch their own puzzle company.

"We grew up doing puzzles together as a family," says Chambers, a CoServ member. "But we had a hard time finding diversity in puzzle images. Then, when I was pregnant, I wanted to decorate my nursery around a puzzle. But there were very few to choose from."

A painting of a Black woman by artist Kwanzaa Edwards of San Antonio sparked an idea. The vibrant colors and fanciful imagery intrigued Chambers, and she suggested making a puzzle of one of Edwards' paintings. "William thought that was a great business idea," Chambers says.

Thus was born Puzzles of Color, which exclusively licenses and features artwork created by the siblings' favorite Black artists as well as Native American, Latino

and Asian American artists. In fall 2020, they partnered with a company to print the artwork and another to mount the pieces on cardboard.

At night, Chambers, then a product manager for Capital One, and Jones, a freelance graphic designer, would cut the boards on a roller die cutter in Chambers' garage. Then they boxed up the puzzles. Their parents and spouses helped, too. They still do.

A big break came in January 2021, when a local news report on the company aired nationwide. Orders shot up so much that all production had to be outsourced.

Since then, Puzzles of Color has steadily grown, both in sales and merchandise. Puzzles are available online and at special events. "They're in some boutique stores and museums, too," Chambers says. "Last February, Target carried our puzzles during Black History Month. We're working to be there year-round."

So far they've licensed with nearly 30 artists from across the country and also Kenya to create puzzles that range from kid-friendly 20- and 60-piece jigsaws up to 1,000 pieces.



ABOVE William Jones breaks up a puzzle after a die cutter did its work. OPPOSITE Nearly 30 artists illustrate the puzzles that siblings Ericka Chambers, left, and Jones have in stock.



Among their first puzzles was Edwards' dreamy depiction of a Black woman called *To Be Loved*. Paul Kellam of Jacksonville, Florida, depicts a Black family gathered near a Christmas tree and Kwanzaa table in his *Comfort & Joy*. Steph Littlebird of Las Vegas created *Wapato Woman*, a portrait of a powerful Native American woman.

Puzzles of Color boxes tell the company's story and those of the featured artists.

"We also interview all our artists in a podcast so we can share their methods and how they got into art," Chambers

says. "Each puzzle has a musical playlist on Spotify with songs connected to the artist's inspiration and what music they're into. So as people are doing a puzzle, they can get into the artist's mindset.

"We've had people tell us they don't do puzzles," she adds. "But they're so enamored with the art that the experience of putting our puzzles together gives them a feeling of being an artist. And that's cool!" ■

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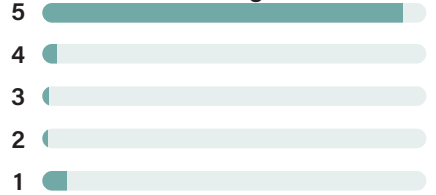
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²Plan 4521. Subject to credit approval. Rates range from 14.26% - 21.19% APR (interest rates range from 15.99% - 24.99%). Loan amount and rate will vary based on your income and creditworthiness. 12 month promotional period ("Promo Period") during which interest is billed but will be waived if the amount financed is paid in full before Promo Period expires. Monthly payments are not required during the Promo Period. Any unpaid balance and amounts owed after Promo Period will be paid over 84 monthly payments. For example, assuming the full credit limit is used on loan approval date and no payments are made during Promo Period, for every \$1,000 financed at a fixed interest rate of 24.99%, 12 monthly payments of \$0 followed by 84 monthly payments of \$28.29. This example is an estimate only. Actual payment amounts based on amount and timing of purchases. Call 866-936-0602 for financing costs and terms. Financing for the GreenSky® consumer loan program is provided by Equal Opportunity Lenders. GreenSky® is a registered trademark of GreenSky, LLC, a subsidiary of Goldman Sachs Bank USA. NMLS #1416362. Loans originated by Goldman Sachs are issued by Goldman Sachs Bank USA, Salt Lake City Branch. NMLS #208156. www.nmlsconsumeraccess.org.



MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
MANAGER

**GARY DON
NIETSCHÉ**

Reliable Power for Today—and Tomorrow

OUR TEAM AT Fayette Electric Cooperative is always looking ahead, exploring ways to innovate and utilize new technologies to improve our services. As our nation increasingly relies on electricity to power the economy, keeping the lights on has never been more important. We're committed to powering—and empowering—our community at a cost local families and businesses can afford.

So how are we working to ensure reliable and affordable power while adapting to a changing energy landscape and our community's evolving needs?

One critical component of reliable power is the mix of energy resources used to generate the electricity that keeps the lights on across our community. You may not realize it, but Fayette EC doesn't generate electricity. Instead, we purchase it from our energy provider, and from there, we distribute it to homes and businesses throughout our community.

We're increasingly using more electricity generated from renewable energy sources, but we still depend on a diverse energy mix to ensure reliable power that's available to our members whenever they need it.

In addition to managing a reliable energy mix, Fayette EC is using technology to enhance our local grid, limit service disruptions and improve outage response times.

Advanced metering infrastructure technology, also known as AMI, enables two-way communication between the co-op and consumers. In the event of a power outage, AMI helps pinpoint the exact location of the outage and can even analyze damaged or tampered meters. AMI helps us save money with real-time data and ultimately improves power reliability for our entire community.

Proactive tree trimming is another way we limit service disruptions. Scheduled trimming keeps power lines clear from overgrown limbs that are likely to fall.

As technology advancements become more accessible, we anticipate using advanced mapping software to better maintain the environment while providing more reliable service.

One of the best methods for improving our services to you is monitoring trends and leading practices from other electric co-ops in Texas and across the country. Learning from other co-ops is one of the many benefits of the cooperative business model because for us, it's about cooperation, not competition.

Rest assured Fayette EC will continue working to provide the reliable, affordable electricity you expect and deserve—for today and tomorrow. ■



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Put a Freeze on Winter Fires

HOME FIRES ARE most common in the winter, when folks are using heat sources to stay warm. As you stay cozy and warm this winter, be smart about fire safety.

If you're using a portable heater:

- ▶ Use a heater that has an automatic shutoff so if it tips over, it turns off.
- ▶ Keep anything that can burn, such as bedding, clothing and curtains, at least 3 feet from the heater.
- ▶ Plug portable heaters directly into wall outlets. Never use an extension cord or power strip.
- ▶ Turn heaters off when you go to bed or leave the room.

If you're using a fireplace:

- ▶ Keep a glass or metal screen in front of the fireplace to prevent embers or sparks from jumping out and starting a fire.
- ▶ Do not burn paper in your fireplace.
- ▶ Before you go to sleep or leave your home, put the fire out completely.
- ▶ Put ashes in a metal container with a lid. Store the container outside at least 10 feet from your home.

If you're using a wood stove:

- ▶ Have your chimney inspected and cleaned each year by a professional.
- ▶ Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet from the stove.
- ▶ Don't burn paper in your wood stove.
- ▶ Before you go to sleep or leave your home, put the fire out completely.

When heating your home, be aware of carbon monoxide. It's called the invisible killer because it's a colorless, odorless and poisonous gas. More than 400 people in the U.S. die every year from accidental CO poisoning from generators or fuel-burning appliances such as furnaces, stoves, water heaters and fireplaces.

Put CO alarms inside your home to provide an early warning of increasing CO levels. These alarms should be placed in a central location outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home.

As always, make sure you have a smoke alarm on every level of your home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas. ■

Fayette Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Fayette EC provides *Texas Co-op Power* and TexasCoopPower.com to give you information about events, safety, special programs and other activities of your cooperative. If you have any comments or suggestions, please contact the co-op office.

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Affordable Strategies for Drafty, Inefficient Windows

IF YOU GET COLD DRAFTS during the winter and some of the rooms in your home seem to overheat in summer, your windows may be the culprit. They're a major contributor to the efficiency and comfort of your home.

Replacing windows isn't always practical because it can be expensive and could take 20 years of energy savings to recover the investment.

Luckily, you can make significant improvements to your existing windows without investing a lot of money or time. Let's take a look at how you can address heat loss during the winter and heat gain during the summer. We'll start with the window itself.

Energy loss and drafts often occur in the cracks between the components of the window. Weatherstripping can be used in areas where a window's movable parts meet the window frame. Retailers offer weatherstripping for different types of windows. These materials are low cost, easy to apply and can pay for themselves in energy savings in as little as one year.

Seams between the window frame and the wall are another common source of air leakage. For anything less than a quarter inch wide, fill it with caulk; for anything larger, use expanding

foam and paint over it. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions.

If a window pane is loose or the glass is cracked or missing, it's probably costing you additional money. If you're handy, it's possible to reglaze a window yourself.

Installing exterior or interior storm windows can sometimes produce as much savings as a full replacement. You can usually order these windows to the exact size of your window opening. Recent testing by a national laboratory showed that storm windows can cut heating costs by 7%–12%.

Another strategy to consider is window coverings. These include interior roller shades, cellular shades or drapes. Recent lab tests showed that cellular shades can cut heating or cooling expenses by 10%–16%. Cellular shades have a honeycomb construction that traps air for extra insulation and can be purchased with a lighter reflective side and a darker, heat-absorbing side. Some can even be reversed with the change of seasons.

Draperies are usually less efficient but can also provide a level of comfort during winter and summer months. For maximum effect, make sure they overlap in the middle, are as tight to

the window and wall as possible, and reach the floor.

The key to reducing overheating in the summer is to keep the sun's rays from reaching the window by installing awnings or overhangs above windows that receive most of the direct sunlight. Window film that adheres to the window surface can reflect unwanted summer sun. Solar screens that block rays can also be effective.

If there are windows in vacant rooms that you don't use, cover the insides of those window frames with rigid foam insulation. Another low-cost measure for these areas that can produce as much savings as storm windows is to fashion a plastic weather barrier that adheres to the frame.

Building supply retailers sell a clear plastic and framing material that can be shrunk into place by using a hair dryer. These kits can also provide comfort and savings on all the other windows in your home.

To learn more about improving the efficiency of older windows, visit energystar.gov or energy.gov. ■



SAKLAKOVA | ISTOCK.COM

Energy Savings All Year Long

SAVING MONEY ON UTILITY BILLS through greater energy efficiency is a year-round objective for many co-op members, but the means for achieving this goal change along with the seasons in Texas.

Several factors affect energy efficiency, including weather, the age and condition of your home, and desired comfort levels. During fall and winter months, you'll want a warm home, seeking to keep the cold air out. In the spring and summer, the focus is on keeping hot air out.

Fall and Winter: Keeping Heat In

To maintain a warm indoor environment in chilly weather, there are simple steps to increasing energy efficiency.

There's no better time to examine seals on doors and windows to check for air leaks. Caulk and weatherstrip as needed to seal in warm air and energy savings. Similarly, examine electrical outlets for air leaks, and where necessary, install foam gaskets behind them to prevent drafts.

During the day, open curtains or drapes on south-facing windows to let sunlight heat your home naturally. Close window treatments at night for an added layer of window insulation.

At the change in seasons, schedule a service appointment for your heating system to ensure that it can operate at an optimal level.

Low-cost or no-cost steps for energy savings include taping or affixing heavy, clear plastic to the insides of your windowpanes to create an additional barrier against cold air. Ensure that the plastic is sealed tightly to the pane to help reduce infiltration.

Use a programmable thermostat to set the temperature as low as is comfortable when you are home (ideally around 68 degrees). When you are asleep or away, turn the temperature down even lower. A downward adjustment of 10–15 degrees over long periods can save about 10% a year on heating and cooling costs, according to the Department of Energy.

Spring and Summer: Keeping Your Cool

During warm months, energy savings and efficiency will require different measures, many of which are just as inexpensive.

Close blinds and drapes during the day to keep the sun's warming rays at bay. Where practical, plant trees and shrubs that provide shade in summer and sunlight in winter.

In extremely hot weather, your cooling system works harder to close the gap between the high outdoor temperature and the cool indoor thermostat setting. To lessen the difference and lower cooling costs, set the thermostat as high as you can while maintaining your comfort level. Employ a programmable thermostat to adjust the settings a few degrees higher when no one is home or your family is sleeping.

Using a ceiling fan in conjunction with your air conditioning can allow you to increase the thermostat setting by about 4 degrees with no reduction in comfort. Just make sure to turn ceiling fans off when no one's in the room.

During the hottest months, it's all the more critical to replace any remaining incandescent lightbulbs with LED bulbs. The wasted heat from the old bulbs affects energy use and creates wasteful and unwanted heat. ■



Ice Isn't Always Nice

Although much of the state is unaccustomed to snow and ice, temperatures can fall below freezing even in South Texas, potentially causing power outages. To keep safe and comfortable during a winter power outage:

Report any outages.

Turn off electrical appliances that were operating at the time the power went off. Leave one light on so you'll know when service has been restored.

Keep warm by closing off rooms you don't need and use only safe sources of heat, like a wood stove. Do not burn charcoal indoors. If you operate lanterns or fuel-fired cook stoves or heaters, make sure that you have adequate ventilation.

Don't drive unless absolutely necessary until conditions improve. If you must drive, go slowly.

Fayette EC encourages you to always practice safety.

PHOTOS.COM



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

National Weatherperson's Day

Monday,
February 5

Valentine's Day

Wednesday,
February 14

Presidents Day

Monday,
February 19

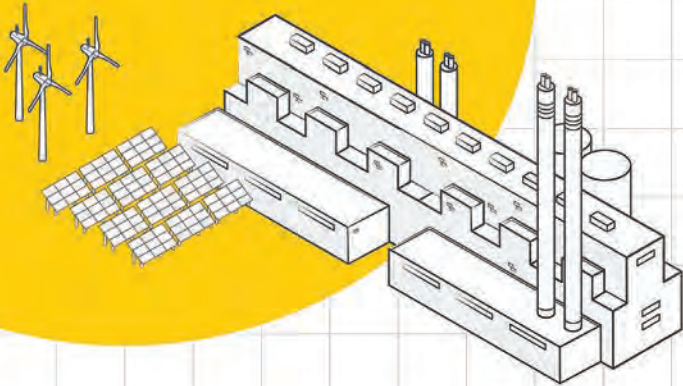
National Tortilla Chip Day

Saturday,
February 24

ELI_ASENOVA | ISTOCK.COM

DID YOU KNOW?

Across the U.S., more than 11,000 power plants send electricity to the grid.



ABBY BERRY

A Beginner's Guide to the Electric Grid

ELECTRICITY PLAYS an essential role in everyday life.

It powers our homes, offices, hospitals and schools. We depend on it to keep us warm in the winter (and cool in the summer), charge our phones and binge our favorite TV shows. If the power goes out, even briefly, our lives can be disrupted.

The system that delivers your electricity is often described as the most complex machine in the world, and it's known as the electric grid.

What makes it so complex? We all use different amounts of electricity throughout the day, so the supply and demand for power is constantly changing. For example, we typically use more electricity in the mornings when we're starting our day and in the evenings when we're cooking dinner and using appliances. Severe weather and other factors also impact how much electricity we need.

The challenge for electric providers is to plan for, produce and purchase enough electricity so it's available exactly when we need it. Too much or too little electricity in one place can cause problems. So to make sure the whole system stays balanced, the electric grid must adjust in real time to changes and unforeseen events.

At its core, the electric grid is a network of power lines, transformers, substations and other infrastructure that span the entire country. But it's not just a singular system. It's divided into three major interconnected grids: the Eastern Interconnection, the Western Interconnection and the Electric

Reliability Council of Texas. These grids operate independently but are linked to allow electricity to be transferred between regions when backup support is required.

Within the three regions, seven balancing authorities known as independent system operators or regional transmission organizations monitor the grid, signaling to power plants when more electricity is needed to maintain a balanced electrical flow. ISOs and RTOs are like traffic controllers for electricity.

The journey of electricity begins at power plants—factories that produce electricity using various energy sources, like natural gas, solar, wind and nuclear energy. Across the U.S., more than 11,000 power plants deliver electricity to the grid.

Fayette Electric Cooperative receives power from our generation and transmission supplier. We work closely with it to provide electricity at the lowest cost possible.

To get the electricity from power plants to you, we need a transportation system.

High-voltage transmission lines act as the highways for electricity, transporting power over long distances. These lines are supported by massive towers and travel through vast landscapes, connecting power plants to electric substations.

Substations are like pit stops along the highway, where the voltage of electricity is adjusted. They play a crucial role in managing power flow and ensuring that electricity is safe for use in homes and businesses.

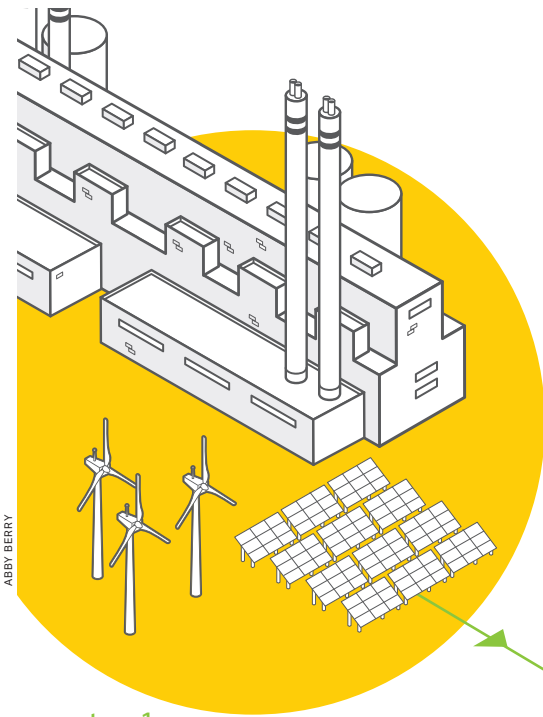
Once the electricity is reduced to the proper voltage, it travels through distribution power lines, like the ones you typically see on the side of the road. Distribution lines carry electricity from substations to homes, schools and businesses. Distribution transformers, which look like metal buckets on the tops of power poles or large green boxes on the ground, further reduce the voltage to levels suitable for household appliances and electronic devices.

After traveling through transformers, electricity reaches you—to power everyday life.

We're proud to be your local, trusted energy provider. From the time it's created to the time it's used, electricity travels great distances to be available at the flip of a switch. That's what makes the electric grid our nation's most complex machine—and one of our nation's greatest achievements. ■

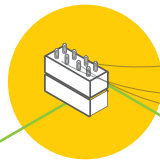
CRITICAL CONNECTIONS: HOW ELECTRICITY GETS TO YOU

The electric grid is considered one of the most complex machines in the world, delivering the electricity we need for everyday life.



step 1 GENERATION

Power plants generate electricity using a variety of energy sources, like solar, natural gas, nuclear and wind energy.



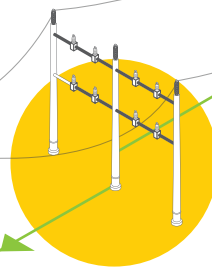
step 2 STEP-UP TRANSFORMER

A step-up transformer increases the voltage to push the electricity over long distances.



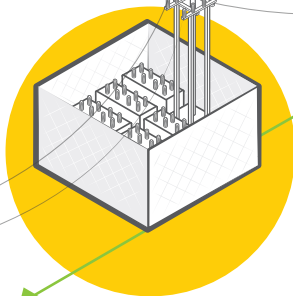
step 3 TRANSMISSION LINES

High-voltage electricity travels over long distances through these lines.



step 4 TRANSMISSION SUBSTATION

Voltage is lowered at a transmission substation so electricity can travel across the local distribution system.

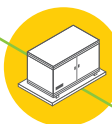
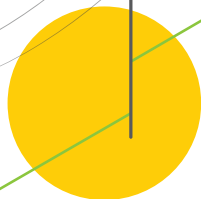


step 5 DISTRIBUTION SUBSTATION

These substations lower the voltage again so the electricity is ready to travel on distribution lines.

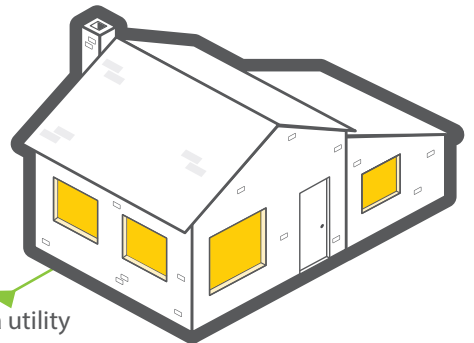
step 6 DISTRIBUTION LINES

Lower-voltage electricity travels through distribution lines, like the ones you typically see on the side of the road.



step 7 FINAL STOP

A transformer located on the ground or a utility pole reduces the voltage a final time, then electricity is sent inside your home, school or business.



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my growing collection!"

— Robert F., Richardson, TX

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A Cut Above

No knife influenced the world like Jim Bowie's behemoth

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY MARK LEMON

A **RELATIVELY NEW** phenomenon in modern society is the rise of social media influencers, personalities skilled at persuading followers to pay attention or even buy things. But how many of today's influencers will still be known in 200 years?

How many can compare to the lasting magic of Jim Bowie?

Many assume Bowie became famous defending the Alamo in 1836. In truth, he was already quite famous 10 years before—as a knife fighter and designer, frontiersman, and all-round world-class badass. He was truly a “man’s man” by any standard.

His world-renowned Bowie knife was probably first made at the direction of his brother, Rezin Bowie. But later versions with Jim’s modifications became the enduring design.

Jim Bowie used the earlier knife in a bloody skirmish called the Sandbar Fight, when Jim was nearly killed by two assailants who shot him on a Mississippi River sandbar in 1827. One man stabbed Bowie with a cane sword, but the sword bent when it hit Bowie’s sternum, giving him a moment to spring upon his attacker with his huge knife, killing him. Bowie then badly wounded the second assailant.

You see, in those days, you wanted to

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



take a knife to a gun fight because guns were notoriously unreliable. Bowie miraculously survived, and the account of the Sandbar Fight went global, thanks to a journalist who witnessed it. Bowie and his blade were thus immortalized.

What made the knife stand out was its size. The original was almost a foot long, but the subsequent model was even longer—and razor sharp. About one-third of the top of the knife, the clip point, was honed to a fine edge—so it cut both ways.

Its lethality became legendary. The *Red River Herald* of Natchitoches, Louisiana, wrote that after the Sandbar Fight, “all the steel in the country, it seemed, was being converted into Bowie knives.” That’s influence!

When Bowie arrived at the Alamo nine years later, with his notoriety on the rise and his famous knife at his side, even Davy Crockett was impressed. He said the sight of a Bowie knife “makes you queasy ... especially before breakfast.”

Bowie’s last stand at the Alamo elevated his fame. It was widely claimed, at least what I heard as a kid, that he took out 10 Mexican soldiers with his knife in close-quarters combat. This is improbable given that Bowie was critically ill from typhoid fever, but a good legend will kill probability any day of the week.

I do like what Bowie’s mama said when she learned of his death: “I’ll wager no wounds were found in his back.”

Soon after, various versions of the Bowie knife began to be made by blacksmiths. Texas Rangers carried them. The Marines had their own version. In popular films, Rambo never left home without his and neither did Crocodile Dundee.

It’s as famous as the Swiss Army knife or Buck knife. Given the ubiquity of Bowie’s blade in the world today—nearly 188 years after his death—I’d say Bowie is a greater influencer than any social media star you can name. ■

Chocolate

Think outside the box with these delectable delights

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

This twist on a traditional tres leches cake begins with a boxed cake mix. And when one of the tres leches—three milks—poured over the warm cake is chocolate, you know you're in for sinfully sweet goodness.



Quick and Easy Chocolate Tres Leches Cake

CAKE

- 1 package white cake mix (14.25 ounces)
- 3 eggs, room temperature
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) butter, room temperature
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 can sweetened condensed milk (14 ounces)
- 1 can evaporated milk (12 ounces)
- 1 cup chocolate milk

TOPPING

- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips

1. CAKE Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
2. In a bowl, beat together cake mix, eggs, milk, butter, vanilla and cinnamon until smooth.
3. Pour into prepared baking pan. Bake 25–30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean.
4. Cool in pan 10 minutes.
5. Use a fork to pierce holes in cake. Slowly pour the sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk and chocolate milk over the cake.
6. Allow cake to cool completely. Cover and chill overnight in the refrigerator.
7. TOPPING In another bowl, beat whipping cream, powdered sugar and vanilla until light and fluffy.
8. Spread over cake and top with chocolate chips.

SERVES 12

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez while she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mole Braised Brisket.



Marlene's Chocolate Doughnuts

TINA WEBB
BLUEBONNET EC

Making homemade chocolate doughnuts is easier than you think. Webb's recipe, passed down through generations, begins with a batter that comes together in a snap.

- 1½ teaspoons distilled white vinegar**
- 1 cup milk**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- 3 cups flour**
- 1 cup sugar, plus 4 tablespoons for dusting**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 3 teaspoons baking powder**
- 2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, divided use**
- 2 eggs**
- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter, melted**
- 1½ ounces unsweetened chocolate (1½ squares), melted**
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract**
- 1 cup vegetable oil**

1. In a bowl, combine vinegar and milk and stir in baking soda to dissolve.
2. In another bowl, sift together flour, 1 cup sugar, salt, baking powder and 1 teaspoon cinnamon.
3. Stir in milk mixture, eggs, butter, chocolate and vanilla.
4. Roll out dough to ½-inch thickness on a floured surface, adding additional flour if dough seems too moist.
5. Cut dough into doughnuts using a doughnut cutter.

CONTINUED >

\$500 WINNER

Hershey Bar Chocolate Cake

KAREN HOLMES
JASPER-NEWTON EC



This customer favorite at the tearoom for which Holmes baked became her husband's requested birthday cake each year. Rich, gooey cake layers sandwiched between thick, fluffy icing is a chocolate lover's dream.

SERVES 12



CAKE

- 2 cups flour**
- ½ cup sugar**
- 1 teaspoon baking soda**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder**
- 3 eggs**
- ½ cup buttermilk**
- 1 cup water**
- 1 cup vegetable oil**
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla extract**

FROSTING

- 1 package cream cheese (8 ounces), room temperature**
- 2 cups sugar**
- 1 cup powdered sugar**
- 1 container whipped topping (12 ounces)**
- 4-ounce chocolate bar, chopped**
- ½ cup chopped pecans**

1. **CAKE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with nonstick spray.
2. In a bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking soda, salt and cocoa powder.
3. In another bowl, whisk together eggs, buttermilk, water, oil and vanilla.
4. Pour wet ingredients over dry ingredients. Mix well for about 2 minutes.
5. Divide batter evenly between cake pans. Bake 30 minutes.
6. Let cakes cool and remove from pans.
7. **FROSTING** In another bowl, cream together cream cheese, sugar and powdered sugar.
8. Fold in whipped topping.
9. Spread half the frosting over one cake. Top with second cake and spread remaining frosting over top.
10. Decorate with chopped chocolate and pecans.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

FROZEN TREATS DUE FEBRUARY 10

We all know it won't be too long before we're trying to beat the heat. Share your favorite recipes for cold desserts—ice creams, popsicles and beyond—for a chance to win \$500. Go online and submit your favorite by February 10.



RECIPES CONTINUED

6. Heat oil to medium-high in a medium skillet and fry doughnuts until golden-brown on both sides.

7. In a small bowl, combine 4 tablespoons sugar and remaining 1 teaspoon cinnamon and dust over hot doughnuts.

MAKES ABOUT 24-30 DOUGHNUTS



Chocolate Cobbler

LINDA J. MOORE
SOUTH PLAINS EC

Moore says she prefers dark chocolate cocoa powder in the batter of this family favorite, which comes out of the oven fudgy and brownielike.

BATTER

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 1½ cups sugar
- 4 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

- 2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup milk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

TOPPING

- 2 cups sugar
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 3 cups boiling water
- Whipped topping (optional)
- Unsweetened cocoa powder (optional)

1. BATTER Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Melt butter in oven in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish, removing from oven once butter has melted.
3. In a bowl, stir together sugar, cocoa powder, flour, baking powder, salt, milk and vanilla. Spoon mixture over melted butter, but do not stir.
4. TOPPING In another bowl, stir together sugar and cocoa powder and sprinkle over batter in pan.
5. Pour boiling water over all, but do not stir. Bake until top has set, 35-40 minutes.
6. Allow cobbler to cool 15 minutes. Serve with whipped topping and dust with cocoa powder, if desired.

SERVES 8

TCP Not enough chocolate? You'll find many more recipes in our online archive. Just search "chocolate."

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Texas' Heartbeat

San Felipe de Austin was home for the first Texans 200 years ago

BY CHET GARNER

IT WAS EARLY MORNING, and I was flying down Interstate 10 with my radio on full blast, a fresh cup of coffee in my hand and the air conditioning cranked. Needless to say, it was a far cry from the way the first pioneers traveled through this same stretch of Texas in the 1820s to settle one of our most important towns.

I needed to connect with my past and so I set my GPS for the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site in Sealy.

Nestled on the banks of the Brazos River, this charming site was once the headquarters for Stephen F. Austin's colony and is now a fascinating glimpse into the lives of early Texans. I stepped into the museum and was amazed at the interactive exhibits, artifacts and displays that told the story of how Austin led 297 families—the Old Three Hundred—here and established the unofficial capital of Texas. This act of courage earned Austin the title of the Father of Texas.

For more than a decade, San Felipe was a major hub, and everyone important to the Texas Revolution passed through here.

I walked the timeline of how the town grew exponentially but was then abandoned and burned to the ground in a moment of fear known as the Runaway Scrape in 1836. Until recently, visitors had to use their imagination to envision the bustling townsite. But today, visitors can step inside meticulously recreated buildings, including a cabin and Austin's empresario office. Fully costumed reenactors transported me back 200 years.

Visiting San Felipe gave me a new appreciation for the lifestyle and struggle of Texans. Whether you're a history enthusiast, a nature lover or simply need to be reminded of how thankful you are for modern conveniences, this is a must-see destination. ■

ABOVE Chet, right, with Bryan McAuley, manager at the San Felipe de Austin State Historic Site.

TCP Join Chet as he sees life as the Old Three Hundred did. 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, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

FEBRUARY

07

Laredo [7–10] Birding Festival, (956) 718-1063, laredobirdingfestival.org

08

Brenham [8–11, 15–18, 22–25] The Crucible, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

09

Boerne [9–10] Chocolate Walk, (830) 248-1635, ci.boerne.tx.us

Fredericksburg [9–11, 16–18, 23–25] How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying, (830) 997-3588, fredericksburgtheater.org

10

Amarillo Triosarachops Devours, (806) 376-8782, amarillosymphony.org

Round Top Valentine's Concert and Bybee Library Fundraiser and Reception, (979) 249-3129, festivalhill.org

Surfside Beach Marathon and Half Marathon, surfsidebeachmarathon.com

Bay City [10, 16–18, 23–29, March 1–2] Matagorda County Fair, (979) 245-2454, matagordacountyfair.com

15

Alpine [15–17] Lone Star Cowboy Poetry Gathering, (432) 216-2167, lonestarcowboypoetry.com

16

Brenham [16–17] Texas Trails Quilt Show, friendshipquiltguild.weebly.com

Waller [16–17] Chili When It's Chilly Cook-Off, chiliwhenitschilly.org

17

Lake Jackson A Celebration of American Black Composers, (979) 265-7661, bcfas.org

San Felipe Nature Talks: Invasives and Exotics, (512) 461-4780, tpwd.texas.gov

19

Brenham [19-24] Fortnightly Club Annual Used Book Sale, (979) 830-5665, visitbrenhamtexas.com

23

Luling [23-24] American Legion Post 177 Chili and BBQ Cook-Off, (512) 554-5389, facebook.com/legion177

24

Victoria Tchaikovsky Spectacular, (361) 576-4500, victoriasymphony.com

26

Decatur [26-March 3] Wise County Youth Fair, wcyouthfair.org

29

Brownsville [29-March 2] Charro Days, (956) 542-4245, charrodaysfiesta.com

MARCH

01

San Angelo [1-2] Brews, Ewes & BBQ; (325) 655-2345; facebook.com/brewsewesbbq

02

Huntsville Texas Independence Day and Gen. Sam Houston's Birthday Celebration, (936) 291-9726, huntsvilletexas.com

TCP *Submit Your Event*

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

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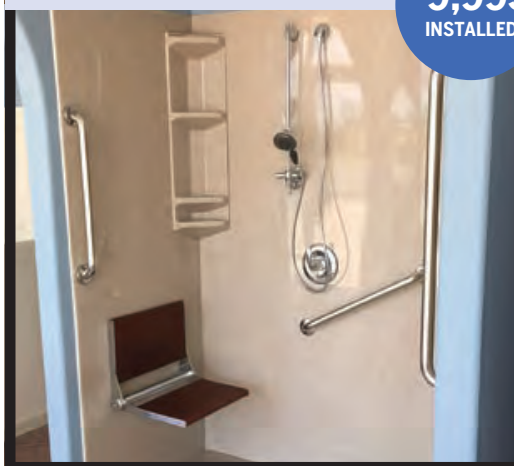


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Vibrant Color

The sun rises, and the world becomes alive with color. As we marvel at hues both artificial and natural, some photographers are fortunate enough to capture the moment with vivid clarity. Come along as we wind down the back trails to see what catches the eye.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 KRISTEN BROWN
PEDERNALES EC

A grackle finds something to eat on the trail at Brushy Creek Park in Cedar Park.

2 MARK HOLLY
BANDERA EC

An iconic San Antonio holiday scene on the Riverwalk.

3 DANNY VIVIAN
NUECES EC

"A fiery sunrise on a summer morning on Mustang Beach, the most beautiful sunrise spot in Texas."

4 ALLISON MORROW
WOOD COUNTY EC

A horned violet.



Upcoming Contests

- DUE FEB 10** Food and Cooking
- DUE MAR 10** Shells and Scales
- DUE APR 10** Textures



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

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



Progress by Design

Beverly L. Greene framed a future for architects like her

BY ARIANNA CANNON
ILLUSTRATION BY
JOHN JAY CABUAY

I KNEW AT A YOUNG AGE that I wanted to change the world.

What I didn't know was how to go about doing it or even who I was to think that I could change the world. I did know that I was drawn to architecture. Maybe that would be my purpose, the mode by which I would change the world.

But less than 100 years ago, I couldn't have pursued that purpose.

Beverly L. Greene needed to come along first. In 1942, she became the first known female African American licensed architect in the U.S. In a field dominated by white men, she stayed true to herself and pursued a path into the unknown.

She earned a degree in architectural engineering, overcame preconceived notions—even being forced to move to New York due to a lack of opportunities

for a Black female architect in Chicago—and persisted.

“I wish that young [Black] women would think about this field,” she said in an interview. “I wish some others would try it.”

I answered that rallying call by enrolling as an architecture student at Texas Tech University in 2021, knowing full well that despite the many years that have passed since Greene's historic achievements, the playing field is still not level.

While history was made in 2020 as the number of licensed female Black architects reached 500, the national registrar reported that just 0.5% of licensed architects were Black women. Not even 1% of architects look like me.

But if Greene could achieve all that she did—including working on the UNESCO headquarters in Paris—during segregation and a world war, then the only limitations on the legacy I create are me.

It's possible that pursuing architecture will have no effect on a global scale, and it's possible that I'll face criticism and setbacks. It's even highly likely that I will fail in this field, which has a higher dropout rate than engineering and medicine.

If learning about Greene taught me anything, it's that success in life is often-times transient and short-lived, but your effect on others—your creations, all those beautiful gifts—those outlive you.

So if someone asked me today what I want my life or my career to look like, I won't tell them that I want to help people in an unconventional but impactful way. I won't tell them that I want to create bonds through and with the built environment. I won't even tell them that I want to design a world in which everyone has access to safe, sustainable and affordable shelter.

Instead I'll tell them this: I want to be remembered like Beverly L. Greene because I helped shape the future for those who came after me. ■

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