PIONEERING PILOTS OF SWEETWATER A TEXAN'S HISTORIC PLAY AT THE MASTERS THE MOST OVERLOOKED BIG BEND VISTA

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# Texas Coop Power

# April 2025



# **06** Ode to a Mighty Hunter

Texas' diversity of colorful dragonflies and damselflies beguiles bird and butterfly watchers.

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

ON THE COVER Widow skimmer dragonflies use their legs and fangs to catch and eat prey. Photo by Kerry Carloy ABOVE Women Airforce Service Pilots trainees in the 1940s. Photo courtesy Official National WASP WWII Museum, Sweetwater, Texas

# The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater

Hundreds of female pilots made history at Avenger Field, where they're still celebrated.

By Pam LeBlanc

 Currents The latest buzz
 TCP Talk Readers respond
 Coron News

**Co-op News** Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative



Footnotes in Texas History Playing Through By Kevin Robbins



#### **TCP Kitchen** Eggs By Vianney Rodriguez

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**Hit the Road** Fish School By Chet Garner



Focus on Texas Photo Contest: Characters



**Observations** Overlooked (No More) *By Pam LeBlanc* 

CONTENTS



# **Grounded in Co-op Pride**

WILLIAM KAISER JOINS the rest of Co-op Country in saluting a special segment of the workforce April 14, National Lineworker Appreciation Day.

As a groundman in the late 1940s, Kaiser, 96, helped construct power lines in Central Texas for San Bernard Electric Cooperative.

He did so from the back of a Burma Jeep, unspooling line around Hallettsville, about halfway between San Antonio and Houston. Bringing electricity to rural Texas was backbreaking work in the years after co-ops got their start, and all these decades later, Kaiser is proud of his role.

"Somebody had to lay those lines out through the right-of-way so that they could hang the lines on the pole," he says. "It takes a whole crew, many people, to get to where the lineman could do his job."

A job, Kaiser notes, that wasn't for him: "I'm not somebody who likes to get up in the air."



# FINISH THIS SENTENCE The best view in Texas is ...

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: **My first car was ...** 

A 1953 Chevy with a nonworking reverse gear. Had to be creative in finding a place to park.

WANDA SIKES TRINITY VALLEY EC TERRELL

Such a clunker that it was on my mechanic's lift so much that it had more miles on it vertically than horizontally.

JOE POLINO TRI-COUNTY EC GRANBURY

A hearse! Specifically, a 1958 Cadillac coach by Miller-Meteor. My father wanted to make sure if I got in an accident, it would be the other guy who got hurt.

JAY WEBER PEDERNALES EC ROUND ROCK

A used fluorescent yellow Ford Maverick. Living in a small town, my parents always knew where I was—no tracking/locator services needed! PEGGY RUSTERHOLTZ

GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

Visit our website to see more responses.



I Contests and More

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We sure love telling you about intriguing insects as we did with *The Bugs That Make You See Red* in February 2019. Find it at TexasCoopPower.com.



# DAVE SHAFER

## **Fun For All**

I plan to send *It's Hip To Be a Square* [February 2025] to some folks who may be shy about trying square dancing or round dancing.

Cheryl Rush Upshur Rural EC Winnsboro

It brought back so many memories of when my hubby and I had a blast square dancing for so many years. It was very challenging, and the friendship was incredible.

Genny Pruitt Nueces EC Victoria

#### **Not Light Reading**

I enjoyed *Field of Beams* [December 2024] so much that I had a tear in my eye when I finished.

Roberta McLaughlin Heart of Texas EC Lorena



## **Bears in Texas**

Around age 10 my friend and I were walking on a trail that ended at a dirt road. We saw a large black bear less than a football field away [*Our Nosy New Neighbors*, January 2025]. We cried and ran.

Then, my friend stopped running and started laughing. I turned around and saw the bear running away from us.

There were many black bears in Minnesota. None of our bear meetings turned out bad for anyone other than our garbage cans. But I still don't think people will like having that many bears in Texas.

Tyler Carlson Pedernales EC San Marcos

#### **Black History Month**

Thank you for the informative articles in February [Currents and *History to a Tea*] about the achievements and contributions of Black Americans in the U.S. and world. It is much appreciated.

Gabrielle Gordon Tri-County EC Tarrant County

UP 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

# "I square danced for 20 years. Nothing better for exercise, enjoyment, friendships."

FEBRUARY 2025 It's Hip To Be a Square

DONNA DEAN HUTCHERSON VIA FACEBOOK

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# ODE TO A MIGHTY HUNTER

Texas' diversity of colorful dragonflies and damselflies beguiles bird and butterfly watchers

#### BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS

n the grassy edge of a dry irrigation canal, an emerald green insect darted about in the air. Then it landed on the limb of a thorny mesquite.

Armed with a camera, amateur naturalist Tripp Davenport of Uvalde aimed his long lens at the dazzling dragonfly and quickly snapped photos before it flitted away.

That morning in July 2017, he had visited the National Butterfly Center in South Texas in hopes

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A female eastern pondhawk dragonfly; dragonflies and damselflies have compound eyes made up of thousands of tiny eyes called ommatidia. The eastern amberwing is one of the only dragonflies that mimics a wasp. The great spreadwing is one of the largest damselflies in North America, with a length up to 2.4 inches, a 3-inch wingspan and a notable yellow stripe. A male eastern pondhawk with its prey. of spotting a red-mantled skimmer, a dragonfly from central Mexico that rarely ventures into Texas. Instead he found something even more special.

"When I looked at my images, I realized it was a dragonfly that I'd never seen before," says Davenport, a high school teacher and Medina Electric Cooperative member. "And I've seen nearly all of them in Texas."

Perplexed and excited, he called and texted pictures to some fellow naturalists. One beelined to Davenport's location. Another researched records and nailed down the species. "It was a secretive darner that had only been photographed twice before, in central Mexico," Davenport says. "My adrenaline was running!"

When you're a dragonfly chaser, that's what can happen. Like avid bird watchers, many chasers keep life lists of every species they've seen. Similarly, they may travel long distances in pursuit of dragonflies. Damselflies, too. The closely related insects, which have two pairs of long wings, elongated bodies and large compound eyes, are listed in the taxonomic group Odonata (derived from *odont*, a Greek root word for "tooth" that refers to their large chewing mandibles).

Luckily for Texans, our state is home to hundreds of species.

Odonates (chasers call them "odes") can typically be found near water but not exclusively. Their bodies come in a rainbow of hues—red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple along with black and white. They can alternately beat and rotate their four membranous wings, enabling them to zip in all directions and even backward.

Using their aerial agility, odes hunt in the air and use their strong legs to snatch prey, such as butterflies, mosquitoes, bees and other insects, including other dragonflies. Odes have excellent vision, too. Not even the tiniest movement escapes their compound eyes made of thousands of tiny eyes called ommatidia.

Of the two groups, dragonflies can generally be identified by their thicker bodies and hindwings that are broader at their base than the forewings. They fly higher than damselflies and can reach speeds of up to 35 mph. At rest, dragonflies hold their wings open whereas damselflies fold their wings over their toothpick-thin bodies.

Worldwide, odonate species total more than 6,430, a number that's tracked virtually at Odonata Central. The website maintains an extensive database compiled from information submitted by users who report their dragonfly



# LOVE ON THE WING

Butterflies and flies mate back-to-back. Not odonates. During mating, their slender bodies curl and join together (like these double-striped bluet damselflies) to form a heart-shaped "wheel" that's unique among insects. They remain in this position for a few minutes or hours.

ERRY

<image>

sightings and upload photos. According to the site, more than 490 odonate species occur in the U.S., and more than half (251 species) have been documented in Texas.

John Abbott, a Texas native who serves as the director of museum research and collections at the Alabama Museum of Natural History, has studied and written about dragonflies and damselflies since the early 1990s. Among his many publications, Abbott has authored Damselflies of Texas and Dragonflies of Texas, field guides published by the University of Texas Press.

In his opinion, there's no better place than Texas to chase dragonflies.

"The state holds a unique geographic position where there's mixing of eastern and western faunas and temperate and subtropical faunas," Abbott explains. "This leads to the large number of odonate species that can be regularly observed in the state and tremendous opportunities for new species to be documented."

He credits a growing number of natural history enthusiasts interested in odonates for making major contributions to what's known about the species of Texas.

Among them are enthusiasts like Davenport and Martin Reid, a retired computer programmer from San Antonio who used to photograph mostly birds and butterflies.

"I got interested in dragonflies in 2001 when I saw a coollooking insect eating one of my butterflies," Reid recalls. "I took a picture, and that was it. I was hooked on dragonflies."

Since then, Reid has sought out odonates across the country as well as in Mexico, Peru, Panama, England and other distant places. But he prefers to focus on Texas species, of which he's photographed 230.

"Whenever there's been a new species found in the state, I dash out and try to catch up with it," he says. "I get tips from Facebook or when someone texts me with a sighting."

Life for dragonflies and damselflies begins in the water, where some species deposit eggs. Others insert eggs into





vegetation or rotting wood near water. From the eggs hatch aquatic larvae that look like big-eyed creepy crawlers. After shedding their hard skins in a series of molts, the nymphs emerge from the water and morph into winged adults.

All across Texas, adult odonates fly from spring through fall. Some occur year-round. Most adult damselflies live two to four weeks; dragonflies live four to six weeks. But some odonates survive several months.

They're best found around freshwater, where they hunt and mate. Large open spaces, such as yards, fields and parking lots, may attract hungry odes in search of winged prey.

On their travels, Reid and Davenport have frequented the Christmas Mountains Oasis, 70 miles south of Alpine in far West Texas. Since 1996, owner Carolyn Ohl-Johnson, a member of Rio Grande Electric Cooperative, has worked to transform 5 acres of her scrubby ranchland into a lush hotspot for birds, butterflies, and, more recently, dragonflies and damselflies. So far, she has tallied 65 species.

"I remember when Tripp Davenport found a California spreadwing here," she says. "Since then, I've had hundreds of them. People come here specifically to see them and Mexican amberwings."

In Port O'Connor, on the Gulf Coast, longtime birder Petra Hockey, a member of Victoria Electric Cooperative, mostly taught herself about odonates.

Using her birding skills and Abbott's field guides, she documented local odonate species. She's since branched out to photograph dragonflies in the Big Bend, Pineywoods, Rio



OPPOSITE One of the first photos captured in Texas of a secretive darner dragonfly, at the National Butterfly Center in South Texas.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A male checkered setwing dragonfly. A male American rubyspot damselfly, found in all but two of the lower 48 states. A male neon skimmer dragonfly.

Grande Valley and other places across Texas. Before a trip, she always researches her destination.

"I learn what dragonfly species are there and what habitats they're found in," Hockey says.

"What time of the day do they fly? Do they fly high or low? How do they perch? As you get more into dragonflies, you learn how interesting and unique they are."

That uniqueness fascinates retired teacher Kerry Carloy, who lives north of Dallas in Lewisville and is a CoServ member. He frequents local natural areas in search of dragonflies. "Their intelligent design to me says they weren't an accident," he says. "I try to get that point across through my photos.

"They're interesting because they can maneuver with such agility," he adds. "They have 360-degree vision, and you can watch them crunch insects up with their teeth."

Though he's chased dragonflies around the world, Brian Gooding, a quality engineer who lives in Plano, doesn't keep a life list.

"Numbers aren't important to me," he says. "My challenge is to take the best picture that I can, even if it's a common species. I've used some of my best pictures to help educate people about dragonflies and how cool they are."

They can also be wise. Gooding recalls the time he watched two male eastern pondhawks fighting over territory at the Colleyville Nature Center northeast of Fort Worth.

"After they were done, they went back to their respective perches and carried on with existing," he says. "That's when I realized I need to be more like them and let go of negative stuff in my life. It was a great lesson to learn from a dragonfly."

Hundreds of female pilots made history at Avenger Field, where they're still celebrated

# The WASPs Who Flew Out of Sweetwater

#### BY PAM LEBLANC

They had to cinch up the waistbands of their oversized, hand-medown flight suits, and they weren't allowed to climb out of a cockpit without applying fresh lipstick. The women who trained at Avenger Field in Sweetwater stepped up in a serious way. They volunteered when more pilots were needed to fly vital stateside missions during World War II.

The National WASP WWII Museum, which opened in 2005 in a circa 1929 hangar at Avenger Field, celebrates the Women Airforce Service Pilots, or WASPs, who trained at the remote airbase, about 40 miles west of Abilene, as part of an experimental wartime program designed to free up male pilots for combat.

"A lot were young and single and free, but some were married and some had children," says Lisa Taylor, executive director of the museum, located across Avenger Field from what is now Texas State Technical College, where the female trainees once lived in barracks.

"The feeling was, 'We have this skill, and there's a need for us.' They adored flying and were thrilled to fly, but they were also thrilled to be needed."

Applicants to the program, which ran for two years, had to have high school diplomas or the equivalent and be between the ages of 18 and 35, although at least one 17-year-old lied about her age to get in. They had to be at least 5 feet 4 inches tall, have a pilot's license, and pass a physical exam and interview to get a spot.

About 25,000 women applied, and 1,830 were accepted.

They came from all 48 states and Alaska and Hawaii. They were overwhelmingly white, but there were at least two Chinese Americans, a Native American and two Latina women. The program rejected Black applicants. They were high school dropouts and debutantes, blackjack dealers and teachers. One was a pinup girl. Some had worked as crop duster pilots or barn stormers, performing stunts in traveling shows.

OPPOSITE Women Airforce Service Pilots assigned to Camp Davis in North Carolina pose in front of a Beechcraft AT-11.

BELOW The courtyard between hangars at the National WASP WWII Museum features three steel cutouts based on a historical photograph of women arriving at the base.



The program officially started in Houston in November 1942, under the direction of pioneering aviators Jacqueline Cochran and Nancy Harkness Love. It quickly outgrew its space in Houston and moved to Avenger Field, where the women could live in bunks in on-site barracks.

The new location worked well. The airfield had two runways plus classroom space. The sparsely populated area's big skies and open fields suited the flight school's needs, and the stiff West Texas wind provided ample training opportunities.

The women spent half their days in ground school, learning meteorology, navigation, first aid, military law, Morse code, mechanics and parachute packing. The rest of the working day was spent learning to fly various military aircraft.

Many of the women were small and had a hard time reaching the pedals on aircraft designed for men. They used blocks of wood and parachute packs as cushions to make it work. One bragged that she was a "three-cushion pilot," meaning she stuffed three packs behind her back so she could operate the controls.

For their efforts, the women earned \$174.50 per month (about \$3,250 today), deducting \$1.65 for room and board. Because they were civil workers and not officially part of the U.S. military, they even had to buy their own uniforms.

Training lasted at least seven months, and about 40% of the recruits washed out before earning their wings. But ultimately, 1,102 women completed training.

Those who graduated were assigned to air bases around the country, where they went to work shuttling military personnel

# Notable Texan WASPs

#### Millie Dalrymple

After her husband was shot down in a B-17 over Europe, Dalrymple of Llano took up flying, joined the WASPs and was soon flying B-17s herself.





## Madge Moore

As a local who grew up just up the road from Sweetwater, in Haskell, Moore used dead reckoning—a navigational method of estimating a plane's current position

based on a previously known location, course, speed and time traveled—to ferry planes without working instruments.

## Florene Miller Watson

Watson of San Angelo was one of just 25 women who qualified for a forerunner to the WASP program. She flew every type of plane used by the Army Air Corps.





and ferrying aircraft from base to base. The WASPs flew 78 different aircraft, including pursuit planes and bombers, and flight-tested others, flying more than 60 million miles.

Some of the women served as tow pilots, dragging targets 1,000 feet behind their planes so soldiers on the ground could practice firing at them with live ammunition. Others worked as instructors or practiced concealment, learning to lay smoke that would hide personnel on the ground.

Thirty-eight WASPs were killed during their service, including 11 who died in training accidents. The military didn't pay for their funerals, so fellow WASPs took up collections to send the women's remains home to family.

About 14,000 people visit the museum in Sweetwater every year, exploring two hangars filled with everything from flight suits to logbooks, part of a tow target, a flight simulator, medals, parachutes and four complete aircraft of the type the women used for training.

Visitors can take a turn at a chin-up bar like one the women used during daily calisthenics or grab a seat in a re-creation of a classroom, where a film leads them through what it was like as an incoming recruit reporting for duty. They can peer into a mock-up of a room in the barracks too.

Mostly, though, visitors can learn who the WASPs were as individuals. "They've all got really amazing stories," Taylor says, sharing a few as she walks through the museum.

When one group of WASPs traveled to California on a mission, they were arrested and briefly jailed for impersonating military pilots, Taylor says. Another WASP made an emergency landing in a farmer's field, and the family who owned the land fed and housed her for the night. Other stories describe WASPs who had to parachute to safety from their airplanes and WASPs who tested aircraft with engines prone to catching fire.

The names of all the WASPs, including those who didn't complete training, are listed on one wall of the museum, and visitors can access a database that includes information about each one. There are photos and handprints of many of the women.

Each April, the museum hosts a Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In, set for April 25-26 this year. While most of the

**OPPOSITE A graduation ceremony August** 7, 1943, at Avenger Field in Sweetwater.

ABOVE AND LEFT Nell "Mickey" Stevenson Bright, 103, knew she wanted to learn to fly when she was 8. She ended up being one of only 20 women chosen to train on B-25 bombers.

WASPs are now gone, their families, as well as members of the public, still attend.

At the 2012 homecoming, WASP Nell "Mickey" Stevenson Bright, who is now 103 years old, explained that she skipped meals as a teenager to pay for flying lessons. After becoming a WASP, she remembers standing in a shower wearing her flight suit to clean it.

"The thrill of flying those wonderful airplanes and getting paid for it-that was worth it," Bright, who is from Canyon, said at the time.

The WASPs were deactivated in December 1944, but it took more than 30 years before President Jimmy Carter signed a bill recognizing them as military veterans. In 2010, President Barack Obama awarded the WASPs Congressional Gold Medals, the oldest and most prestigious civilian award in the U.S.

Today, museum officials hope the institution can inspire the next generation.

"These women went to a lot of time and trouble to learn how to fly in a world that wasn't going to let them in," Taylor says. "So, what is it that you want to do and try, and what barriers will you need to overcome to leave a good legacy for yourself?"

ICP Tour Hangar 2 at the National WASP WWII Museum with Lisa Taylor, the museum's director.



# Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In

The National WASP World War II Museum will celebrate its 20th anniversary at this year's WASP Homecoming Celebration & Fly-In, Friday–Saturday, April 25–26. There will be museum tours, guest speakers, live reenactors, aviation games and a display of aircraft. For more information, go to waspmuseum.org/ homecoming.



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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER

DOUG LAMBERT

# Lineworkers Power Life— Whatever It Takes

LINE WORK RANKS as one of the most dangerous jobs in the country.

The crews at Fayette Electric Cooperative work, rain or shine, in often-challenging conditions to ensure you have reliable electricity. On April 14, we celebrate National Lineworker Appreciation Day, honoring those who make sure our community has the power it needs every day.

It's hard work but very rewarding.

#### The Danger

Working around high-voltage electricity comes with obvious risks. Move just a little the wrong way or lose focus for a split second, and it could be deadly.



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Lineworkers often work on energized power lines and can't tell they're energized by sight alone. Their work requires concentration, and there's no margin for error. They often endure rainstorms, high winds, and extreme heat and cold to restore power during an outage—sometimes in the dark or near fast-moving traffic.

That's why workers must undergo years of training before they can officially be called a lineworker. They typically start as a groundman, helping crews with tools and keeping job sites safe, then transition to apprentice status, which usually spans four years.

After an apprenticeship, with more than 7,000 hours of training under their belts, they transition

to journeyman lineworker status—when they're considered official lineworkers.

But the education is ongoing. Lineworkers continue training to stay up on safety requirements and up to date on the latest equipment and procedures.

#### The Sacrifices

This field comes with trade-offs. Lineworkers are often first on the scene of devastating emergencies, like car accidents, structure fires and damage from severe storms.

They don't know what type of situation they're going to face or when they'll face it. They get calls at all hours, including in the middle of the night. They

> might miss their kids' sports events and family dinners, but with the support of their families, their dedication pays off in the end.

Their sacrifices ensure the electricity that powers the lives of our friends and neighbors stays on.

#### The Rewards

One thing that makes this job worth it is the camaraderie. FEC's employees are like a second family, and the line crews are a tight-knit group. In this work, they have to depend on the person beside them in life-or-death circumstances.

It's a culture of trust, teamwork and service. It's all about keeping everyone safe and the lights on.

Lineworkers have a lot of pride in their work. When it's cold and wet, they know they're working to keep people warm. There's a lot of satisfaction in hearing someone yell "thank you" from the window after the lights come back on or seeing people flip the light switches on their porches after an

No matter how tired they are or how long they've been working, that feeling makes it worth it.

outage is restored.

You can trust that Fayette EC lineworkers are doing their best to get the lights back on as quickly and safely as possible—so you can get back to living.

# WE NEVER STOP.



Not everyone starts their day at the same time or in the same way. But no matter when or how, Fayette Electric Cooperative is there to help you power every moment of it.

Visit **fayette.coop** to discover the power of your co-op.

YOUR SOURCE FOR POWER. AND INFORMATION.

Call Us 979-968-3181



Visit Our Website www.fayette.coop



Our Location 2111 N. Von Minden Rd., La Grange



# Take Precautions With Perishable Foods During Power Outages

**WE REFRIGERATE OR** freeze foods to keep them fresh and prevent the spread of foodborne illnesses through the growth of microorganisms such as salmonella, E. coli and botulism. But what happens if the power goes out and your appliances stop working?

These food storage tips from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration can help you understand what to do with food during and after a power outage.

If you lose electricity, keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Your refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if it's unopened. A full freezer will keep an adequate temperature for about 48 hours if the door remains closed. If your freezer is not very full, fill it up with gallon jugs of water. They'll help keep food safe longer.

# Once power is restored, you'll need to determine the safety of your food. Here's how:

▶ If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.

▶ If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. You can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook. If in doubt, throw it out.

▶ Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power was not out for more than four hours and the refrigerator door was kept shut.

▶ Discard any refrigerated perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs or leftovers) that has been at temperatures above 40 degrees for four hours or more. Perishable foods with temperatures that are 45 degrees or below (measured with a food thermometer) should be safe but should be cooked and consumed as soon as possible. ■

## Fayette Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy' Cooperative 😥

#### CONTACT US

2111 N. Von Minden Rd. P.O. Box 490 La Grange, TX 78945 Local (979) 968-3181 Toll-Free 1-866-968-3181 Email electric@fayette.coop Web fayette.coop

#### Your Board of Directors

Joseph D. Kruppa, President Gale Lincke, Vice President James A. Anderle, Acting Secretary-Treasurer David Lehmann David A. Stancik Leo C. Henke

Your General Manager Doug Lambert

24/7 Outage Hotline Numbers For information and to report outages, please contact us.

LOCAL (979) 968-3181

TOLL-FREE 1-866-968-3181

#### ABOUT FAYETTE EC

FEC serves Austin, Bastrop, Colorado, Fayette, Lavaca, Lee and Washington counties.

#### CONVENIENT PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Pay by Bank Draft
- Pay Online Using SmartHub
- Pay by Phone at 844-971-1048
- Pay in Person
- Pay by Credit Card Draft
- Pay by Mail
- Fay Dy Wall

#### **TEXAS CO-OP POWER**

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.

VISIT US ONLINE fayette.coop



# Lehmann Set to Retire, District Elections Ahead

**DIRECTOR DAVID LEHMANN** will retire July 16, concluding 45 years of dedicated service on the board of Fayette Electric Cooperative. His retirement will create a vacancy for District 1 on the board.

Directors Joseph Kruppa, District 2, and James A. Anderle, District 5, will seek reelection to the board this year.

Fayette EC's board members are elected to staggered three-year terms, ensuring each district holds elections every three years. Directors represent their respective districts and are chosen by cooperative members during these elections. Nominations for candidates will be accepted from the floor during the meeting. Any member residing in the district may nominate a candidate.

To qualify, nominees must be cooperative members living in the district and meet the criteria outlined in Article IV, Section 4.02, of the cooperative's bylaws. The bylaws are available for review at fayette.coop/bylaws. Members interested in running for a seat on the board can access an application at fayette.coop/board-directors or pick one up at Fayette EC's headquarters at 2111 N. Von Minden Road in La Grange.

Applications must be submitted by **5 p.m. May 1.** Completed forms can be mailed to:

Fayette Electric Cooperative Attn: Tracy Denton P.O. Box 490 La Grange, TX 78945

Alternatively, applications may be dropped off at 2111 N. Von Minden Road in La Grange.

If your district meeting is scheduled for this year, look for a notice in the mail this month. You can also contact our office to confirm which district meeting you should attend. These meetings play a vital role in the cooperative's operations and overall well-being—your vote truly makes a difference.

Watch for an article on Lehmann's retirement in the July issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. ●





# FEC Mourns the Loss of Bill Briscoe

**BILLY JOE BRISCOE** of Weimar passed away peacefully February 13 at the age of 73. His life was marked by a long career with Shell Oil Co., devotion to family and faith, and significant service on the Fayette Electric Cooperative board.

Briscoe graduated from Eagle Lake High School in 1970 and earned an accounting degree from Texas A&I in Kingsville. He met and married Patricia Dettling in 1973 and raised three children: Corey, Tyson and Hannah.

Briscoe's 30-year career with Shell took him to Houston, New Orleans and Rio de Janeiro, where he excelled in accounting roles before retiring in 2003 in Weimar.

In retirement, Briscoe served almost 20 years on the FEC board, representing District 6 and serving as secretary-treasurer for 19 of those years.

Briscoe also served as grand knight and financial secretary for the Knights of Columbus, coached youth sports at St. Michael Catholic School, and was a member of the Weimar Lions Club.

He is survived by his wife, Patricia; three children; and 11 grandchildren. His legacy of service and dedication will be fondly remembered by all who knew him.

# Save the Date F for your district meeting!



Did you know district meetings are held on a rotating basis each year? The purpose is to elect a nominee for director-candidate for your district who is then officially elected by members at FEC's Annual Meeting held the third Wednesday in July. District meetings are also an opportunity to meet with FEC staff and share information about cooperative-related matters. For information about the current board of directors and how the cooperative works, visit fayette.coop/board-directors.

## **District 1**

May 5 Registration: 6 p.m. Business Mtg: 6:30 p.m.

Holy Cross Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall Warda

# District 2 May 7 Registration: 6 p.m. Business Mtg: 6:30 p.m.

Ammannsville KJT Hall 7904 Mensik Rd Schulenburg

# District 5 May 6 Registration: 6 p.m. Business Mtg: 6:30 p.m.

St. Peter & Paul Catholic Church Parish Hall Plum

If your district meeting is scheduled this year, please watch your mailbox for your district meeting notice and be sure to bring it with you to speed up your registration. You can also contact our office to confirm which district meeting you should attend.

# What Are the Duties and Responsibilities of Board Members?

**ONCE ELECTED TO THE BOARD**, directors have two basic functions: decision making and oversight. As decision makers, they're responsible for working with the cooperative's management and key staff to set policies and develop strategies to keep the cooperative on track.

To do that, they have to maintain a working knowledge of all phases of the electric cooperative program, from the broad national overview down to day-to-day operations, to serve members in each of the seven districts. The oversight function, or fiduciary duty, requires board members to monitor the cooperative's business performance, risk assessment and compliance with legal obligations.

## Other responsibilities and functions of the board are to:

- ▶ Set the cooperative's mission and purpose and provide strategy, direction and guidance.
- Contract for and approve an annual independent financial audit.
- ▶ Review the annual financial audit and management letter.
- ▶ Select and appoint legal counsel.
- Review and approve major contracts, such as wholesale power agreements, loan agreements and construction contracts.

- Review, monitor and report to the membership regarding the critical operating and financial performance of the co-op.
- ► Hire and regularly evaluate the performance of the general manager.
- ▶ Comply with all board policies and bylaws, including attendance at cooperative meetings, training and certifications.
- Conduct membership meetings.
- Protect the cooperative's assets through review, approval and procurement of appropriate insurance coverage while adhering to all regulatory requirements at local, state and federal levels.

Cooperative directors represent the members who elect them and take seriously the duties and responsibilities of their position. They uphold the unique democratic business model that distinguishes your electric cooperative from utility companies whose sole purpose is to make a profit for investors.

At Fayette Electric Cooperative, the guiding principle is service. Your board of directors serves to uphold that mandate with knowledge, integrity and vision.

# **Director Qualifications**

**1. NO MEMBER SHALL BE** eligible to become or remain a director or to hold any position of trust in the cooperative who is a close relative of an incumbent director or of an employee of the cooperative, who has not been a member in his/her individual capacity for at least one year prior to his/her election and whose principal place of residence is not served with electric power and energy by the cooperative in the district he/she is to represent.

**2.** No member shall be eligible to become or remain a director who is not at least twenty-one (21) years of age, is a convicted felon, or who is in any way employed by or financially interested in a competing enterprise or a business selling electric energy or supplies to the cooperative, or a business primarily engaged in selling electrical or plumbing appliances, fixtures, or supplies to the members of the cooperative.

**3.** No member shall take or hold office as a director who is the incumbent of or candidate for an elective public office in connection with which a salary is paid.

 ${\bf 4.}\,{\rm A}\,{\rm director}\,{\rm whose}\,{\rm term}\,{\rm expires}\,{\rm may}\,{\rm be}\,{\rm reelected}\,{\rm for}\,{\rm subsequent}\,{\rm terms}.$ 

**5.** The term of service for each director is three (3) years from the date of the annual membership meeting at which such director was elected.

**6.** Once elected, each director is required to become credentialed under the Credentialed Cooperative Director Program of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association during his/her first full term. The CCD certificate is earned by completing five courses designed to provide the basic knowledge and skills required of cooperative directors, who have several opportunities during the initial three-year term to earn their CCD certificate.

**7.** Since the cooperative is a member of NRECA and Texas Electric Cooperatives, directors are encouraged to attend conferences and other activities to improve their skills and knowledge. While a director's attendance is not mandatory, nor a bylaws requirement, the training programs, conferences and meetings offer unique educational opportunities that are conducive to making the board of directors a more knowledgeable and informed decision-making body.

8. Directors spend an average of 30 days annually attending monthly board meetings; state, regional and national meetings; training sessions, and other meetings or functions. Most events are held during regular business hours, but some meetings are held in the evenings, and some may last several days. ■

#### Editor's Notes:

Excerpts 1-5 were taken from Article IV, Section 4.02 of the bylaws of Fayette Electric Cooperative.

For members interested in serving on the board of directors, FEC's policy on director duties and responsibilities is available for review at the cooperative's office located at 2111 N. Von Minden Road in La Grange.



## POWER TIP

Plant leafy trees to the south of your home to block sunlight in the summer and reduce the need for air conditioning.

CKYARDPRODUCTION | ISTOCK.CO



# District Meeting Voting

- Members must be present to vote at the meeting.
- Each member shall be entitled to one vote and no more upon each matter submitted to a vote at the meeting.
- At all member meetings, the spouse of a member will be allowed to vote for the membership, whether single or joint.
- If a husband and wife or two persons hold a joint membership, they shall jointly be entitled to one vote.
- In the event of the death of a person holding a joint membership, the surviving member alone may vote.
- A membership held by a school, community hall or similar public body shall be voted by the president or chairman of the board or, if so authorized in writing, by any one member of the board.
- The pastor or, if so authorized in writing, any one member of the governing body of a church holding membership in the cooperative shall cast the vote of the church.
- A membership held by any corporation, partnership, firm, government agency or political subdivision shall be voted by any person submitting proof of their authority to vote for the membership.

# **Board Terms up for Reelection**



DAVID LEHMANN (RETIRING) DIRECTOR, DISTRICT 1

After 45 years of dedicated service, David Lehmann will retire July 16 during the annual membership meeting of Fayette Electric Cooperative. Lehmann's remarkable career will be celebrated in the July issue of *Texas Co-op Power*.

Members interested in running for the District 1 board seat can access an application at fayette.coop/board-directors or pick one up at Fayette EC's headquarters at 2111 N. Von Minden Road in La Grange.

Applications must be submitted by 5 p.m. April 28 and can be mailed to:

Fayette Electric Cooperative Attn: Tracy Denton P.O. Box 490 La Grange, TX 78945

Alternatively, applications may be dropped off at the La Grange headquarters.

To qualify, nominees must be cooperative members residing in District 1 and meet the criteria outlined in Article IV, Section 4.02 of the cooperative's bylaws, available at fayette.coop/bylaws.



## JOSEPH KRUPPA (INCUMBENT) PRESIDENT, DISTRICT 2

#### EDUCATION:

Graduate of Bishop Forest High School and served in the U.S. Navy Submarine Force during the Vietnam War

occupation: Rancher

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: Power generation and oil and gas industry

#### PAST MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICES HELD IN ORGANIZATIONS:

Director, Fayette EC, 2001–present; Vice President, Fayette EC, 2006–24; former treasurer, La Grange Noon Lion's Club

#### CURRENT MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICES HELD IN ORGANIZATIONS:

President, Fayette EC, 2024–present; member and quartermaster, VFW Post No. 5254; member, La Grange Noon Lion's Club; third- and fourth-degree member, Knights of Columbus

NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERA-TIVE ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATIONS: NRECA Credentialed Cooperative Director, 2003; Board Leadership Certificate, 2005; Director Gold Certificate, 2019



## JAMES A. ANDERLE (INCUMBENT) DIRECTOR, DISTRICT 5

EDUCATION: Graduate of Texas State Technical College, Waco

OCCUPATION: Maintenance manager at Muldoon Minerals

## PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT:

Technical field operations technician at CenterPoint Energy

#### PAST MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICES HELD IN ORGANIZATIONS: Member, Smithville Lions Club

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICES HELD IN ORGANIZATIONS:

Director, Fayette EC, 2016–present; member, Knights of Columbus Council No. 2574, La Grange; member, the KJT Society No. 1, Praha; member, Holy Rosary ACTS

NATIONAL RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERA-TIVE ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATIONS: NRECA Credentialed Cooperative Director, 2017

# FEC & COBANK To offer grants

Fayette EC, in partnership with CoBank, is seeking applicants for the Sharing Success Grant Program.

Eligible grant applicants must:

- Be a 501(c)(3) organization
- Plan to use grant money to serve a public purpose
- Submit a grant application by 5 p.m. on May 12
- For more rules and information and to complete an application, visit fayette.coop/grants.



# Questions? Contact Tracy Denton @ 979-968-3181 or tracya@fayette.coop.



Fayette Electric cooperative maintains a record of members dependent upon electrical support systems. A life support-dependent member is a person who has an electrical device and/or equipment designed to sustain that person's life that was prescribed by a physician who is licensed by the state of Texas as a medical doctor or osteopath.

Members currently on the Critical Care Residential Member List who are dependent upon electrical life support systems are asked to complete a new application every two years and submit it to FEC's operations department.

Members on life support must understand that they secure no special right to preferential service because FEC has created a system to take into account members' special needs and that FEC in no way guarantees uninterrupted service. Life support-dependent members also are advised to make alternative arrangements in the event of an interruption to their normal electrical service.

Forms can be found on FEC'S website, fayette.coop/report-outage. For more information, call the operations department at (979) 968-3181.



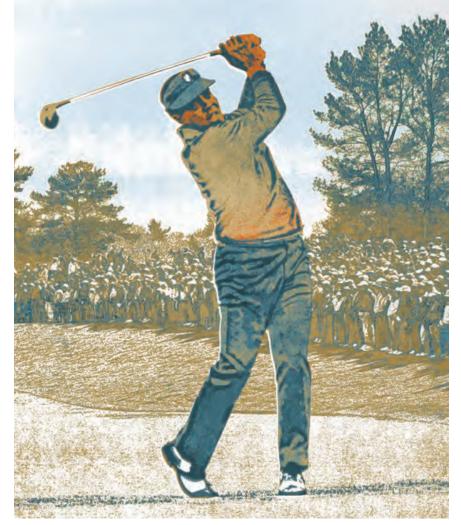
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# Playing Through

Golfer Lee Elder shot his way to the very top despite grave barriers BY KEVIN ROBBINS • ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC KITTELBERGER

LEE ELDER WAS 40 when he played in his first Masters Tournament, the spring golf ritual in Augusta, Georgia, that represents the first of the four major championships each season. But his rather advanced age wasn't the story at all 50 years ago this month—in April 1975. Nor were the death threats.

The Dallas native had become the first African American to compete in the Masters. Augusta National Golf Club, which organizes and hosts the tournament, had finally responded to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. While the club had no formal policy banning Black players, it nonetheless had never extended an invitation to one.

That changed in 1971.

That year, the Masters announced that

any player who had won the previous season on the PGA Tour would automatically qualify—a policy that exists to this day.

Elder won the 1974 Monsanto Open in Pensacola, Florida. It was two weeks after Hank Aaron broke the Major League Baseball home run record set by Babe Ruth.

Elder's acceptance to play in the Masters generated massive publicity. It felt like a watershed moment in American sports.

"Move over, Hank Aaron," wrote *The Chicago Defender*, a Black newspaper. "There's enough room in the spotlight for at least two people." The threats soon followed.

In April, as the Masters neared, Elder rented two houses near the course for himself and his wife. He wanted no one

# FOOTNOTES IN TEXAS HISTORY

else to know where he would be while competing.

It was all so new and unnerving to the U.S. Army veteran who, along with his nine siblings, had lost his parents when he was young. Born in 1934, Elder caddied with his brother Raymond at Tenison Park Golf Course in Dallas, miles from the nearest course that allowed Black players. He moved to California in the 1940s to live with an aunt.

There he caddied, toiled in bag rooms, did odd jobs in pro shops and gradually learned to hit a golf ball straight and far.

Elder joined the United Golfers Association, a tour for Black players, who were, at the time, excluded by fiat from the PGA Tour.

Elder thrived on the UGA. He won 18 of 22 tournaments in one remarkable stretch. But that wasn't where the money and prestige were; UGA purses were a pittance. Elder joined the PGA Tour in 1968, seven years after it lifted its Caucasian-only policy.

That August, he took the mighty Jack Nicklaus to a playoff in Akron, Ohio. Elder had arrived. People knew his name.

He eventually won four tournaments in 448 starts on the PGA Tour, including once in Texas, at the 1976 Houston Open. He proved, with Charlie Sifford and Calvin Peete, that Black players belonged in professional golf.

Elder missed the 36-hole cut at that Masters (a tournament he would play five more times) in his 1975 debut. He later said he felt seen in a way he never had.

"The display from the employees at Augusta National was especially moving," Elder, who died in 2021, told *Golf Digest* in 2019. "Most of the staff was Black, and on Friday, they left their duties to line the 18th fairway as I walked toward the green.

"I couldn't hold back the tears. Of all the acknowledgments of what I had accomplished by getting there, this one meant the most." ■



Hearty meals that just might be too good to limit to breakfast

#### BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Team salsa verde! I unapologetically drench salsa verde over all my dishes, but over eggs in a well of hash browns topped with bacon? This is what breakfast dreams are made of. Take this directly from the stovetop to the table and serve it family style.

# Salsa Verde, Hash Brown & Bacon Breakfast Skillet

6 strips bacon, diced 6 cups frozen diced hash browns 34 cup chopped red bell pepper 34 cup chopped green bell pepper 12 cup chopped onion 1 teaspoon salt 14 teaspoon ground black pepper 4 eggs 1 cup salsa verde 14 cup chopped cilantro (optional)

1. In a large skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Remove bacon and set aside. Drain, reserving 2 tablespoons of drippings in skillet.

**2.** Add hash browns, peppers, onion, salt and pepper to drippings. Cook 2 minutes while stirring.

**3.** Cover and cook about 15 minutes more or until potatoes are browned and tender, stirring occasionally.

**4.** Reduce heat to low. Make 4 wells in potato mixture. Break 1 egg into each well. Top each egg with 1/4 cup salsa verde.

 Sprinkle bacon over the top, cover, and cook until eggs are completely set, about 8–10 minutes.

**6.** Serve warm, garnished with cilantro if desired.

#### SERVES 4

Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Honey Flan.



Egg Puff & Stuff michele bradley grayson-collin ec

If you crave an easy, sticks-to-your-bones breakfast, this one has it all—veggies, sausage, eggs, cheese and a hint of spice. Served warm with a few slices of creamy avocado, this dish will keep you going all morning.

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed

1 small potato, diced

- 1/2 cup ground pork or turkey breakfast sausage
- 1/2 cup diced green bell pepper
- 1/2 cup diced red bell pepper
- ½ cup diced yellow bell pepper¼ cup thinly sliced portabello
- mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- 8 eggs
- 2 tablespoons cottage cheese
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning

1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes Sliced avocado

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over mediumhigh heat. Add diced potato and sausage. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage is cooked through and potato is fork-tender.

**2.** Stir in peppers, mushrooms and garlic, and cook until vegetables are slightly tender, adding additional oil if needed. Remove from skillet and set aside.

**3.** In a bowl, beat eggs lightly. Add cottage cheese, Cajun seasoning and crushed red pepper flakes.

**4.** Pour egg mixture into skillet over mediumhigh heat. Run spoon across bottom of skillet to begin lightly scrambling eggs.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

# Easiest Breakfast Casserole

VALERIE KRUSE TRI-COUNTY EC



Stuffing in a breakfast casserole? This recipe piqued my interest from the start, and boy was I happy I gave it a try. The stuffing addition gives this eggy dish a mouthful of flavor and bite. This casserole will feed a crowd, but you could also keep it for yourself and enjoy it for lunch all week.

- 9 eggs
- 3 cups milk
- 1 box stuffing mix (6 ounces), any flavor
- 1 pound ground breakfast sausage, cooked and crumbled
- 3 cups grated cheddar cheese, divided use
- **1.** Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray.

**2.** In a large bowl, lightly beat eggs. Add milk, stuffing, sausage and 2 cups cheese. Stir to combine.

**3.** Spoon into prepared dish and top with remaining 1 cup cheese.

**4.** Cover with plastic wrap or aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight.

**5.** In the morning, allow casserole to sit at room temperature 30 minutes while the oven preheats to 350 degrees.

**6.** Bake uncovered 40–45 minutes or until lightly browned on top and toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12-16

# 健 \$500 Recipe Contest

**ONE-SKILLET DINNERS** DUE APRIL 10 It's a busy weeknight, and you need an easy one-dish dinner to fill up the family. What's your go-to? Send us your best skillet stunner, and you could win \$500. Enter by April 10. **UPCOMING: CANDIES AND FUDGE** DUE MAY 10





#### RECIPES CONTINUED

**5.** Stir in cooked potato, sausage and vegetables to evenly coat with egg. Continue to cook until eggs are fully cooked.

6. Serve warm, topped with avocado.

SERVES 3-4

## Easy Egg Bake

AMY STREET MIDSOUTH EC

This egg bake packs all the flavors of a breakfast sandwich into a casserole. I love finding great recipes to have on hand for a lazy Sunday morning brunch with ingredients I have readily available in my kitchen. Fresh from the oven, I topped my slice with plenty of hot sauce—delicious!

1 tube crescent rolls (12 ounces) 1 pound pork breakfast sausage



- 1/2 cup diced green onion
- 8 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese, divided use
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, divided use

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Line crescent rolls along the bottom, pinching seams to seal. Bake 8 minutes, then remove from oven.

2. While crust is baking, cook breakfast sausage in a skillet over medium-high heat, breaking up with a spoon. Add green onion and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until sausage is fully cooked. Remove from heat.

**3.** Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Add eggs, milk, salt and pepper to a bowl. Whisk until thoroughly combined.

**4.** Spread sausage mixture over cooked crescent crust. Sprinkle half the cheddar and mozzarella over sausage. Pour egg mixture evenly over cheese and then sprinkle on remaining half of cheeses.

**5.** Bake 30 minutes or until top is lightly browned and toothpick inserted comes out clean.

SERVES 12







Just 30 minutes south of Downtown Dallas off I-35E in Waxahachie.



## HIT THE ROAD



# **Fish School**

For millions of fish, life starts at Sea Center Texas

BY CHET GARNER

MANY TEXANS WILL spend their entire lives chasing the big one on the Gulf Coast. They'll traverse marshes and bays in search of a bull red or spec worthy of hanging on the wall or, perhaps more importantly, posting on social media.

I've spent my share of afternoons casting but have never had half as much luck as I did in 10 minutes fishing the ponds outside Sea Center Texas in Lake Jackson, about an hour south of Houston. That's because many of the redfish and speckled trout in our state started their lives right here.

Sea Center Texas is an aquarium, science lab and fish nursery. It's where the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department breeds fish to populate our waters and educates the public on all the amazing creatures of our coast.

What immediately impressed me wasn't the live fish but the replicas of state-record saltwater fish covering the lobby walls. Let's just say the great hammerhead specimen still gives me nightmares.

I walked the halls of aquariums, each focusing on a different underwater ecosystem, from coastal marshes to deeper offshore waters. There was even a touch tank where I held a blue crab (pincers removed, thankfully).

I then grabbed a tour of the back-of-house where TPWD biologists raise millions (literally) of reds, trout and flounder. Outside is a wetlands boardwalk and 75 acres of tanks, including some open for public youth fishing. Luckily I had my kids in tow and was able to reel in a speckled trout much bigger than anything I've ever caught before. But, hey, I'll count it.

It's just one of the many reasons to plan a trip here instead of chasing the big ones all around the coast. ■

ABOVE Chet and Paul Cason, director of Sea Center Texas, with a speckled trout.

Watch the video on our website and see all Chet's 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.

APRI Carthage [11–12] Piney Woods Quilt Festival, (903) 754-1948, carthagetexas.com Aubrey GreenFest on the Greenbelt, greenfestdenton.com Lake Jackson Kids Reel Big Fish Event, (979) 297-4533, lakejacksontx.gov McKinney [12–13] Spring Native Plant Sale, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org Fairfield Easter Eggstravaganza, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com Corsicana [23–26] Derrick Days, (903) 654-4850, derrickdays.com Burnet [25–26] Highland Lakes Quilt Festival, hlqguild@gmail.com, hlqg.org Burton Cotton Gin Festival, (979) 289-3378, texascottonginmuseum.org **Castroville** Alsatian Festival of Texas, castrovilletx.gov Channing Hogs at the Point, (806) 935-5598, talonpoint.org Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Department Fish Fry, (830) 997-7521, fbgtx.org

Huntington Homestead Festival, shophuntingtontx .com Huntsville Gen. Sam Houston Day, (936) 294-1832, samhoustonmemorialmuseum .com

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

Tomball Rails & Tails Mudbug Festival, (281) 290-1035, tomballtx.gov

**Brazoria** [26–27] Migration Celebration, 1-844-842-4737, migrationcelebration.org

Temple [26–27] Texas State Button Society Spring Show and Sale, (512) 892-4265, texasstatebuttonsociety.com

# MAY

2

Fort Worth UNT One O'Clock Lab Band Spring Showcase, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

Taylor [2–3] Chisholm Trail Quilt Guild Quilt Show, ctquiltguild.org

3

**El Campo Cinco de Mayo Celebration**, (979) 275-1600, eclostlagoon.com

**Fairfield Lemonade Day,** (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

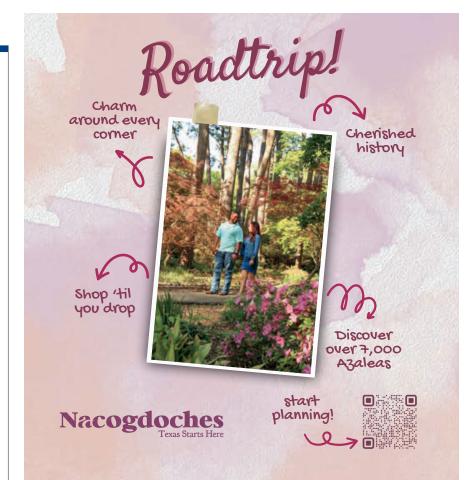
New Ulm Honey Bee Jubilee, (713) 568-5584, newulmtexas.org

San Marcos Heritage Home Tour, (512) 392-4295, heritagesanmarcos.org

Comfort [3–4] Hill Country Two-Step, texasminimilkers .org

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# Characters





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

Whether your friends be of a feather or the four-legged variety, they bring a unique flavor to life in Texas. As these photos attest, being true to oneself is joyful.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

#### 1 THERESA MCKEE FANNIN EC

"This guy has been iconic over the years. He truly is a Texas character!"

#### 2 PAUL GARCIA MEDINA EC

"It took me forever to get this shot. I had about 10 hummingbirds at my feeder and had an idea about trying to hand-feed them."

3 MARY CARUTH PEDERNALES EC Cheese! This was taken at Dripping Springs Distilling.

#### **4** AMY SAYLAK BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

"A Texas girl with her first cap gun, Sneaky Pete!"







# Overlooked (No More)

The best view in the Big Bend is worth the trek

BY PAM LEBLANC PHOTO BY CHRIS LEBLANC **FROM MY VANTAGE** point on the side of a rocky slope high above the Rio Grande, the river looks like a glinting horseshoe far below.

I think it's the best view in the Big Bend region, and that's saying a lot. I've spent hours gazing down at the rippling desert floor from the South Rim, watching the sun sink behind the Window in the Chisos Basin and peering upriver at Santa Elena Canyon.

But this view, from the western edge of Mesa de Anguila, surpasses all of those, and few hikers make the trip. The mesa, an 11-mile hump of land that juts like a broken pinkie off the western side of Big Bend National Park, is one of the least-visited areas of the park.

I first discovered the overlook six years ago, during a challenging multiday back-

packing trip down the spine of the mesa. Now I make a much easier 2.5-mile jaunt to reach the overlook.

Here, the desert closes in for a prickly hug. With its shattered rocks and cactuses that look like bouquets of steak knives, this remote spot feels like the backdrop of an old *Star Trek* episode.

You've probably seen photographs of Horseshoe Bend at the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area in Arizona, where Instagrammers famously flock to snap photos of themselves high above a U-shaped section of the Colorado River. This, to me, is the Texas equivalent.

To get here from the park's west entrance, drive 21 miles west along FM 170 to Lajitas. The Mesa de Anguila Trail starts behind the Lajitas Golf Resort, next to a sign that says, "Poisonous snakes and insects may be present."

The first mile and a half of the trail zigzag through flat desert, dipping into shallow arroyos and winding past scrub. There is no shade; bring plenty of water, even in winter.

After about 30 minutes plodding through the desert, the trail starts to climb up a rocky gully. You'll get a quadburning workout as you ascend 600 feet over half a mile. You might need to use your hands as you clamber over rocks as big as armchairs and tiptoe through spillways of scree.

When you reach the saddle at the top, just past the 2-mile point, the main trail continues straight. Instead of following that path, look for a faint trail to your right. Make your way up the hill, then look south, toward Mexico.

Voilà.

Find a good boulder to sit on, and take it in. I could sit for hours, contemplating the way the river embraces the land.

They say horseshoes bring good luck. In this case, I'm sure it does. Anyone who makes it to this spot is lucky to take in such a beautiful view. ●

Author Pam LeBlanc takes in the view from the western edge of Mesa de Anguila in Big Bend National Park.

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