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# Texas Coop Power

FOR FAYETTE EC MEMBERS

SEPTEMBER 2025

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# September 2025



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Equestrian trails maintained by volunteers offer a stunning way to take in Texas.

By Anna Mazurek  
Photo by Dave Shafer

## Counting Down

Missile silo owners are fighting rust and ruin to preserve and repurpose subterranean Cold War relics.

By Samantha Bryant  
Photos by Eric W. Pohl

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#### ON THE COVER

Mary Apple-Williams leads the way on a trail ride at soon-to-open Palo Pinto Mountains State Park.

Photo by Dave Shafer

#### ABOVE

Bruce Townsley at the launch control panel of his 1960s missile silo south of Abilene.

Photo by Eric W. Pohl



# Pluck the Perfect Book

DO YOU LOVE being cooped up with a good book?

Central Texas author A.A. Davenport's *A Chicken Was There* collection aims to entertain while imparting history along the way—a perfect escape for National Read a Book Day on September 6.

Through the eyes of chickens, Davenport, a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member, takes readers to colonial America, the Civil War, Wild West and more.

"I was watching a movie with my husband. He really likes Westerns, and I noticed that there were chickens everywhere—in town, out on the homestead, at the stagecoach station," says Davenport, a former English teacher at Smithville Junior High School. "That's when I thought that the chickens have been eyewitnesses to a lot of historical events."

Her sixth book in the series came out in July.



## A Pioneer in Academia

June Brewer made history in 1950 when she became one of the first African American women to apply and be admitted to graduate school at the University of Texas.

Brewer, born 100 years ago this month in Austin, got her bachelor's degree at the college now known as Huston-Tillotson University. After getting her doctorate from UT, she taught English for 35 years at what was then Huston-Tillotson College.

## TCP Contests and More

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Snakes Alive!

### RECOMMENDED READING

Revisit our September 2005 issue to see how our Best of Co-op Country picks stand up to the test of time. Read it at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite football team is ...

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

Here are some of the responses to our July prompt: **My favorite Fourth of July was ...**

The bicentennial celebration in 1976, with the huge regatta of tall ships in New York Harbor and the massive fireworks show over Lady Liberty.

STUART BERKOWITZ  
PEDERNALES EC  
MANCHACA

When my city relatives visited our farm, and for the first time I tasted soda pop and saw fireworks.

LORETTA BEDFORD  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC  
SAN AUGUSTINE

When I came back from Vietnam in 1970.

LIONEL ROACH  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC  
BLUFFTON

When my husband and I had our first date and first kiss.

ELLEN HOLDCROFT  
WOOD COUNTY EC  
QUITMAN

Visit our website to see more responses.





### Dressed for the Theater

When I was a student at Blinn Junior College in Brenham in 1977, I attended my first viewing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at the Simon Theatre [A Century of the Simon, July 2025].

A friend and I were driving by one night and saw a long line of people dressed in what is now common garb for the RHPS experience. Back then it was quite a shock to see some of my dormmates in that line wearing fishnet stockings and bustiers.

William Culver III  
Farmers EC  
Murphy

### Rodgers' Influence

Jimmie Rodgers did not sell more records—10 million—than any other RCA Victor artist before Elvis Presley [The Fast Track, July 2025].

In a 10-year period before Presley's first release, Perry Como sold more



than 30 million records for RCA Victor.

Coy Prather  
Trinity Valley EC  
Montalba

**EDITOR'S NOTE** You're correct, and we'll regret this mistake "till the end of time." We have fixed the story online.

I wonder if the author is familiar with Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass Music. Monroe played, sang and recorded many of Jimmie Rodgers' songs back in the mid-to-late 1920s, 1930s and very possibly into the 1940s.

Rodgers very likely influenced Monroe into occasionally adding yodeling to his own music.

Mike Adams  
San Bernard EC  
Magnolia

### Family Love

*Stepping Up* [May 2025] brought tears to my eyes. As a stepparent, I related to this story. DNA isn't what matters in a blended family—it's the love.

Rosie Strode  
Tri-County EC  
Parker County

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

 Texas Co-op Power

### JULY 2025 A Century of the Simon

"I grew up in the late 1950s, early '60s spending Saturday afternoons at the Simon Theatre. Kids got money for the show and maybe popcorn and a soda."

TED KEMPER  
SAN BERNARD EC  
BELLVILLE

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# Mounts in the Hills

**Equestrian trails maintained by volunteers offer a stunning way to take in Texas**

BY ANNA MAZUREK  
PHOTO BY DAVE SHAFER  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN O'ROURKE

**M**ary Apple-Williams was riding her retired ranch horse, Slick, on the equestrian trails at Benbrook Lake south of Fort Worth in April 2016 when she noticed sections of two trails were closed due to storm damage.

After talking with a park ranger, she discovered the nonprofit Texas Equestrian Trail Riders Association helped maintain the trails. She immediately joined the organization, reached out to her region's manager and led efforts to reopen the trails, which are now maintained by TETRA continually.

For her and many others who find great joy in trail riding, this is important work.





From right, Mary Apple-Williams on Cutter, Brenda Laing on Sunshine, Staci Barnes on Shadow and Matt Barnes on Lily depart the equine campground at Palo Pinto Mountains State Park in North Texas. The park is expected to open in 2026.

Panhandle, TETRA helped prevent a section of the trail built along a former railroad from being shut down in May 2022. That's despite the group's aging and dwindling membership, declining from 2,000 members when it was founded in 1997 to fewer than 300 statewide today.

"We were out there replacing boards off of the railroad trestle, and that was hard work," Apple-Williams says. "When you look at our volunteers, the average volunteer age of our organization—we're not spring chickens anymore."

Many state parks and other natural areas are supported by nonprofit organizations founded by volunteers, including TETRA members, who enjoy using and maintaining the outdoor spaces. "We support those groups with labor, expenses [and] grants," Apple-Williams says. "We'll do a benefit ride out there where any funds we collect ... we turn back into that group to help maintain that park."

Since equestrian trails are often multiuse trails, TETRA's restoration efforts also benefit hikers and mountain bikers at state parks, where attendance has topped 9 million each year since 2021, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Apple-Williams is now a manager for TETRA's Region 4, which encompasses a section of North Texas that includes the soon-to-open Palo Pinto Mountains State Park. To assist construction

efforts, TETRA held trail rides at the site in 2017 and 2018 and donated proceeds to the park's nonprofit, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park Partners, which advocated for trail riders during the park design process.

In November 2024, she volunteered at an on-site workday.

"To me, that day wasn't a workday but a preview of what riders would experience for years to come—beautiful streams, winding trails through large boulders [and] high plateaus where you can see for miles," she says.

If you ask Apple-Williams about her favorite place to ride in Texas, she can't pick one because there are too many amazing and diverse trails.

"I think the best place to ride is Texas," she says. ■



**Ready to ride?**  
Turn the page to explore five state parks that are top picks among trail riders.

"For equestrians, riding is more than a hobby; it's a profound connection with nature," Apple-Williams says. "From the fragrance of spring blooms to the thrill of mountain trails, every ride is a celebration of the natural world."

Apple-Williams, who went on to serve as TETRA president from 2022 to 2024, says the nonprofit's goal is to develop and maintain riding trails across the state.

"We're a voice for equestrians in the state of Texas, and that is needed so much more today than it has been in the past," Apple-Williams says.

TETRA members and volunteers maintain more than three dozen trails, including some at Army Corps of Engineers lakes and many at state parks, through fundraising rides and scheduled workdays during the spring and fall. Volunteers put in a combined 800–1,000 hours a year doing trail maintenance, Apple-Williams says.

At Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway in the



# Across the Lone Star State, there are 19 equestrian trails in state parks (all of which require proof of a current Coggins test, which screens for potentially fatal equine infectious anemia). These are some of trail riders' favorites.



## Palo Pinto Mountains State Park

Tucked halfway between Abilene and Fort Worth,

Palo Pinto Mountains State Park will be Texas' first new state park in 17 years when it opens. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has not set an opening date. The park will comprise nearly 5,000 acres of former ranchland with a rugged landscape of scenic plateaus, sheltered canyons and crisscrossing waterways, including Palo Pinto Creek near the northern boundary. The 90-acre Tucker Lake will be the park's star attraction for fishing, boating, swimming and birding, and there will be several multiuse trails, including 11 miles of equestrian trails with substantial trailhead parking for trail riders. Each of the 10 equestrian campsites will be equipped with a two-horse corral, water and electrical hookups.



## Caprock Canyon State Park and Trailway

Home to the Texas State Bison Herd, this 15,000-acre park has 90 miles of trails, including the equestrian-friendly 64-mile-long multiuse trailway built on a former freight

and passenger railway that operated from the early 1920s until 1989. The trailway has a variety of access points and passes through Clarity Tunnel, home to a half-million Mexican free-tailed bats. The Panhandle park also has a dozen primitive equestrian campsites with two corrals each.



## Cooper State Park

Located on Jim Chapman Lake in northeast Texas, this park is an angler's paradise with an abundance of water activities and trails to explore. The park consists of two areas—the northern Doctor's Creek Unit and the equestrian-friendly South Sulphur Unit on the southern shore. The challenging Buggy Whip Equestrian Trail is a 10-mile adventure through dense forests and creek ravines. A dozen equestrian campsites have electricity but no stables.

## Davis Mountains State Park

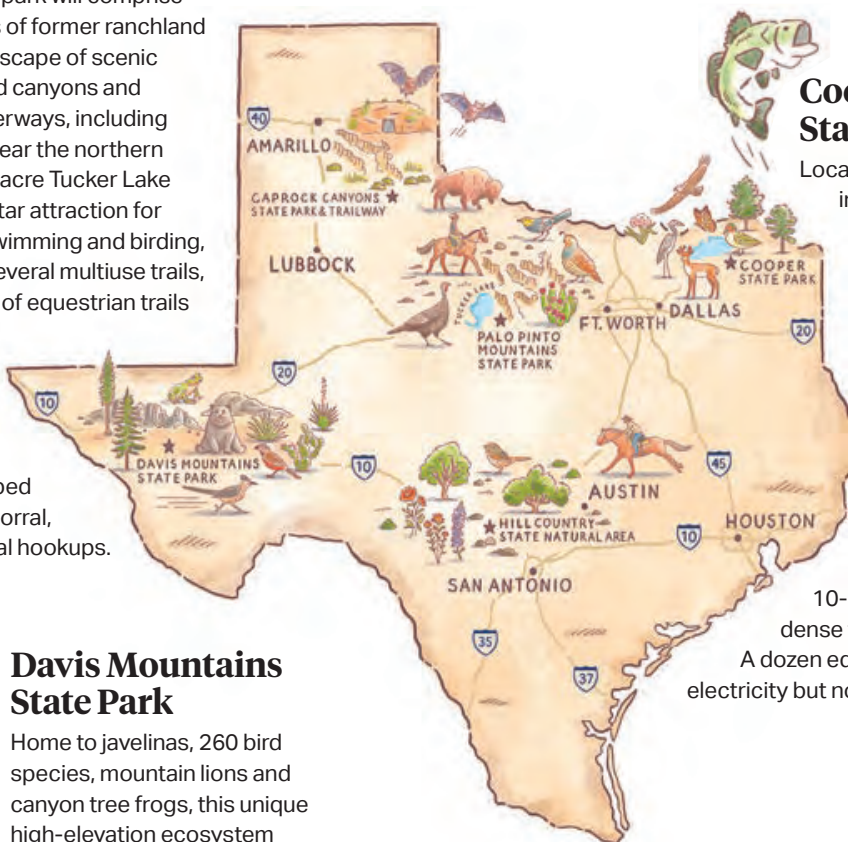
Home to javelinas, 260 bird species, mountain lions and canyon tree frogs, this unique high-elevation ecosystem at the base of the Davis Mountains was formed 25

million–30 million years ago by volcanic eruptions. This volcanic activity is responsible for the West Texas park's most unique formations, Frazier's Canyon, Sleeping Lion and Barrel Springs. Trail riders can explore the stunning landscape on 11 miles of trails that meander from 4,900 to 5,700 feet with scenic overlooks in the Limpia Canyon area. There are six primitive equestrian campsites.



## Hill Country State Natural Area

At this former ranch northwest of San Antonio, 40 miles of shared-use equestrian trails cover terrain that includes flat, broad prairies and steep, rocky canyons. The park's extensive equestrian facilities include a day-use area near the headquarters with a water trough, hitching posts and a flush toilet. Overnight equestrian accommodations include six primitive campsites with pens, a group camp that has a barn with stalls for nine horses, and a 1930s ranch house that sleeps 12 humans and has stalls for five horses.







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# COUNTING DOWN

Missile silo owners are fighting rust and ruin to preserve and repurpose subterranean Cold War relics

**BRUCE TOWNSLEY'S FAVORITE** place to visit in Japan is Ryoanji Temple Rock Garden in Kyoto. The enigmatic garden has 15 stones, but only 14 are visible to the viewer, no matter where they stand. One side of the garden is arid and stark, but walk around a corner and there's lush greenery.

It's the unexpected that gets him.

So it's little wonder that Townsley's home in Oplin, south of Abilene, is an illusion all its own. Drive onto his property, and you'll see a few small buildings and a Quonset hut. But that's the tip of the iceberg—one that descends 18 stories into the ground.

For the past 25 years, Townsley has lived underground in the two-story launch control center of a decommissioned missile silo. A relic of the Cold War, the 185-foot silo is one of 12 near Dyess Air Force Base that once housed nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles meant to deter the Soviet Union from using their own.

The Atlas F missile sites roughly encircle Abilene like points on a clock face, a silently ticking time bomb that thankfully never had to be ignited—despite veering dangerously close during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

In 1965, the government salvaged much of the metal, removed the 82-foot missiles and sold the silos to private owners and municipalities. Townsley bought his in 1997, and he's one of several missile silo owners bent on preserving the structures so future generations can learn about and honor this pivotal moment in the Cold War.

Townsley, formerly a real estate broker in Colorado, initially was interested in the site as a renovation project. He still remembers his first visit to West Texas, crawling into the silo by way of an air vent shaft and shining his flashlight deep inside the cavernous concrete and steel structure.

"It felt like it was—this is going to sound strange—alive," he says. "It was just like something was sleeping. It wasn't a frightening feeling; it was just an unusual feeling."

OPPOSITE Bruce Townsley in his missile silo in Oplin. The crib, the silo's steel framework, held an Atlas F intercontinental missile in the early 1960s.

RIGHT, FROM TOP A close-up of Townsley's Cold War-era missile launch control panel. He converted the control center into a living space.





"IF WE DON'T  
KNOW OUR PAST,  
WE CAN'T LIVE  
OUR FUTURE  
THE WAY LIFE  
IS INTENDED  
TO BE LIVED."

As with many of the 72 Atlas F silos built across six states, water had seeped into the vast void over the years, and the walls were graffitied with the names of local students who had sneaked onto the property decades ago.

Townsley, a Taylor Electric Cooperative member, purchased the property for \$99,000 and set about making the control center into a personal residence. Connected to the silo by a 40-foot tunnel, it once housed a five-man missile crew on its upper floor and equipment and offices on another floor.

After about 18 months of renovations, Townsley began his subterranean existence that has lasted more than a quarter century. He says he enjoys the quiet. The living spaces are white and open, with plenty of lighting and high ceilings.

"You don't have that sense of claustrophobia," Townsley says. "Now, some people really react to there being no windows, but cameras and monitors provide a pretty good substitute."

After renovating the control center, Townsley, with the help of others, turned his efforts to the silo itself, draining the water and removing debris (the only bones he found belonged to a coyote and an armadillo). He was also able to get one of the 75-ton, 3-foot-thick silo doors operable so that it once again opens to the sky with the press of a button.

As Townsley renovated the property, he became friends with people who had helped construct the facilities and missileers who served when the sites were active, 1962–65.

"You can't help but get involved in the history of it," Townsley says. "It's just part of it."

One of the people he met was Roger Jensen, who enlisted in the Air Force in 1961 at age 19 and worked on the Abilene silo sites as an electrical technician with the 578th Strategic Missile Squadron.



Now in his 80s, Jensen still remembers some of the pass-words he spoke at the door to gain access to the control center, words like "bicycle" and "wheelbarrow."

"We spent 24 hours in and out of the silo," Jensen says. "We had to go out into the silo at least once every hour to take specific readings on various pieces of equipment."

Tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were high during those years, especially during the 13-day Cuban Missile Crisis, when the Soviets deployed nuclear missiles to Cuba. The Air Force's Strategic Air Command was at DEFCON 2, one step away from the highest level of readiness for nuclear war.

With a wife and baby in Abilene, Jensen says the possibility of nuclear war became undeniable for the crew. "It was a big dose of reality and what was reality at that time," he says.



The crisis was averted through diplomatic agreements, and Jensen says the crew was “elated when it was over.”

In homage to that history, Townsley had long thought his silo should be turned into a museum, an idea planted by the broker who showed it to him. And in January 2024, he started the Atlas Missile Museum of Texas, a nonprofit organization with a five-member board.

Visitors must make an appointment through his website, [www.atlasmissilemuseumoftexas.org](http://www.atlasmissilemuseumoftexas.org), to tour the silo and control center and learn about the site’s role in the Cold War. They can walk into the silo and see the steel crib once equipped with an elevator capable of raising the Atlas F missile to the surface and launching it in about 10 minutes. Townsley has a model elevator to show how it works and a refurbished control console that simulates a missile launch.

A short drive down the road in Lawn, Larry Sanders is also preserving the history at his missile silo, which he acquired in 1999. Sanders spearheaded a movement in 2001 to get the roadway it sits along renamed to the Atlas ICBM Highway.

He spent years saving the complex from its more recent No. 1 enemy: rust.

“My immediate concern was stabilization,” Sanders says. “You have to keep in mind that water was everywhere. Wood rot, decomposing Sheetrock, metals being compromised totally to rust. So we did nothing for the first five years but demolition.”

Now that the site is stable and clean, Sanders plans to add back infrastructure. Through the Atlas Missile Base Cold War Center, a nonprofit he founded, he holds on-site events and

gives presentations to groups about the Cold War, a time that can sometimes get forgotten.

“No one received the recognition and the honor that they deserved in winning the Cold War, unlike World War II,” Sanders says.

In addition to veterans, Sanders says the heroes of the time include civilian contractors and city administrators. “Texas had a significant role in America’s Cold War victory, and Texans need to celebrate Texas’ role in that victory,” he says.

Like a lot of American schoolchildren in the early Cold War era, Sanders grew up doing “duck and cover” air raid drills in elementary school and watching the political tension unfold on TV.

Mark Hannifin, who owns a missile silo in Shep, also remembers this tense time and tells younger generations that for them, “the Cold War might as well have been in black and white. It’s kind of like us looking at the second World War or our predecessors looking at the first World War and Civil War. No, it was in color. It was a real thing.”

Hannifin and his wife, Linda, bought their silo in 1982 and were “armchair survivalists” at the time, he says. To avoid detection, they used a code word whenever they referred to the facility in public.

An avid scuba diver, Hannifin eventually decided to open the silo for diving and began cleaning out the debris. Their business, Dive Valhalla, hosts scuba dive clubs in the 120 feet of water.

“It’s nice, crystal-clear well water,” Hannifin says. “We have been letting people dive in there for about 30 years now.”

Hannifin’s control center is equipped with beds for over-night stays, and he shows a short Cold War documentary and slideshow so visitors are aware of the silo’s original mission.

The Hannifins no longer feel the need to keep it under wraps, and Mark says he’s seen other missile silo owners move from concealing their purchase to being more open about it.

The silos were part of a top-secret mission (although folks in Abilene couldn’t have missed the construction crews that arrived in 1960 to build them). When that secret mission faded, the silos “had fallen out of use,” Hannifin says. “Fallen out of memory.”

But these dutiful owners are ensuring this important history isn’t buried by time.

Jensen, who spent many hours in the silo as a young man during the beginning of his military service, certainly won’t forget.

“If we don’t know our past,” Jensen says, “we can’t live our future the way life is intended to be lived.” ■

OPPOSITE Mark Hannifin turned his silo in Shep into Dive Valhalla for scuba divers. A staircase and gangplank connect to a floating platform.

BELOW The entry to Larry Sanders’ silo in Lawn.



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MESSAGE  
FROM  
GENERAL  
MANAGERDOUG  
LAMBERT

## Tradition and Transition Mark Fayette EC's Annual Meeting

**HUNDREDS OF MEMBERS** filled the KC Community Center, eager to enjoy the activities organized by Fayette Electric Cooperative employees for the annual meeting, then settled in to visit with friends and wait for the business session to begin.

Many come every year, a summer ritual that turns a community gathering in La Grange into a de facto appreciation for the efficient and reliable service the co-op has provided since 1937. Some things never change.

But for FEC and one man in particular, things will never be the same.

David Lehmann, a farmer and rancher from Warda, retired from the board of directors after

ers for field workers to use after a rugged shift and the 24/7 system operations center.

"I have an affinity for people who work outside in the field," said Spence, adding that she grew up as an "oil field rat."

"I relate to people who work in the weather."

What Spence and the 419 other members in attendance probably don't think about as much as FEC's employees do are the Seven Cooperative Principles that drive everything the co-op does. Yet they were quite evident that night.

The hall was bordered by several tables that members could visit before the meeting. They could play a golf putting game, Plinko and a spinning wheel for free goodies.

Lara Perez, an engineering assistant, headed a table where members could learn more about safety and kids could pose as a lineworker for a photo op. This addressed two of those principles—Concern for Community and Education, Training and Information.

So did FEC's participation in the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, and Sophia Nance, one of two area students represented by the co-op who spent a week in Washington, D.C., expressed her appreciation for the opportunity.

"I'm so thankful for this

trip because it gave me the chance to view historical monuments and sites, meet incredible people and experience unparalleled moments," Nance said. "I've made lifelong friends and memories that will stay with me forever."

Avery Nelius was the other Youth Tour winner.

FEC also introduced graduating seniors who won co-op scholarships: Adin Beyer, Brianna Clark, Jodie Kaspar, Sadie Noska, Hunter Sabo and Adam Thompson. Their names appeared in the July issue of *Texas Co-op Power*. Additionally, Kaylee Beyer was awarded the Luck of the Draw Scholarship when her name was selected during the meeting.

Another hallmark of co-ops is Democratic Member Control, which gives members a powerful say



serving for 45 years, marking the first time in FEC's 88-year history that a member of Lehmann's family won't be on the board. Lehmann replaced his grandfather, L.A. Giese, a charter board member, when he retired after serving for 43 years.

"All good things come to an end," Lehmann said. No more meetings. No more policy matters. No more numbers to crunch. "Besides, I got hay to bail."

But some good things also had their beginning July 16. Brenda Spence attended her first annual meeting.

Spence became an FEC member in March 2024 after moving back to Texas. She attended the open house of the co-op's new headquarters last year and was impressed, especially by the showers and lock-



in their direction. Three seats on the board were up for election this year. Members elected Scott Schultz to replace Lehmann in District 1. Two directors were reelected in uncontested elections: Joseph Kruppa in District 2 and James A. Anderle in District 5.

Kruppa, the board president, also announced the retirement of Leo C. Henke, the director in District 4 who has served the board for 22 years.

Kruppa said District 4 members interested in serving the remainder of Henke's term can apply, and the board will appoint a member to fill the unexpired term.

The board also remembered Bill Briscoe, a 19-year director who died in February. Kruppa spoke of his career in the oil industry, his commitment to FEC and his community of Weimar, and his devotion to his church and family. "His legacy of service and dedication will be fondly remembered by all who knew him," Kruppa said.

In May, the board appointed Clayton Wessels as the District 6 director to replace Briscoe.

In a video report, Doug Lambert, FEC's general manager and CEO, reflected on the co-op's progress and direction moving forward.

He explained the benefits of moving out of the crowded and outdated headquarters the co-op had used since the 1960s and into a new facility.

"The state-of-the-art facility represents more than just a new building," Lambert said. "It lays the foundation for our smarter and more responsive, resilient climate by modernizing our business operation practices. We ensure that we'll continue delivering safe and reliable, high-quality electric service for generations to come."

He pointed to a shared service agreement with Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative, a neighboring cooperative. GVEC now manages FEC's after-hours, weekend and holiday operations, including dispatching crews during outages. This upholds another co-op principle: Cooperation Among Cooperatives.

**Lambert also explained the benefits of other strategies and developments, including:**

- ▶ Wildfire mitigation
- ▶ Vegetation management
- ▶ Vehicle maintenance and replacement
- ▶ A \$241,000 cybersecurity grant from the Department of Energy
- ▶ Board approval of a 4.3% rate adjustment
- ▶ Five consecutive years without a lost-time incident

Lambert also recognized recent employee retirements, including Accounting and Finance Manager Linda Gaddes, who concluded her 54-year career in June, and Equipment Operator Ronnie Martinek, who retired in July after 30 years of service.

Door prizes are not a cooperative principle, but they are a staple at FEC's annual meetings and part of the reason members began showing up more than an hour before the start time and stayed seated to the very end.

Fifty-five prizes, including bill credits, cash and household goods, were handed out throughout the meeting. "My favorite thing to do is give away prizes," said Gale Lincke, the director for District 3.

Lehmann was tasked with announcing the last of the prize winners, his last official duty as a director.

Some things change; some things stay the same—like the fellowship that night. Spence, the newcomer, noticed that.

"Look at this," she said. "Everybody knows everybody." ■

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Gale Lincke, Vice President  
James A. Anderle, Secretary-Treasurer  
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[fayette.coop](http://fayette.coop)











1. The board recognizes Bill Briscoe, a 19-year director who died in February.
2. Stephanie Crider was the lucky recipient of a \$50 credit on her energy bill.
3. Consumer service representatives Amanda Wood, Emily Purdy, Diana Torres and Lezli Thomas greeted members and helped them register for the meeting.
4. Children 10 and under had the opportunity to register to win one of five children's prizes, which included gift cards for Sonic and Walmart.
5. Mary Dybala of Fayetteville was the lucky recipient of a \$100 bill credit on her energy bill.
6. Diane Krenek, director of IT and operations, and Amy Rackley, systems operator, assisted members and guests at the Plinko game booth.
7. Fayette County 4-H members and leaders served homemade cookies, lemonade and coffee to annual meeting attendees.
8. Melissa Sommer, director of procurement, and Dana Janca, an engineering assistant, assisted members and guests at the prize wheel booth.







## Director Leo Henke Retires After 22 Years of Service

**AFTER 22 YEARS OF DEVOTED SERVICE**, Leo C. Henke, District 4 director, retired July 16 at the Fayette Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting.

“I would like to thank all Fayette Electric Cooperative members for entrusting me to make decisions on behalf of all the members,” Henke said. “It has been a pleasure for me to serve you. It was a job, an honor and a privilege I never took lightly or for granted because it was for the benefit of members.”

Henke, whose family has called the Hallettsville area home for generations, worked for the state Department of Human Resources and was a cattle rancher and hay producer.

His journey to becoming a director began with a conversation with a close friend.

“One day, George Pesek, who was the director of District 4 at the time, stopped by and asked me if I would consider being a director,” Henke said. “He thought I would be a good candidate for the job, and he was retiring. After some thought, I decided to run in May of 2003 with one opponent.

“I was elected and remained as District 4 director since then, and I have enjoyed every minute of it and working alongside the general managers, directors, employees and members of Fayette Electric Cooperative.”

Henke’s proudest achievement as director was a recent one. “My greatest accomplishment was to purchase acreage to build our new headquarters,” he said.

What he’ll miss though, is the members. “I enjoyed visiting and assisting District 4 members in any way I could because

Leo C. Henke, right, District 4 director, receives a distinguished service award from Doug Lambert, general manager and CEO. Henke retired from the board after serving for 22 years.

the co-op is a family, so I will miss the ability to represent the members every day and at special events.”

In his retirement Henke is looking forward to spending more time with his spouse, Dorothy, along with their three children and their spouses, eight grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

He also plans to stay busy with some mechanical work—like “putting a rear end in my recliner,” he joked.

Henke leaves a legacy of dedication and integrity.

“Leo Henke’s more than two decades of service to District 4 and Fayette Electric Cooperative have made a lasting impact on our organization and the communities we serve,” said Doug Lambert, general manager and CEO. “His leadership has been grounded in a deep commitment to improving the quality of life for our member-owners by helping ensure FEC remains focused on delivering affordable, reliable power.

“Leo has been a steadfast advocate for cooperative values, and his thoughtful guidance over the years has helped shape a stronger, more resilient future for all of us. We are deeply grateful for his dedication and lasting contributions.”

The board and staff of Fayette EC extend their heartfelt thanks and best wishes for a well-deserved retirement; may it be restful, fulfilling and full of joy. ■



# Fayette EC Members Elect New and Returning Directors

**FAYETTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**  
members elected three directors to the co-op's board of directors at FEC's annual meeting in July.

Members elected Scott Schultz to represent District 1, filling the seat previously held by retiring director David Lehmann. Schultz will serve members in the Ledbetter, Round Top, Rutersville, Waldeck, Warda, Warrenton and Winchester areas and east of La Grange.

In an uncontested race, Joseph Kruppa was reelected to continue representing District 2, which includes Ammansville, La Grange, Holman and Hostyn. James A. Anderle was also reelected in an uncontested election, to represent District 5, serving members in Cistern, Flatonia, Muldoon, Plum and West Point.

Fayette EC would like to thank the members who participated in this year's annual meeting and extend congratulations to the newly elected and returning directors. ■



**Scott Schultz**  
Director, District 1



**Joseph D. Kruppa**  
Director, District 2



**James A. Anderle**  
Director, District 5



ABOVE: Youth Tour delegate Sophia Nance, a graduate of Round Top-Carmine High School, told members, "I'm so thankful for this trip because it gave me the chance to view historical monuments and sites, meet incredible people, and experience unparalleled moments."

BELOW: William E. Schilhab of Fayetteville was the lucky winner of a 75-inch Onn Roku smart TV donated by Lamar Technical Services.





# Annual Meeting Door Prize Winners

## \$50 Energy Bill Credit

David Schulz by wife Carol  
Adrienne E. Kobza  
Johnny A. Barton  
Ivan A. Muras  
Richard Behrens  
Jimmie Fucik by wife Gracie  
Michael S. Miller  
Vornsand-Brandt by Harvey Vornsand, partner  
Douglas N. Lehmann  
Benjamin J. Lafferty and Jerry N. Lafferty  
Nicolas A. Campos and Stephanie M. Crider  
Eugene L. Mikes  
Beatrice A. Patek  
Ernest Thompson and Dottie Thompson

## \$50 H-E-B Gift Card

Eugene J. Mache  
Warren Meischen

## \$50 Academy Gift Card

Elton Klesel

## \$50 Mastercard Gift Card

Dorothy A. Gabler  
Michael Brier by wife Joyce  
Kleihege Ranch by Marcel Kleihege, owner  
Ann Latham  
Roman Szeszycki and Gracie Szeszycki  
Ledbetter Fire Department by Rodney Read  
Ann M. Janda

## \$75 Energy Bill Credit

George Kana Jr.  
Harlan J. Schroeder by wife Barbara  
Dennis S. Olsovsky  
Leslie B. Kinnear and Jordan J. Kinnear

## \$100 Amazon Gift Card

Shirley M. Pietsch  
E. Dale Koehn

## \$100 Cash

Betty Jean Fillip  
Lori E. Granum

## \$100 Energy Bill Credit

Joyce W. Ohnheiser  
Mary L. Dybala  
Vernon J. Oehlke  
Kenneth R. Mache

## \$100 H-E-B Gift Card

Sylvester Schmitt Jr.  
Bryan Branch by wife Amanda  
Carlo A. Triolo by wife Bonnie  
L. Paul Crain  
Clarence Faldyn by wife Helen  
L. P. Lorfing  
Carolyn J. Aulick

## \$100 Mastercard Gift Card

David J. Klesel  
Alwin A. Oeser

## \$100 Visa Gift Card

Marilyn Kothmann  
Melodee L. Schaller

## Buc-ee's Gift Basket

Michael L. Robbins

## \$150 Energy Bill Credit

Laura A. Pavlicek and Russell R. Mueller

## \$200 H-E-B Gift Card

Marilyn Strmiska  
Allen E. Christ

## \$250 Energy Bill Credit

Cheryl L. Perkins

## 55-inch Roku Smart TV

Francis H. Ripper

## 36-inch Blackstone Grill with accessories

Rosalyn Muras

## 75-inch Onn Roku Smart TV

William E. Schilhab

## Children's Prize Winners

Hayzen Holub  
Reagan McCullough  
Emma Norris  
Rylee Hentschel  
Nolan Kloesel

# Thanks for the Donations!

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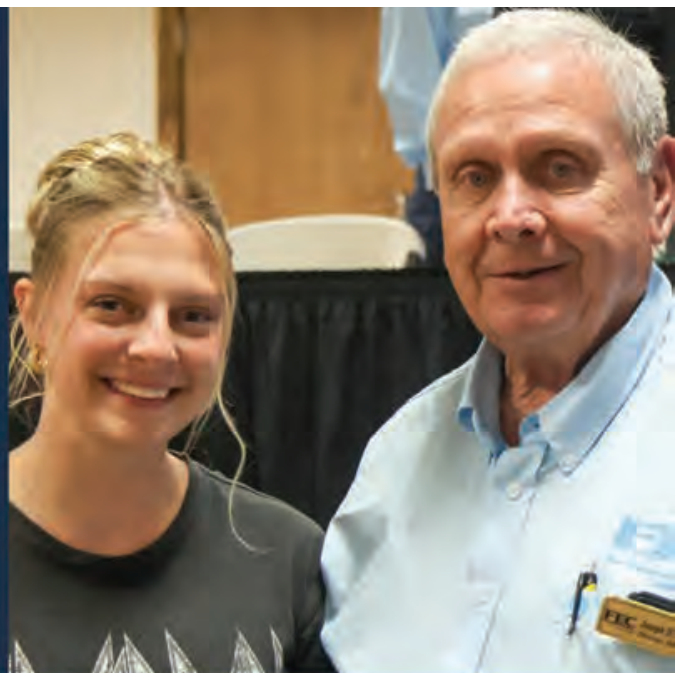


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## LUCK OF THE DRAW SCHOLARSHIP

Congratulations to Schulenburg High School graduate, Kaylee Beyer, daughter of Michelle & Neal Beyer. Kaylee's name was drawn at the annual meeting to receive one \$1,500 scholarship. She will be attending Texas A&M University in the fall.





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<input type="checkbox"/> Single unit - \$19.99 per unit	\$19.99
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**TCP** Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



# It's in the Bag

How did Frito Pie make its way to Hank Hill and football fans across Texas?

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY GISELA GOPPEL

**FRITOS PIE** OR Fritos chili pie or simply Frito pie—whatever *you* call it—is a much-loved delight often spooned up under Friday night lights.

I've heard many baby boomers claim their mother invented the dish out of necessity to feed incessantly hungry kids back in the 1950s. I've heard claims that their grandmothers had been making something like Frito pie since the '20s, which would have been a neat trick since Fritos weren't invented until 1932.

A version of Frito pie was served at a gathering of the Dallas Dietetic Association in 1949. The recipe came from the Frito Co. itself and originally called for putting a layer of Fritos in a casserole dish, covering it with chili and then cov-

ering everything with liberal amounts of cheese and onions. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes.

You can see how this got MacGyvered into just pouring chili into bags of Fritos for efficiency and transportability. Today, you'll also find it with the added ingredient of a mound of jalapeños on top.

Whatever the case, Fritos and the pies are Texas originals.

Charles Doolin of San Antonio created the chips, putting his own spin on a recipe he bought for \$100 from a Mexican restaurant in 1932. He fried strips of corn dough, and Fritos were born. It's interesting that most Texans now associate the chip with piles of meat, as Doolin was a vegetarian.

He called them *fritos*, Spanish for “fried.” Doolin also invented Cheetos, around 1948, by the way.

In the 1960s, my mother made something she called “creamed tacos,” which was a cheesy chili con carne poured over a plate of Fritos. Exceptionally filling, the recipe no doubt came from Frito-Lay itself. Though the company, now based in Plano, had its own brand of chili by then, my mother, like Hank Hill, preferred Wolf Brand Chili (“Neighbor, how long has it been?”), another Texas original.

This type of mixing and matching was encouraged in the early days of Fritos—as they were not marketed as a stand-alone snack. They were sold as an ingredient for casseroles. The inventor's wife, Mary Kathryn “Kitty” Doolin, even experimented with pouring chocolate over Fritos and baking them on a cookie sheet.

Kitty also is credited with coming up with the original chili pie recipe. We know this because her daughter, Kaleta Doolin, wrote the most thorough history on the subject you can find, her 2011 book *Fritos Pie: Stories, Recipes, and More*. It's an incredibly detailed history that provides all manner of Fritos recipes you have never imagined. Maybe there's another classic in there, waiting to be popularized in today's world of spicy snack foods.

Along with her mother, Kaleta gives credit to another woman for popularizing the dish. She writes with admiration that Teresa Hernandez sold thousands of Fritos chili pies at the Woolworth's counter in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the 1960s, reportedly selling 56,000 bags in one year.

And at the same time, it was all the rage in San Antonio and across Texas at football games as fundraisers for civic and student groups. Who knows how many kids were sent to college on profits from Frito pies. ■



# One-Skillet Dinners

Where convenience and flavors unite for a delicious cause

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Growing up in Aransas Pass, home of the Shrimptree Festival, we enjoyed the freshest harvest delivered by the shrimp boats daily from the Gulf Coast. We grilled, fried and sautéed shrimp in countless marinades and spices, and we always served them with plenty of fresh lime juice. This one-pan dinner is a family favorite.

## Spicy Shrimp and Rice

**2 tablespoons olive oil**  
**1 small onion, diced**  
**1 yellow bell pepper, seeds removed, diced**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**1 cup uncooked white rice**  
**2 cups chicken or vegetable broth**  
**½ cup salsa verde**  
**1 teaspoon ground cumin**  
**1 teaspoon ground oregano**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**1 teaspoon ground black pepper**  
**1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined**  
**Juice of 1 lime**  
**Cilantro leaves, for serving**  
**Lime slices, for serving**

1. In a skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion, bell pepper and garlic. Cook until onion is light and translucent, stirring often, about 5 minutes.
2. Add rice, stir and continue to cook 2 minutes. Stir in broth, salsa verde, cumin, oregano, salt and black pepper.
3. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, cover and cook 15 minutes.
4. Remove lid, place shrimp over rice, cover and cook until shrimp are opaque, about 5–7 minutes.
5. Add lime juice and fluff the rice mixture. Serve with cilantro and lime slices.

**SERVES 6**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Skillet Chicken Fajita Rice.





### Cider Stew

THERESA SHELDON  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

Stews are good for the soul and the belly. This one-skillet wonder starts with chunks of beef that are seared then simmered with vegetables and herbs in a rich and savory broth that tastes complex in flavor but is actually simple to make. The whole family will love it.

- 2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter
- 2 pounds beef chuck stew meat, cut into 1-inch pieces
- ¼ cup flour
- 2 cups water
- 1 cup apple cider
- ½ cup steak sauce
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 3 medium carrots, sliced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 package frozen cut green beans (10 ounces)

1. Heat butter over medium-high heat in a large skillet. Add beef and brown on all sides, 2–3 minutes per side.
2. Stir in flour. Gradually stir in water, apple cider and steak sauce. Bring to a boil.
3. Stir in thyme, pepper and bay leaf. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer 2 hours.
4. Add potatoes, carrots, onion and green beans. Cover and cook an additional 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Discard bay leaf before serving.

SERVES 8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

### Egg Roll Stuffing Stir Fry

JENNIFER CURTIS  
PEDERNALES EC



This might just be my new favorite dinner. It takes everything delicious in classic egg rolls and turns it into one ridiculously easy, healthy and flavor-packed meal with no rolling required. Spoon the stuffing into lettuce cups or over rice. The leftovers are a great lunch the next day.

- 2 tablespoons avocado oil or other neutral cooking oil
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 2 pounds ground pork or ground chicken
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes

- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons white sesame seeds
- 2 teaspoons black sesame seeds
- 1 cup shredded carrot
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 4 tablespoons honey
- ½ cup coconut aminos or soy sauce
- 2 cups shredded purple cabbage
- 2 cups shredded green cabbage
- Lettuce leaves or rice, for serving

1. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and cook until light and translucent.
2. Add pork or chicken and cook, breaking meat up into small pieces with a spoon, until cooked through, about 6 minutes. Season with salt, pepper, red pepper flakes and ginger.
3. Reduce heat to medium and stir in garlic, sesame seeds and shredded carrot and cook 3 minutes.
4. Make a well in the center of the skillet and add the rice vinegar, honey, and coconut aminos or soy sauce. Stir to combine.
5. Stir in cabbage and cook 3 minutes to slightly soften cabbage.
6. Serve warm, spooned into lettuce cups or over rice.

SERVES 6

### TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

CHEESECAKE DUE SEPTEMBER 10

Did you know they served cheesecake at the first Olympics 2,800 years ago? We want to serve yours while we watch the 2026 Games. The best recipe will score \$500. Enter by September 10.

UPCOMING: BARBECUE SIDES DUE OCTOBER 10







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## Southwest Chicken With Toasted Orzo

GAIL PATTERSON  
PENTEX ENERGY

One of the main reasons I enjoy cooking with orzo is its quick and easy preparation. I usually add a splash of lemon juice and a touch of grated Parm, but once I spotted Patterson's Southwestern spin, I knew I had to give it a try. Brothy orzo and blistered tomatoes combine with perfectly seasoned chicken.



**½ teaspoon cayenne pepper**  
**½ teaspoon ground cumin**  
**½ teaspoon granulated garlic**  
**½ teaspoon ground black pepper**  
**1 teaspoon kosher salt**  
**4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1-inch pieces**  
**5 teaspoons olive oil, plus more as needed, divided use**  
**1 cup cherry tomatoes**  
**1 tablespoon (⅞ stick) butter**  
**1 cup uncooked orzo**  
**1 tablespoon chicken base**  
**3 cups water, plus more as needed**  
**1 cup corn kernels**  
**1 can black beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed**  
**½ cup chopped cilantro, for serving**  
**Tortilla chips, crushed, for serving**

1. In a small bowl, mix together cayenne, cumin, granulated garlic, black pepper and salt.
2. Season chicken with half the spice mixture, reserving remaining half.
3. In a skillet, heat 3 teaspoons oil over medium-high heat. Sear chicken in 2 batches until lightly browned on both

sides, adding more oil if needed. Set cooked chicken aside in a bowl.

4. Add 1 teaspoon oil to skillet and add cherry tomatoes, stirring to coat in oil. Cover and cook, shaking pan occasionally, 5 minutes or until tomatoes slightly blister. Add tomatoes to bowl with chicken.

5. Add butter and remaining 1 teaspoon oil to skillet. Reduce heat to medium and stir in orzo. Cook, stirring occasionally, until orzo is golden and glistening, about 5–7 minutes.

6. Stir in chicken base and 3 cups water, bring to a simmer. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, 6 minutes or until almost all liquid is absorbed.

7. Stir in corn, black beans, prepared chicken and tomatoes, and remaining spice mixture. Add water if orzo becomes dry. Cover and cook an additional 3 minutes. Serve warm, with cilantro and tortilla chips.

**SERVES 4**

## Why I Love One-Skillet Meals

I tell myself I cook for a living, but in reality I wash dishes for a living. Not when it comes to one-skillet meals.

**Less cleanup:** Forget about the mess of juggling several pans on the stovetop.

**More flavor:** Mixing all the ingredients together in one skillet brings out richer flavors.

**Budget friendly:** Beans, rice, pasta and vegetables help make these recipes easy on the pocketbook.

—Vianney Rodriguez





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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Saga on the San Saba

The remains of Menard's Spanish fortification predate the U.S.

BY CHET GARNER

**THE SMALL TOWN** of Menard (population 1,300) sits along the blurry line where the Hill Country turns into West Texas. It's more than an hour from any major city, but if the Spanish had had their way, it might have become our largest metropolis.

As I stood in the middle of a dusty field, staring at the crumbling walls of the Presidio de San Sabá, I couldn't help but feel the dramatic story of conquest, bloodshed and what-could-have-been. Today, what remains of the abandoned Spanish fort covers a few acres on the north bank of the San Saba River.

The fort was constructed in 1757 to protect the Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá, 4 miles to the east. Spain brought in a caravan of 300 soldiers and civilians to push their presence and control deeper into the heart of Texas.

Native Americans (and the French) didn't want the missionaries there. And in March 1758, 2,000 Comanche and other natives (likely armed with French weapons) attacked the mission and massacred its residents. A decade of fighting between the Spanish citizens inside the fort and the surrounding tribes followed, until the Spanish gave up and left in 1772.

Over the centuries, the ruins became a sort of roadside attraction. Famous Texan Jim Bowie even carved his name in the stone gate after supposedly hiding his silver cache, but that's another story. Sadly, the presidio's history began to fade as its stones were scavenged to construct Menard's growing downtown, and the grounds became an attraction on the city golf course. Seriously!

Luckily, it's now a protected site that's been extensively studied and cataloged.

If you're a lover of Texas history and want a glimpse into the past—but without the constant threat of death—it doesn't get much better than walking the grounds of the old presidio and pondering life on the Texas frontier. ■

ABOVE Chet in front of the ruins of Presidio de San Sabá in Menard.

**TCP** 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.

## SEPTEMBER

7

**Gainesville [7–14] Fall Art Exhibition**, (940) 613-6939, [gainesvilleareavisualarts.org](http://gainesvilleareavisualarts.org)

11

**Grapevine [11–14] GrapeFest**, (817) 410-3185, [grapevinetexasusa.com](http://grapevinetexasusa.com)

12

**Bryan [12–13] Brazos Bluebonnet Quilt Guild Quilt Show**, (979) 776-8338, [bbquiltguild.org](http://bbquiltguild.org)

13

**Chappell Hill Airing of the Quilts**, (979) 337-9910, [chappellhilltx.com](http://chappellhilltx.com)

**Luling Luling Foundation Youth Grill-Off**, (830) 875-2438, [lulingfoundation.org](http://lulingfoundation.org)

**Stephenville Local Art & Wine Walk**, (254) 965-6190, [downtownstephenvilletx.com](http://downtownstephenvilletx.com)

14

**Yorktown Holy Cross Festival**, (361) 564-2893, [holycrossyorktown.net](http://holycrossyorktown.net)

19

**Giddings [19–20] Happy Stitchers Quilt Show**, (979) 540-8043

25

**Grand Saline [25–27] Salt Festival**, [gssaltfestival@gmail.com](mailto:gssaltfestival@gmail.com), [facebook.com/gssaltfest](https://facebook.com/gssaltfest)

26

**Commerce [26–27] Bois D'Arc Bash**, (903) 886-3950, [commerce-chamber.com](http://commerce-chamber.com)



27

**Winnsboro** [26-27] Cowboy Music and Poetry Gathering, (903) 342-0686, winnsboro.centerforhearts.com

**Hallettsville** Kolache Fest, (361) 798-2662, hallettsville.com

**Lake Dallas** 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Lake Dallas Library, (940) 497-3566, friendsoflakedallaslibrary.com

**Lakehills** Medina Lake Cajun Festival, (830) 460-0600, cajunfestival-medinalake.com

**Woodville** Ghosts and Legends of Texas Past, (409) 403-2025, heritage-village.org



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28

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

# OCTOBER

3

**Granbury** [3-5] Oktoberfest, (682) 936-4550, granburysquare.com

4

**Burnet** Texas State Button Society Fall Workshop and Sale, texasstatebutton.society.com

**Huntington** Catfish Festival, shophuntingtontx.com

**Johnson City** Blanco County Wild Game Dinner, (830) 833-4138, facebook.com/wildgamedinner

**Taylor** Bluebonnet Horse Expo & Training Challenge, 1-888-542-5163, bluebonnethorseexpo.com

## TCP Submit Your Event

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



## Western Swing Festival

**September 6-7, 2025**  
Stephenville City Park  
Free Entry | Food Trucks

For more information go to  
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**September 13, 2025**  
Downtown Stephenville  
**Incredible Art • Shopping**  
**Great Food • Live Music**  
**Wine Tastings**

For more information go to  
[visitstephenville.com](http://visitstephenville.com)

**September 6**  
**7AM-10AM**



**Cars & Coffee @ the Courthouse**

Downtown Stephenville



**Stephenville Farmer & Artisan Market**  
**9AM-12PM**



## Celebrate Rodeo Heritage in the Cowboy Capital

**Ranch Rodeo**  
September 20-21, 2025



**PRCA Rodeo**  
September 26-28, 2025

Priefert Cowboy Capital Fairgrounds Arena  
For more information go to  
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J. A., Ft Lauderdale, FL

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1

**1 SABINE BREDOW**  
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**2 REAGAN FERGUSON**  
CENTRAL TEXAS EC

Navigating Engineer Pass in Colorado, with a 1,000-foot drop on the right.

**3 STEVEN MOORE**  
BLUEBONNET EC

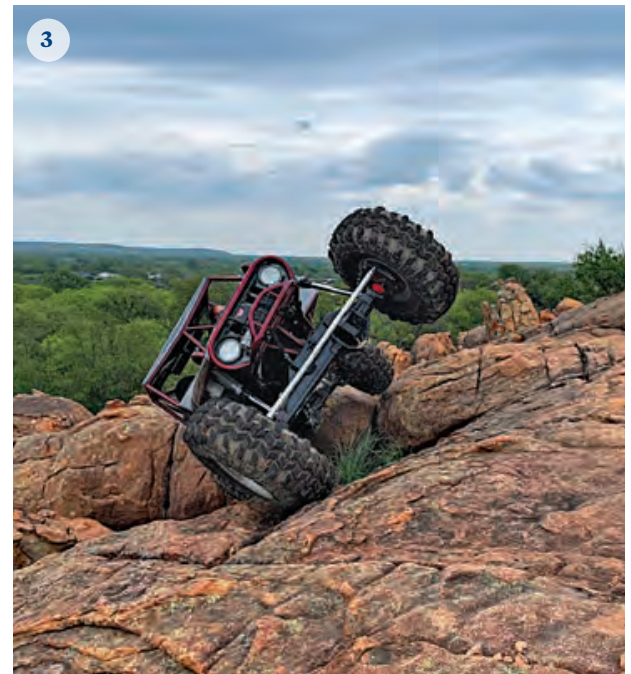
"Rock crawling Texas style at Wolf Caves off-road park in Mason."

**4 LESLI SAN JOSE**  
PEDERNALES EC

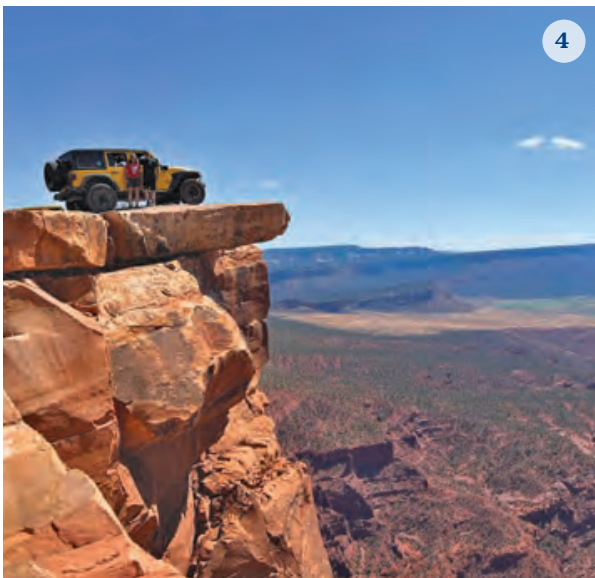
At the end of a trail called Top of the World in Moab, Utah.



2



3



4

## Upcoming Contests

**DUE SEP 10 Snakes Alive!**  
**DUE OCT 10 From the Oil Fields**  
**DUE NOV 10 Still Life**



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Off-Road Adventures photos from readers.





## Ebb and Flow

People come and people go,  
and when they do, nature reclaims

BY MARTHA DEERING  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
JONATHAN RICE

**A SPRING BURBLES** in a peaceful Central Texas valley. Hidden beneath the tall weeds and grasses around the spring are the foundation stones of old buildings.

They are all that is left of a small Texas town—a town that was once as alive as the mockingbirds that bicker in the live oak trees.

Two hundred years ago, someone dug a well near the spring where the unmistakable aroma of wild onions filled the air. A windmill built above the well pumped water into a trough for horses and cattle.

The well never went dry, and during the hottest, driest weather, settlers drove their wagons for miles to get its water. The families who came to live there built a small Baptist church out of logs.

Eagles made their nests in the oak trees

near the spring. And so the people who built their homes in the area called it Eagle Springs.

Before long, a post office and a general store were added. Since farmers near the spring grew lots of cotton, a cotton gin was built. Blacksmiths set up shop and fixed wheels, sharpened plows and put shoes on horses. A woodworking and harness shop opened, and a doctor set up his practice in town. Court was held, and a jail was needed when horse thieves arrived.

Eagle Springs had become a noisy, bustling town of more than 200 by 1884.

The well always had plenty of water, so ranchers drove great herds of cattle through the town on their way north along a branch of the Chisholm Trail. Parents worked together to build a school for the children, and one little boy named Pat Neff grew up to become the governor of Texas.

One day the railroad announced that they were building a track in the area, but it would not go through Eagle Springs. The railroad brought business to other towns, and Eagle Springs began to decline.

The stores and blacksmith shops moved closer to the railroad. The farmers took their cotton there, and the gin closed.

The children were sent to a bigger school. The cattle went north in railroad cars. Little by little, the old, abandoned buildings at Eagle Springs fell into ruin.

After nearly two centuries, little is left but the spring and the church, rebuilt in 1876 after the log church burned.

Bit by bit, nature has erased Eagle Springs, relegated to Texas' long list of more than 500 ghost towns.

The water still burbles cheerfully over stones, and wild onions grow all about. The evening breeze shivers the leaves of the live oak trees, making a sound like the soft whispering of voices from long ago. ■



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