

PIONEERING PILOTS  
OF SWEETWATER

A TEXAN'S HISTORIC  
PLAY AT THE MASTERS

THE MOST OVERLOOKED  
BIG BEND VISTA

# Texas Coop Power

FOR RUSK COUNTY EC MEMBERS

APRIL 2025

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1. 14.5¢ kWh - June 2024 Texa's Monthly Electricity Rate Average | Actual data powered by Symphony

2. ENERGY STAR rated units qualify for 30% through 2032, 26% through 2033 and 22% through 2034

# April 2025



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*By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers*

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

*By Pam LeBlanc*

**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*

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Troy Moore, a crew supervisor at Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative.

# 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.”



“A flower blossoms for its own joy.”

— OSCAR WILDE

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best view in Texas 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 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  
LUCAS

Visit our website to see more responses.



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**RECOMMENDED READING**

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](http://TexasCoopPower.com).

FEBRUARY 2025 It's Hip To Be a Square

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

DONNA DEAN HUTCHERSON  
VIA FACEBOOK



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



KENNY BRAUN

**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

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

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

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

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**TEXAS CO-OP POWER** Volume 81, Number 10 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** Subscription price is \$5.11 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50.

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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

**O**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

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 darter 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.

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.

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD: KERRY CARLOY

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



COURTESY TRIPP DAVENPORT

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.

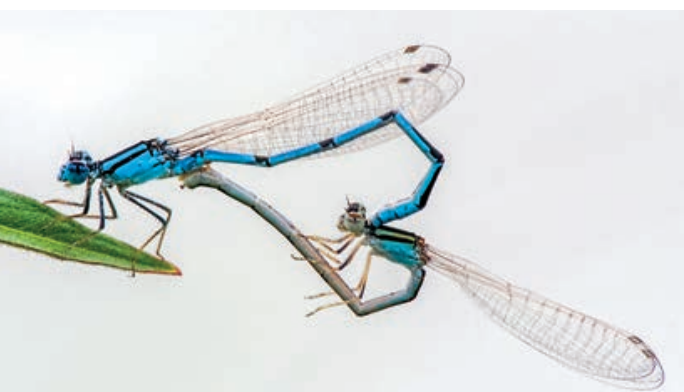
Among them are enthusiasts like Davenport and Martin Reid, a retired computer programmer from San Antonio who used to photograph mostly birds and butterflies.

“I got interested in dragonflies in 2001 when I saw a cool-looking 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



## 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.**

KERRY CARLOY



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

PHOTOS THIS PAGE: KERRY CARLOY

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 hot-spot 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

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-me-down 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.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OFFICIAL NATIONAL WASP WWII MUSEUM, SWEETWATER, TEXAS

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

## 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 [wasmuseum.org/homecoming](http://wasmuseum.org/homecoming).



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?" ■

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





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MESSAGE FROM CEO/GENERAL MANAGER RHETT REID

## Join Us at the Annual Meeting

IT'S THAT TIME of year again: Rusk County Electric Cooperative is gearing up for its 88th annual meeting, which will be held Thursday, April 17, at the Rusk County Youth Expo Center.

The annual meeting is a time for Rusk County EC members to gather, share experiences, hear from co-op leadership, enjoy a meal and maybe win a door prize.

Your electric cooperative is not owned by faraway investors or run by an appointed board of directors. It's run by a democratically elected board that is given the privilege to serve because of your vote.

Our board of directors is made up of seven members who live and work right here in our local service area, putting them in the best position to know where community investments are most needed.

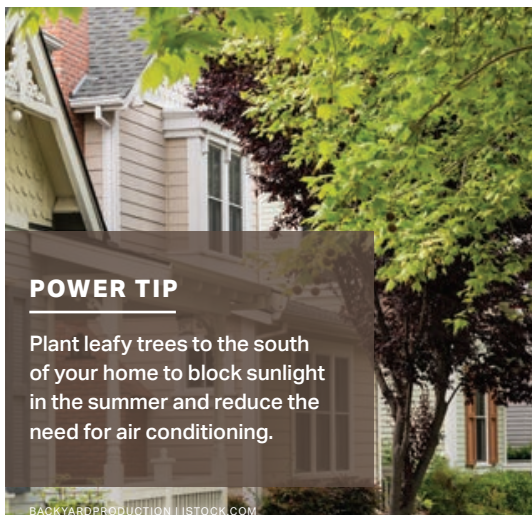
Most consumers likely don't equate active involvement in their electric company with helping

their community. But Rusk County EC is not an ordinary utility company. As a co-op, our business model is meant to serve the members and the community in which it operates.

Our core purpose and mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable service to our members that enhances their quality of life. We're motivated by service to our community, rather than profits.

The annual meeting is an opportunity to gather with other members and be involved in deciding the future of the co-op. Not only will you have a good time, but you'll feel good knowing you had a voice in a very important decision that impacts one of our most vital resources—electricity.

We hope you'll exercise the benefits of your co-op membership and join us for the annual meeting April 17. ■



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**FOR CO-OP MEMBERS ONLY**

# Rusk County EC 88th Annual Meeting

**Thursday, April 17**

Tommy McDaniel Exhibit Hall  
Rusk County Youth Expo Center  
3303 FM 13 W., Henderson

- 3:30 p.m.**    **Doors open, registration, exhibits, popcorn**
  - 4 p.m.**        **Food line opens**
  - 4:30-5 p.m.**   **Arcing demo**
  - 5:30 p.m.**    **Members' business meeting**
- Call to order and certification of quorum  
Invocation  
Pledge of Allegiance  
Reading of notice of meeting and proof of publication; reading or waiver of reading and approval of minutes  
Financial report  
General manager's report  
Election of directors  
Unfinished business, new business  
Adjournment of business meeting  
Door prizes and scholarship drawing

Members must register and be present to win door prizes and for the chance to win the grand prize.

Rusk County Electric Cooperative will give scholarships worth \$1,000 to 2025 high school graduates at the annual meeting. Students must register at the meeting before 5:30 p.m. and be present to win. Winners must be seniors in high school, and their parent or guardian must be a member of Rusk County EC with permanent residence on the cooperative's lines.

CALENDAR: OKSANA SAZHNEVA | ISTOCK.COM

## Rusk County Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

### CONTACT US

P.O. Box 1169  
Henderson, TX 75653-1169  
**Phone** (903) 657-4571  
**Email** info@rcelectric.org  
**Web** rcelectric.org

### CEO/General Manager

Rhett L. Reid

### Board of Directors

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Emily Whitworth, Vice President  
Richard "Trey" Hacker, Secretary-Treasurer  
Tony Cavaliere, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer  
Sam Allison  
Kenneth Keeling  
Michael Pinnell

## 24/7

## Outage Hotline Numbers

For information and to report outages, please call us.

### LOCAL

(903) 657-4571

### TOLL-FREE

1-855-945-3520

### OFFICE LOCATIONS

#### Henderson

**(903) 657-4571**

3162 State Highway 43 E.

Hours: Monday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

#### Carthage

**(903) 693-2198**

325A W. Sabine, Suite 1

Hours: Monday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 1–5 p.m.

#### Lakeport

**(903) 643-9181**

8989 FM 349

Hours: Monday–Thursday, 7 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and 1–5 p.m.

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- In person at any of our offices
- Night deposit box at all office locations
- By phone at 1-855-945-3520. Please have your RCEC account number available.

### VISIT US ONLINE

rcelectric.org



Check us out at

[TexasCoopPower.com/rcec](https://TexasCoopPower.com/rcec)



KILLERBIO | ISTOCK.COM

## Notice of Rusk County Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting

**THE ANNUAL MEETING** of members of Rusk County Electric Cooperative will be held Thursday, April 17, at the Rusk County Youth Expo Center at 3303 FM 13 W. in Henderson.

The business meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m. to take action on the following matters:

1. To hear reports of officers, directors and committees.
2. To elect directors to serve three-year terms.
3. To discuss other business that may come before the meeting.

Ballots were mailed separately. Follow these guidelines to cast your vote:

1. Mark your ballot by circling one name for each district.
2. Sign the ballot. Failure to sign the ballot by the name that appears on the label will void the ballot.
3. Place the ballot in the envelope included with the mailed ballot, addressed to Knuckols, Duvall, Hallum & Co., and return it:
  - a. By mail (must be received by 10 a.m. April 17)
  - b. By delivering to RCEC's Henderson office by 10 a.m. April 17.
  - c. By bringing it with you to the annual meeting by 5:30 p.m. April 17.

If you have a disability and plan to attend the annual meeting, please contact the cooperative at (903) 657-4571 so we can accommodate your needs.

Respectfully,

**Richard "Trey" Hacker**, Secretary-Treasurer  
Rusk County Electric Cooperative Board of Directors


### Tex-Mex Bacon and Egg Squares

- 2 cans whole green chiles (10 ounces each), drained**
- 8 ounces grated sharp cheddar cheese**
- 6 slices thick-cut bacon, cooked and cut into bite-size pieces**
- 6 eggs**
- Dash of hot sauce**
- Salt, to taste**
- Ground black pepper, to taste**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Coat an 8-by-8-inch baking dish with cooking spray. Arrange chiles evenly in the dish, then sprinkle on cheese and bacon.

2. In a bowl, beat together eggs, hot sauce, salt and pepper, then pour evenly into the dish. Bake until eggs are firm and cheese has melted, 25–30 minutes. Cool 5 minutes, then cut into squares to serve.

SERVES 9

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

MEGAN MYERS



# Electricity Theft and Vandalism Pose Safety and Financial Concerns

**THEFT INVOLVING ELECTRICITY** and related materials is a problem all electric utilities face, and it's a problem for electricity customers too. Since Rusk County Electric Cooperative is member-owned, electricity theft ends up costing you—the member—money.

Theft of electricity is also extremely dangerous. Tampering with an electric meter can make it unsafe and unstable. When people steal electricity, they put themselves, their neighbors, family and pets—and the co-op's lineworkers—all at risk for electric shock.

Stealing electrical equipment and materials can also pose a significant risk to the culprit, resulting in injury or even death from electric shock.



KENNETH-CHEUNG | ISTOCK.COM

Although electricity can be easily acquired through a utility, some people are still willing to risk physical damage or loss of life just for the sake of some free kilowatt-hours. Others may not realize the serious legal and potential health implications.

Keeping power safe and affordable is a priority for Rusk County EC. That's why we routinely inspect co-op meters

and equipment to ensure we're doing our best to protect you from the risks of electricity theft. We take a proactive approach to this serious problem in an attempt to eliminate theft and reduce related costs.

You can also play a role in this process by immediately notifying us if you suspect someone is gaining access to our power supply without paying their fair share of the costs or by tampering with equipment.

If you have information related to electricity or materials theft, please call us at (903) 657-4571. Rest assured, we'll keep your name private.

Because you share in the ownership of Rusk County EC, when people steal from the cooperative, they're stealing from you too. ■



BLUEGEMMA | ISTOCK.COM

## Do Your Spring Cleaning Safely

**NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME** to get outside and catch up on chores. Here are some safety tips to help.

Maintain a clear fire zone of 10 feet around all structures. Clean up leaves and debris and consider using stone or non-combustible mulch.

Check outdoor electrical outlets and other electrical appliances to ensure they're in good repair.

Get your gas grill cleaned and serviced. Check propane tanks and lines for leaks or damage.

Keep 100 feet of garden hose with an attached nozzle connected and ready for use in case of a fire.

Check paints and pool and yard chemicals to make sure their containers are in good shape and are stored properly.

Check fuel containers for leaks and make sure they're properly stored.

Have all power equipment cleaned, serviced and readied for use.

Be sure to use personal protective equipment, such as gloves and safety glasses, when appropriate. ■

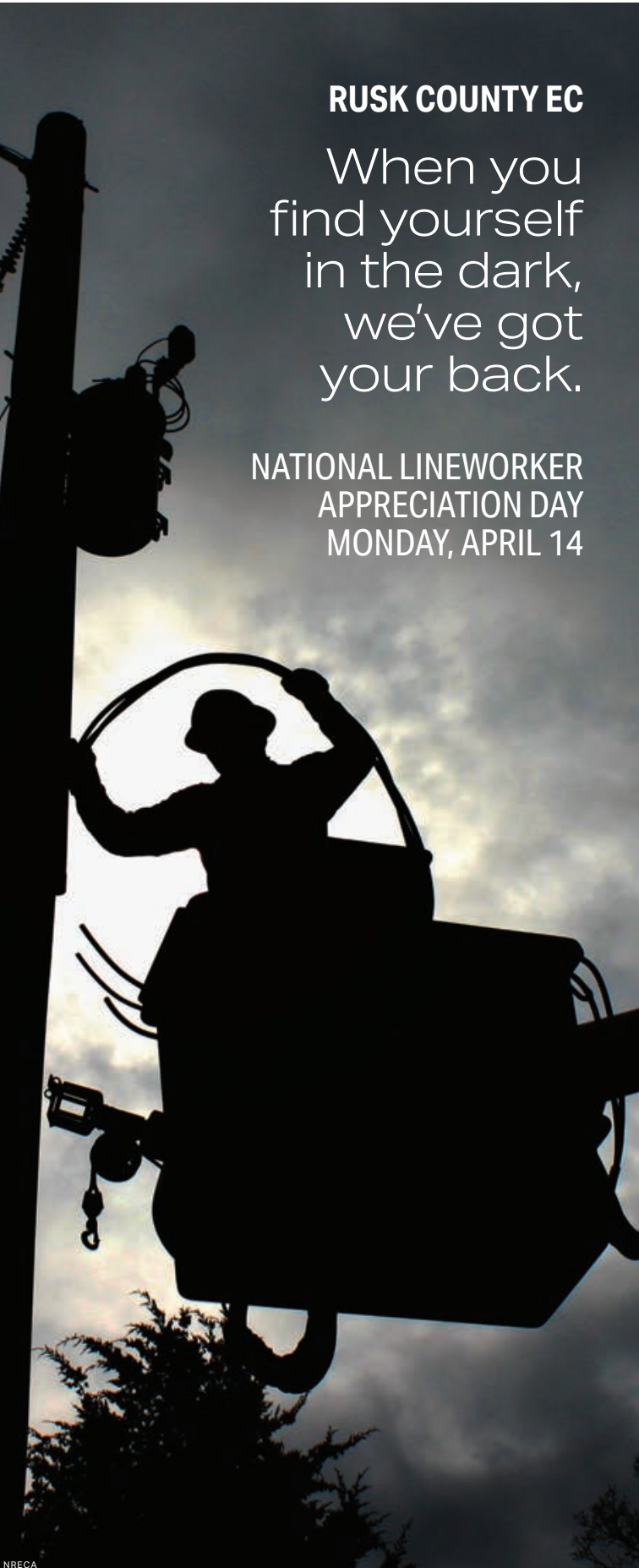
### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**Lineworker Appreciation Day**  
Monday, April 14

**Easter**  
Sunday, April 20

**Earth Day**  
Tuesday, April 22

EDIEBLOOM | ISTOCK.COM



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MONDAY, APRIL 14

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| Collin Castle     | Wryn Martin     |
| Joe Collins       | Keaton Mims     |
| Garrett Combs     | Gabe Powell     |
| Ruben Contreras   | Mark Prior      |
| Jacob Costlow     | Scout Puckett   |
| Max Gomez         | Colten Roberts  |
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| Bradley Henderson | Trace Smith     |
| Jake Howeth       | Danny Yelverton |

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Nacogdoches, Panola,  
Rusk and Shelby counties  
since 1937.





M. STOCK | ISTOCK.COM

## 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 fridge 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. ■

## Double-Pane Windows Save Energy and Money

**IF YOU LIVE** in an older home, there's a good chance its windows are made from single panes of glass.

Newer homes typically come with double-pane windows, and for good reason: They're far more energy-efficient. In fact, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates that you can save 7%–15% on heating and cooling bills when you replace single-pane windows with double-pane versions.

You can find out how much money a window swap could save you by visiting the Energy Star website, [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov). For Texans, savings average \$230 per year. Be sure to compare the savings with the cost and expected life of the windows to determine if it's a good investment.

If new windows aren't in the budget, there are still some solutions to make your single-pane windows more efficient.

- ▶ Check for air leaks and apply caulk or install weatherstripping.
- ▶ Put up energy-efficient window treatments like blinds or curtains.
- ▶ Install window film and hang exterior shades such as awnings to reduce solar heat gain in warmer months. ■



RZELEICH | ISTOCK.COM

# A Twist on Cornbread

Meet the East Texan who turned her childhood snack into a hit sandwich

STORY AND PHOTO BY ANNA MAZUREK

**WHEN KITT WILLIAMS** was 8, she took a break from watching *Gilligan's Island* to look for a snack in the kitchen—a simple quest that would become a pivotal career moment. Spying her mom's leftover cornbread on the counter, she used it to make a ham and cheese sandwich.

"I loved the taste of it," Williams says. "From that moment on, every time she had cornbread, I would make a cornbread sandwich."

Now Williams owns Kitt's Kornbread Sandwich and Pie Bar in downtown Jefferson. Hungry customers often line up down the block for her cornbread creation—two decades after it debuted.

But the journey to her culinary empire was anything but linear.

Williams and her mother, Sarah Rosetta Williams, moved from Dallas to Jefferson, a small town about 45 miles northwest of Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1992 to open a bed and breakfast. But when Sarah received a breast cancer diagnosis, the duo returned to the Metroplex for her treatments.

They eventually moved back to Jefferson and turned the bed and breakfast into a diner to make use of Sarah's culinary talents. "She could look in the refrigerator and see five things and find a whole meal out of that," Kitt says.

In 2003, the duo moved downtown to open Jefferson's House of Pies, an eatery that whipped up sweet and savory dishes, from Cajun meat pies to buttermilk pies. As the business grew, diners repeatedly requested sandwiches.

"I thought, 'Well, if I ever do a sandwich, it's going to have to be something different,'" Kitt says.

One of the signature menu items was Sarah's famous chicken and dumplings soup, which they started pairing with broccoli cornbread. One day, Kitt had a flashback to her childhood in the kitchen.

"The broccoli cornbread smells really good coming out of the oven," she explains. "And it just hit me: oh, cornbread sandwich. I used to do that, and I wonder if other people would want that."

It proved to be an instant hit.

When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, it also affected Jefferson's tourism traffic, Kitt says, prompting the Williamses to shut down the business and sell everything. After a few unsuccessful months of selling food at Canton's First Monday

Trade Days, a massive flea market closer to Dallas, Kitt's dread of having to work an office job inspired her to return to Jefferson and reopen the business with the cornbread sandwich as the star of the menu.

They reopened in their old location but quickly outgrew it as demand spiked. Kitt found a larger space in 2009, in a nearby former drugstore that needed a total renovation.

The booths and tables were a bargain, a \$300 yard sale find, and the oven was a steal on eBay. The bar was delivered an hour before the grand opening of Kitt's Kornbread Sandwich and Pie Bar. The old neon sign from Jefferson's House of Pies has an honorary spot in the front window.

One of Kitt's main challenges was perfecting the cornbread recipe so it wasn't too greasy or crumbly. Concocting the top-secret formula for their three flavors—original, broccoli and jalapeño (the most popular)—was a two-year mission that's constantly tweaked due to supply changes.

On Saturdays, the crowds stack up, like the ham, turkey and cheese between two slices of cornbread.

"If you've never had it, we always say you should get the jalapeño club all the way because that has the biggest wow factor when you first bite into it," Kitt says. Or order the Bigfoot Texan—a double-patty burger smothered with Texas chili, cheese and jalapeños followed by a slice from one of their most popular pies, buttermilk and chocolate pecan.

As the popularity grew, Sarah dove into franchising the business and opened a Carrollton branch in 2013 while also researching how to sell a cornbread bake mix. Three months after opening the new store, Sarah, a 15-year breast cancer survivor, died from stomach cancer, halting the expansion plans.

Kitt shut down the Carrollton location to focus on the original and carry on her mother's legacy in Jefferson. 2025 marks the 20th anniversary of Kitt's cornbread sandwich.

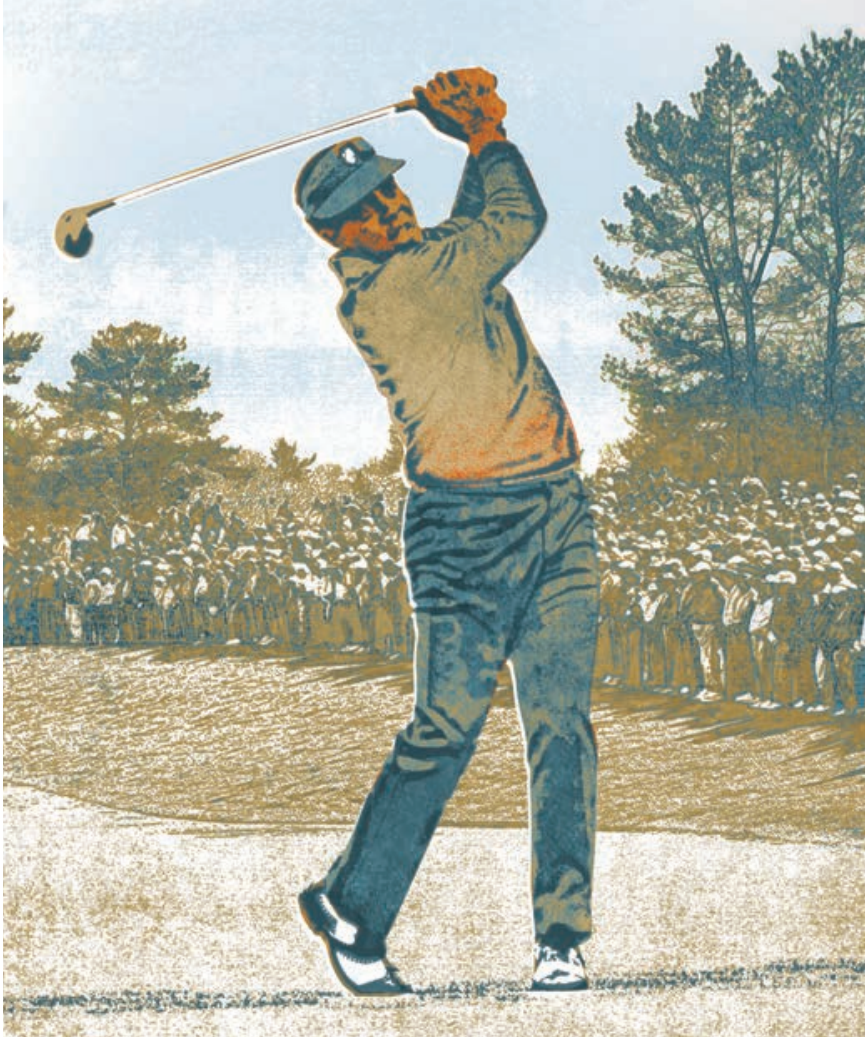
"We feel Mom is still here helping us," Kitt says. "It's a testament to our ancestry. My mom, my grandmother [and] my great-grandmother all had businesses that flourished even in hard times." ■

Kitt Williams with a double chocolate cream pie and cornbread club sandwich.



  
**Kitt's**  
Kornbread Sandwich & Pie Bar





# 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

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." ■

# Eggs

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**  
**¾ cup chopped red bell pepper**  
**¾ cup chopped green bell pepper**  
**½ cup chopped onion**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**¼ teaspoon ground black pepper**  
**4 eggs**  
**1 cup salsa verde**  
**¼ 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 ¼ cup salsa verde.
5. 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**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifecake.com](http://sweetlifecake.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**
- ½ cup ground pork or turkey breakfast sausage**
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper**
- ½ cup diced red bell pepper**
- ½ cup diced yellow bell pepper**
- ¼ cup thinly sliced portabello mushrooms**
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic**
- 8 eggs**
- 2 tablespoons cottage cheese**
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning**
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes**
- Sliced avocado**

- 1.** Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high 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 medium-high 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

## TCP \$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



½ cup diced green onion

8 eggs

1 cup milk

1 teaspoon salt

½ 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

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COURTESY TODD WHITE STILLS AND MOTION

## 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.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all Chet's Explorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

## APRIL

11

**Carthage [11-12] Piney Woods Quilt Festival**, (903) 754-1948, carthagetexas.com

12

**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

19

**Fairfield Easter Eggstravaganza**, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

23

**Corsicana [23-26] Derrick Days**, (903) 654-4850, derrickdays.com

25

**Burnet [25-26] Highland Lakes Quilt Festival**, hlqguild@gmail.com, hlqg.org

26

**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, texasstatebuttonociety.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

### TCP Submit Your Event

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

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# Characters

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

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!"



3



2



4

## Upcoming Contests

- DUE APR 10 College Life
- DUE MAY 10 Off-Road Adventures
- DUE JUN 10 Heroes



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

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



## 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 quad-burning 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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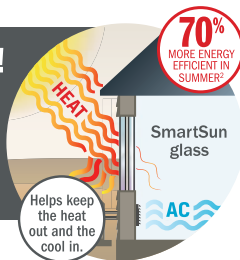
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