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# Texas Coop Power

FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

JANUARY 2025

## The Bears Are Back

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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

# January 2025



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Decades after black bears were forced out of Texas, they're traipsing back and causing a ruckus.

*By Pam LeBlanc*

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Wherever you wander, a Texas RV-maker has the rig for your next trip.

*By Brandon Weaver*

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#### ON THE COVER

A black bear heads toward Chisos Basin in Big Bend National Park.

*Photo by Jared Markgraf*

#### ABOVE

Betty McCord Studzinski and her bulldog, Tonka, with their home away from home at Lake Georgetown.

*Photo by Eric W. Pohl*

# Looming Large



THIS MONTH, CHET takes us to the world’s largest pecan, in Seguin (see Page 30). Other attractions in Texas lay claim to being the world’s largest because, you know, everything’s bigger ... . These include the world’s largest:

- Patio chair**, in Dallas
- Roadrunner**, Fort Stockton
- Rattlesnake**, Freer
- Caterpillar**, Italy

- Watermelon**, Luling
- Muleshoe**, Muleshoe
- Jackrabbit**, Ralls



## TCP Contests and More

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Download our issue from January 2005 and learn about Gainesville’s quirky circus history. Find it at [TexasCoopPower.com/magazine-archives](http://TexasCoopPower.com/magazine-archives).

“Kindness and consideration of somebody besides yourself keeps you feeling young.”

—BETTY WHITE

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The best year of my life was ...

**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 November prompt: **Snakes are ...**

Misunderstood.

JAMES KLEIN  
FARMERS EC  
EAST TAWAKONI

Frightfully fascinating.

TAMMY TEMPLIN  
PEDERNALES EC  
AUSTIN

Nope ropes.

SUSAN ALLEN LITTLEFIELD  
VIA FACEBOOK

Better seen than felt.

LORI GUSTAVSSON  
HAMILTON COUNTY EC  
GOLDTHWAITE

Lovely to look at, tempting to hold, but if you are bitten, you might not grow old.

NOLAN GREEN  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC  
JACKSONVILLE

Visit our website to see more responses.

NOVEMBER 2024 A Good Snake

“Hopefully a few snakes will live on because of this, and folks will start to understand better that snakes are valuable members of our wildlife community.”

MELINA BAKER  
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC  
RUSK



RUSSELL A. GRAVES

**A Smart Pet**

I had a corn snake pet I adopted [A Good Snake, November 2024]. He lived for about 16 years. Junior loved humans but did not trust my two cats. Smart dude.

Diane Cabiness  
MidSouth EC  
Montgomery

**Interpreting Maps**

I know very little Spanish. I enjoyed the article [Found in Translation, November 2024]. I knew some of the names in English. It caused me to think of two towns with Spanish names. One is Cuero, which means leather. The other is Port Lavaca. Vaca means cow.

Ron Tietz  
Medina EC  
San Antonio

**A Memory Burns Brightly**

Raised on a farm in Wilson County, Kansas, I remember well when the area received electricity in the early 1940s



NICK LU

[In the Beginning, August 2024]. That evening, the neighborhood was aglow as most had their yard lights on. The first appliance my parents purchased was a refrigerator, replacing the kerosene-powered one.

Thanks to the Rural Electrification Administration, those lights continue to burn brightly in my memory 80 years later.

Dick Stanley  
Farmers EC  
Greenville

**Kindness in Kerrville**

Folks who move to Kerrville, over time, become Kerrverts [Vegan Panhandlers, July 2024]. Nothing perverted is meant by it; it's more about conversion.

In my case, it had to do with shedding a sort of crust acquired living my first few decades of life in a major metro area (Houston). A few years after moving to Kerrville, its pervasive aura of authentic kindness and old-fashioned neighborliness softened my somewhat city-hardened exterior.

Kristin Mudry  
Bandera EC  
Kerrville

**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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# OUR NOSY NEW NEIGHBORS

BY PAM LEBLANC

Decades after bears were forced out of West Texas,  
they're traipsing back and causing a ruckus

In 1994, when Alida Lorio and her husband moved to the quirky Terlingua Ranch development north of Study Butte, where off-the-grid shacks sprout alongside hipster hideouts in the desert of far West Texas, they never expected they'd be living among black bears.

That changed in 2022, when several of the large, furry omnivores began ambling through their 110-acre, cactus-dotted backyard and diving for greasy pizza boxes in a dumpster.

"It's like Terlingua Ranch just got invaded by bears," Lorio says. "We have an arroyo right behind our house, and they were using that as a highway."

Lorio reported the animals to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department officials who connected her with researchers at the Borderlands Research Institute at Sul Ross State University, up the road in Alpine. They set up traps and collared some of the animals as part of an ongoing, multiyear project to learn more about their movements.

Bears, they've discovered, are making a comeback in Texas. And as the animals expand their territory beyond just West Texas, it's time for Texans to prepare to live alongside them.

## HOMeward BOUND

Black bears once roamed across much of Texas, from the Big Bend to the Pineywoods, the Panhandle to the

Rio Grande, but habitat loss and overhunting—along with ranchers who killed them over fears for their livestock—decimated their population. By the 1950s, they had been extirpated from the state.

A remnant population survived in the remote mountains of northern Mexico, though, and began to rebound. In the late 1980s, a few bears wandered across the Rio Grande and into Big Bend National Park. Now they've been spotted outside the park's gates, along the Rio Grande and even as far as the Hill Country.

"A lot of that is due to the protected landscape, restrictions on hunting bears in Texas and most importantly, a change in people's attitudes in the last 50 years," says Matthew Hewitt, a wildlife research assistant who works on the Borderlands Research Institute's black bear project.

The influx of the animals indicates improving habitat, but it also means an increased likelihood that humans will cross paths with bears, who are drawn to garbage, outdoor grills, deer feeders and pet food.

And that sometimes leads to conflict.

"Human-bear interactions are going to start becoming more common as bears continue to recolonize," Hewitt says. "We're working to get Texans in general to realize bears are a real thing and they do exist here."

In 2020, someone shot and killed a bear that roamed into a Del Rio neighborhood. In 2022, a bear nicknamed Oscar



A black bear, seemingly unconcerned about a nearby photographer, feasts on prickly pear tunas just off the road in Big Bend National Park.





ABOVE A mama and her three cubs meander along Chisos Basin Road on the way into the Chisos Mountains.

BELOW Matthew Hewitt of the Borderlands Research Institute collects vitals and records the condition of a creature's mighty paws.



began hanging around a dumpster outside a barbecue restaurant in Terlingua. The animals have popped up in Laredo, the Davis Mountains and Guadalupe Mountains National Park, too, and last September, TPWD officials trapped and relocated a bear on the outskirts of Uvalde, 85 miles west of San Antonio.

Three years ago, Melanie Kaihani noticed a bear on the 243 acres of land she'd just purchased near Sanderson, southeast of Fort Stockton. She set up a wildlife camera and struck gold: a bevy of bears cavorting beneath a deer feeder and climbing a salt lick to take a dip in the water tank she constructed for wildlife. (You can watch their antics on Instagram at @bigbendcountry.)

"With their size and teeth and claws, you'd expect them to be really intimidating creatures, but they're really just big, goofy raccoons," says Kaihani. She notified researchers, who advised her to quit filling the deer feeder. "If they had opposable thumbs, they'd rule the world."

For now, no one really knows how many black bears live in Texas, where they're still considered threatened and hunting them is banned. "More than a dozen, less than a thousand," Hewitt says. "Possibly a couple hundred."

Researchers want to know more about the bears—which have ears shaped like castanets; oval paws with candy corn-sized claws; eyes the size of a quarter; and a distinctive, musky odor—so they're fitting them with collars to track their movements.

Their diet includes mostly plants: prickly pear tunas, acorns, wild persimmons, berries and seeds from piñon pine cones. They also eat insects and roadkill, and researchers in Texas have documented one incident of true predation (a javelina). Full-grown males typically weigh up to 300 pounds.

## BEARS WILL BE BEARS

Twice a year, in the spring and fall, Hewitt and others from the Borderlands Research Institute load baked goods and fruit into live traps they set on land where bears have been reported.

"We have learned that bears sure do like doughnuts," Hewitt says.

When the trapdoor shuts behind a bear, the researchers get a text alert on their phones. Someone is always within a 90-minute drive.

"If a trap goes off, it's boots on ground," Hewitt says.

## BEAR NECESSITIES

- Never feed or approach bears.
- Secure food, garbage and recycling.
- Remove bird feeders when bears are active.
- Never leave pet food outdoors.
- Clean and store grills and smokers.
- Alert neighbors to bear activity.



“We jump out of bed, drop what we’re doing and drive out to the trap site.”

The researchers use a dart gun or jab stick to anesthetize the bear. Once it’s unconscious, they check its vitals; gather biometric data; attach tracking tags; and take hair, blood and tissue samples. Finally, they attach a rubber collar equipped with a transmitter and battery pack so they can follow the animal’s movements.

So far, they’ve collared about 30 bears, including five on Kaihani’s land near Sanderson and a couple on Lorio’s property in Terlingua Ranch.

“We have been extremely surprised by the sheer size of the area these animals are using,” Hewitt says. “We’ve seen some 80-mile movements from Terlingua Ranch down into Mexico.”

Another surprise? The bears are apparently thriving in the harsh, prickly environment of West Texas.

That’s why Borderlands researchers and scientists with TPWD want to educate the public on how they can safely coexist with the animals.

“Bears get into problems when there’s food involved,” Hewitt says. “Outside that, they’re good at keeping to themselves.”

By removing food that attracts bears, storing grills where bears can’t access them and installing bear-safe dumpsters, people can lessen the odds of a problem, Hewitt says.

If you do encounter a black bear, remember that it’s likely

to scamper off if threatened or scared. Stay at least 100 yards away, and if you accidentally find yourself in close proximity to one, continue facing it and back away slowly. Bear spray is a good tool if a bear acts aggressively.

Also, consider yourself lucky.

“Take a second to marvel at a cool critter in a cool place,” Hewitt says.

### OH, BOTHER

Back at Terlingua Ranch, Lorio and her husband say they’re learning to coexist with their new neighbors.

“William and I are adaptive, and we figure the bears were here first,” she says. “So we just made some adjustments on how we dealt with garbage.”

They now store trash indoors. They rinse out pet food and other food containers to eliminate odor, and they put chicken bones in the freezer until trash pickup day. Bear-proof dumpsters have been installed in the rural neighborhood too.

Although not all her neighbors appreciate the bears as much as the Lorios do, Alida says she enjoys observing them.

“A lion is kind of regal, but bears look like you’d want to go have a beer with them,” she says. “The rare times that you do see them, it’s like a gift from Mother Nature.” ■

# WHEEL

Wherever you wander, a Texas RV-maker  
has the rig for your next trip



# ESTATE



BY BRANDON WEAVER

## IN THE SUMMER

of 2023, Betty

McCord Studzinski caravanned to Alaska from her home in Georgetown, north of Austin, with 12 other RVers. The majority made the trek in large 45-foot motor homes, but her recreational vehicle was the smallest of the bunch: a 17-foot Texas-made travel trailer perfect for her and Tonka, her bulldog.

“They were breaking down here and there,” says Studzinski, 78. “We had no issues at all.” She and Tonka covered 11,000 miles on that trip. Her favorite part was the wildlife. “They were everywhere,” she says. “And the scenery was just breathtaking.”

Studzinski has seen 49 states and many national parks with her Casita trailer in tow and has no plans to slow down. This year, she’s planning a trip to Maine and the Maritime Provinces of Canada.

Texas was the top destination for shipments of new RVs in 2023, according to the RV Industry Association, but our state also produces its very own travel rigs. Casita, Capri Camper and Sportsmobile are niche manufacturers compared to the corporate behemoths, and each of these companies has a wait-list for every RV that they build right here in Texas. The folks who buy these vehicles are loyal, and for them, it means buying into an ethos of community, since they don’t have to go through a dealership.

Each of the companies’ RVs take unique forms. Sportsmobile’s converted vans are like turtle shells—you live and drive in your home. Casita makes small, fiberglass egg-shaped trailers that you tote behind you. And Capri makes the classic truck camper for pickups.

An RVIA study found that RV ownership has increased 62% over the past 20 years, with nearly a quarter of owners aged 18–34. These are a few of the intrepid travelers who love their Texas-built homes on wheels.

Betty McCord Studzinski loves her Casita Spirit Deluxe camper. “I hardly ever go back to a place I’ve been before,” she says.

ERIC W. POHL



## TOP

**LARRY PANCAKE IS** a professional saddle bronc rider and music and rodeo promoter from Amarillo.

"I started rodeoing when I was 12," he says. "My seventh grade PE teacher taught me to rope." The Capri camper is a mainstay for professional cowboys like him. The campers are so iconic in Western culture, several have been featured in the TV series *Yellowstone*.

And they've been custom-made in Texas since 1969. In 2003, the company set up manufacturing in the tiny town of Bluff Dale, southwest of Fort Worth. They offer four models to top every size of pickup, with retro styling on the outside and modern amenities inside.

Pancake has owned four Capri campers, and his current one sits atop a 1997 Freightliner chassis. He spends about 150 days a year in it, hunting elk in New Mexico, riding broncs and promoting events across the U.S. The interior is decorated with a neon flamingo and a Welcome to Las Vegas sign.

"Anytime I leave the house, I'm in my Capri. I don't rent hotel rooms," Pancake says. "I like having my own space."

His favorite feature is his Capri's blackout shades that keep the interior completely dark in the daytime and under streetlamps. At big rodeos, there are sometimes hours between rotations. "I can watch a movie or take a nap," Pancake says. "The blackout shades are huge."

He also had Capri build a dream rig from his childhood rodeo days. The Bronc Stomper is a 1977 Chevrolet C20 Camper Special with a Capri camper on it. It's a show truck he uses to promote his National Finals Rodeo events in Las Vegas.

"When I was a kid growing up in the '70s, you had made it big time if you had a Chevy Camper Special with a Capri camper on it," Pancake says. "You either pulled horses with it or rode bulls. That's what the elite rodeo rig was."



COURTESY LARRY PANCAKE

Larry Pancake, a professional saddle bronc rider, calls his outfit, made by Capri Camper, the Bronc Stomper. He also outfitted a Freightliner with a Capri camper, and he uses the big rig to haul his smaller truck.

## TOTE

**STUDZINSKI, THE AVID RVer** from Georgetown, has owned just about every type of home on wheels—from a pop-up tent trailer to a massive motor home.

"I never could find the right size for me," Studzinski says. "I thought being a single female, traveling alone, with just a dog, I needed an engine-driven vehicle." That way if she felt unsafe camping, she could go from her bed to the driver's seat without exiting the rig.

Studzinski likes to boondock (camp off-grid, without hookups), but when all you have is one vehicle, you're likely to lose your spot if you leave briefly and drive to a trailhead or into town. So she started looking at trailers and settled on Casita.

The tough little fiberglass trailers have been built in



LEFT: COURTESY KATIE PERKINS; RIGHT: COURTESY BRANDON WEAVER

# TURTLE

**CHARLES BORSKEY SET** up shop in El Paso in 1961, converting Volkswagen and Ford vans. In the following decades, his company added innovations like “penthouse” tops (expandable roofs for sleeping) and four-wheel-drive conversions. In 1984, Borskey moved Sportsmobile to Austin.

I built my first van in 2005 with Sportsmobile, a four-wheel-drive Ford Econoline. The interior was sparse, with a compact cabinet, microwave, TV and a small “garage” area in the back for my mountain bike.

These days, the company offers standardized floor plans but also has an infinite selection of custom options to build your Goldilocks van. I chose the minimalist approach and christened my go-anywhere machine the Travel-All.

My first excursion was a shakedown trip to the Big Bend. The penthouse top, which raises above the van’s roof, withstood a blustery windstorm in Terlingua, and the four-wheel-drive chassis had no problem navigating the rough and rocky Black Gap Road in the backcountry of Big Bend National Park.

I deemed the Travel-All ready for a remote expedition in Colorado and drove it deep into the Rio Grande National Forest, inching down an impossibly steep Jeep trail to a

The author and his camper outfitted by Sportsmobile. It eats highway miles the way he eats breakfast tacos—with glee and fervor.

campsite along the rushing headwaters of the Rio Grande. I spent four glorious days in absolute solitude next to a Texas river born in Colorado.

I quickly outgrew the Travel-All’s sparse interior, so back to Sportsmobile I went.

In 2007, a few years after Mercedes-Benz introduced their sleek Sprinter van to the American market, I ordered one from Sportsmobile, one of the first certified outfitters in the U.S., and christened it Bruce. Unlike the Travel-All, it ate highway miles like I consume breakfast tacos—with glee and fervor.

I drove it all over the Western states, from Carmel-by-the-Sea, on the coast of central California, to the Grand Canyon, where my wife and I honeymooned in it with our trusty beagle, Pizza. In the 2000s, the Mercedes Sprinter van was uncommon, but now they’re ubiquitous. Ford and Dodge offer their own Euro-styled vans, and Sportsmobile does conversions on those as well out of their facility in North Austin.

Texas since 1983. Their current manufacturing plant is in Rice, south of Dallas, where they produce five models that are 17 feet long. The molded two-piece fiberglass design is built more like a boat than an RV. When a hailstorm damaged Studzinski’s home, her Casita, which sits uncovered outside, sustained no damage.

She purchased her Spirit Deluxe model in 2019 and had it outfitted with 325 watts of rooftop solar panels and four 100-amp-hour batteries. She bought a Subaru and promptly loaded up Tonka and went to Big Bend National Park, where she camped in the Chisos Basin campground.

The sites are small, but her little fiberglass “egg” fit perfectly, and with all her solar power, she could run her fridge with ease. Finding her perfect RV has fueled more wanderlust for Studzinski.

“I hardly ever go back to a place I’ve been before,” she says. “There are so many other places on my list that I want to see.” ■



ERIC W. POHL

Studzinski’s compact camper includes rooftop solar panels and four 100-amp-hour batteries.

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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/CEO

JOHN ED SHINPAUGH

## Resolve To Save Energy in 2025

**THE START OF THE** new year always seems to bring about lists for improving one’s life. You know: lose weight, stop smoking, exercise more—conserve electricity.

That last one might not be on your list, but it can be just as important as any personal health goals, both to your financial bottom line and the overall health of our cooperative and the state’s electricity system.

When temperatures are moderate, there’s an adequate supply of electricity to serve Texas’ needs, according to the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, the grid operator for 85% of the state. However, as the vicious winter storm of 2021 demon-

But you’ll likely find, after a few repetitions of a new behavior, you eventually won’t even have to think about it. You’ll turn off lights automatically.

Here are other energy-saving resolutions that you might consider for 2025.

- ▶ Unplug computers, TVs and phone chargers, plus the coffee maker and other kitchen countertop appliances, when you’re through using them. These items draw electricity as long as they’re plugged in, even if they’re turned off. Collectively, their energy use adds up.

- ▶ If any of the overhead fixtures, table lamps or outdoor lights around your house still have those old, inefficient incandescent light bulbs, change

them to LEDs, which use significantly less power.

- ▶ Explore LED fixtures. The light is built into the fixture—for all kinds of decorative and task lighting. With no bulbs to burn out, the light works as long as the fixture does. They aren’t as cheap as other options, but prices are dropping. In the long run, they’ll pay for themselves.

- ▶ Install a programmable thermostat. Use it to lower the heat by a few degrees once the family leaves the house every day and to raise it back up just before everybody gets home. You won’t feel any less comfortable at home, but you’ll notice a dip in your bill.

If everyone in Fannin Electric Cooperative’s membership embraces just one or two of these ideas, or took other energy-efficiency measures, the effect would be magnified by our entire membership.



TAPANAKORN KATVONG | ISTOCK.COM

strated, with more extreme conditions, there could be a shortfall.

But if we all do our part and make energy conservation a habit, we may be able to avoid outages.

As one saying goes, it takes 21 days to create a new habit. During that time, it may take a conscious effort to change your behavior—for instance, remembering to switch off lights as you leave a room.

And if everyone in Texas embraced even the simplest of these ideas, like turning off unused lights, it could add up to significant savings and would help keep the lights on for all of us. ■

# Become Part of the Legacy

Students: Apply now to win a trip to DC

FANNIN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE is proud to sponsor two high school students from its service area to participate in the Government-in-Action Youth Tour, a weeklong, guided trip to Washington, D.C., June 15–22.

Since their founding more than 80 years ago, Texas' electric cooperatives have been committed to empowering the communities they serve. Of course that mission includes providing electricity, but it's so much more than that. Co-ops not only power homes and businesses across rural

and suburban Texas but also invest time, energy and compassion into improving their members' quality of life.

That means investing in our young people—the leaders of tomorrow. And one of the main ways Fannin EC works to empower local youths is through Youth Tour.

Texas' electric cooperatives sent their first Youth

Tour delegation to Washington in 1965. The group of 58 deserving teens joined their peers from across Co-op Country to explore the capital, meet with their congressional representatives to discuss important issues and broaden their view of the world. Since then, more than 4,400 Texas students have gone on the unforgettable trip.

To become part of this enduring legacy and represent Fannin EC on Youth Tour, apply for the essay contest.

## Eligible entrants must:

- ▶ Be in 11th or 12th grade.
- ▶ Be a dependent of a Fannin EC member with permanent resident status in the co-op's service area.
- ▶ Submit an application and essay responding to this question: What does smart-grid technology mean for the future of electricity?

Applications must arrive at Fannin EC by January 31. They can be submitted through our website at [fanninec.coop/community/youth-programs/youth-tour](http://fanninec.coop/community/youth-programs/youth-tour).

For more information about Youth Tour, visit [texasyouthtour.com](http://texasyouthtour.com) and [youthtour.org](http://youthtour.org) or contact Becca Newnam at (903) 583-2117 or [rnewnam@fanninec.coop](mailto:rnewnam@fanninec.coop). ■



## Fannin Electric Cooperative

### CONTACT US

2201 FM 87, Bonham 75418  
P.O. Box 250, Bonham, TX 75418

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**Toll-Free** 1-800-695-9020

**Web** [fanninec.coop](http://fanninec.coop)

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Check us out at

[TexasCoopPower.com/fannin](http://TexasCoopPower.com/fannin)

## January Billing Schedule

### Cycle 1 Dates

**BILLING** January 2  
**DUE** January 21  
**DISCONNECT** February 4

### Cycle 2 Dates

**BILLING** January 8  
**DUE** January 24  
**DISCONNECT** February 11

### Cycle 3 Dates

**BILLING** January 16  
**DUE** February 3  
**DISCONNECT** February 19

### Cycle 4 Dates

**BILLING** January 22  
**DUE** February 7  
**DISCONNECT** February 25



## Beachcombing at home.

Texas Co-op Power presents an illustrated *Seashells of Texas* poster by artist Aletha St. Romain, 20x16 inches, suitable for framing.

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Leave the electricity on, especially if it powers a well.

Turn on sprinklers. Wet down the house and shrubs close to structures.

## **Follow these home fire safety tips:**

Mow grass short. Rake leaves. Clear away debris.

Keep hay bales and firewood away from structures and electric lines.

Make a family evacuation plan. Keep an inventory of home valuables in a fireproof box.

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# Roaring Success

Meet the teacher who turned an upsetting incident into a burgeoning business

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • PHOTO BY JULIA ROBINSON

**LERIN LOCKWOOD LIGHTS** up whenever she recalls the day in 2011 that ended badly. Then a high school art teacher and softball coach in Marble Falls, outside Austin, she was playing catch before a game when a softball slammed into Lockwood's glove and she felt a sharp sting on her ring finger.

"When I pulled off the glove, I realized my engagement ring was flattened," Lockwood says. "I'd lost a diamond out in left field, too. I dreaded telling my fiancé."

Determined never again to damage or lose her jewelry, Lockwood, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, invented a solution. The Lion Latch, which she named after her favorite animal, is a round, two-piece container just big enough to safely store a piece of jewelry. It uses a carabiner ring to secure the lid and attach to larger items, such as key rings, backpacks or water bottles.

Her softball story has since become one of many testimonials for Lion Latch, the business Lockwood launched in 2015. Ten years later, her startup company has grown from developing prototypes of her mini container to marketing thousands of patented Lion Latches made of unbreakable polycarbonate plastic.

As the CEO of her own company, Lockwood manages three part-time employees at the Lion Latch headquarters, located in a small commercial building in Burnet.

As for her treasured ring, she did get it repaired. She did marry her fiancé, Trent Lockwood. And she did become an entrepreneur intent on perfecting her product and learning how to run a business.

"My first ones weren't big enough," Lockwood recalls. "So I enlarged it to hold my husband's collegiate ring and wedding band. After that, people started asking me for their own Lion Latch. I'd say, 'I'm just a teacher. I can't afford to manufacture these.'"

Then she learned about Kickstarter. Through the online funding platform, she raised \$14,500 in presales, which covered production costs of her first Lion Latches. "I went to all the local gyms and stood on the back of parade floats, handing out my Kickstarter fliers," she says. "My Burnet County community helped me create the Lion Latch. And they've supported me ever since."

For the next three years, Lockwood focused on

teaching and coaching. In the meantime, she sold Lion Latches online and packaged orders in her living room. When jewelry stores called, she learned how to wholesale. To broaden her customer base, she went to trade shows.

Her first break happened at Atlanta's AmericasMart, where she connected with *Good Morning America*. That led to a Lion Latch clip on *The View* in 2019. Then Lockwood appeared live on *GMA*. More than 8,000 orders poured in. To meet demand, Lockwood hired some of her high school seniors to help with shipping.

The next year, a big dream came true when she pitched her invention to potential investors on *Shark Tank*, the business reality TV series. She didn't get a deal, but thousands of orders flooded her website.

Wanting to free up more time for her company and family, Lockwood quit teaching in May 2021. At home, she and Trent have two children, Bowie and Thorn. She continued to run Lion Latch out of her living room. Then TikTok came calling in March 2023.

"They wanted me to be one of their first shops with TikTok Shop," she says of the social media app that shares user-created videos. "They boosted my Lion Latch videos in return for helping them to build the platform. My sales went through the roof—like 1,200 orders a day!"

So she moved her business into the commercial space and bought a printer that enables customers to special-order Lion Latches imprinted with their logo or message—or animal prints, sports emblems and other themes.

Along the way, Lockwood has wanted to pull her hair out on occasion. For example, lots of trial and error went into finding U.S.-based manufacturers. Copycat ring holders have also been a headache. Patents, she discovered, are difficult to protect.

She's learned a lot. Her top advice to entrepreneurs: Grow slowly.

"Don't be in too big of a hurry to grow your business," she says. "When you rush decisions, mistakes can be made, and you'll lose both time and money."

Lockwood says she loves inspiring people. "If you have an idea, you can do it!" she says, flashing one of her bright smiles. "It's just going to take a lot of grit. And patience." ■



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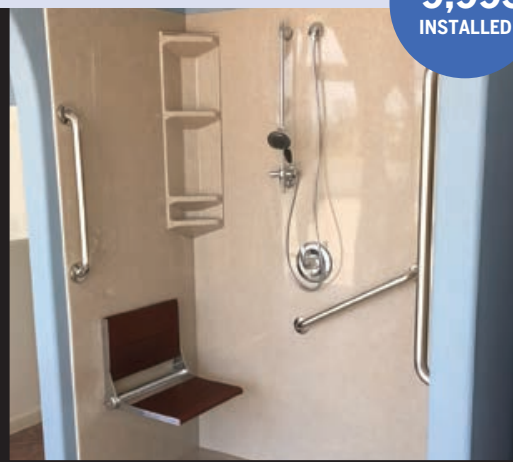
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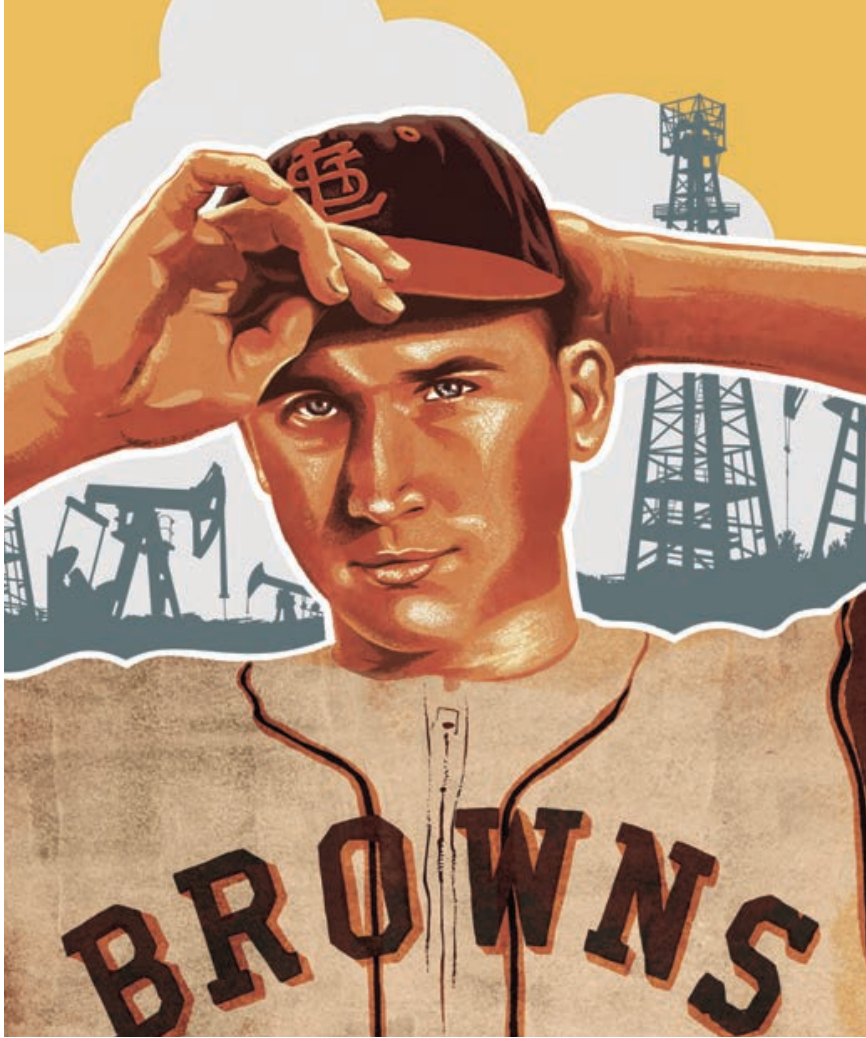
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# Striking It Big

War vet Frank Saucier left behind a big-league career to chase oil

BY ANNE R. KEENE • ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC KITTELBERGER

**IMAGINE GIVING UP** a promising baseball career to become a landman and wildcatter in the oil business. That's what Francis "Frank" Saucier did when he saw more potential in oil than baseball.

At 98, the Amarilloan and former outfielder for the St. Louis Browns (now the Baltimore Orioles) has seen almost a century of booms and busts and war and peace.

Saucier was born in 1926 on a Missouri farm, educated in a one-room schoolhouse and carried water to wheat field workers for 25 cents a day at age 6. By 10, the youngest of six children founded a fur-trapping enterprise with a Remington rifle, earning money for used books.

As a teen, Saucier heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor as he and his cousin

walked home from a movie. "A Model T pulled up with folks who shared the news. I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was," he says with a soft-spoken West Texas drawl in a recent interview at his home, where he displays baseballs signed by Hall of Famers Satchel Paige and Rogers Hornsby. "My family did not own a radio, so I raced home to tell them about the bombing."

The day after his 17th birthday, Saucier enlisted in the Navy, where he enrolled in the V-12 officer training program at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. As an apprentice seaman, Saucier says, "My rank was so low I could crawl under a rattlesnake's belly under a wagon wheel with a stovepipe hat on."

Saucier served on an amphibious

warfare commando team—a forerunner to the Navy SEALs. "President Truman dropped the first atomic bomb when we were about 1,000 miles from Japan," he says. "Though there was no alcohol on board the ship, we had a big party and thought, 'By golly, we made it.'"

Strong farm-boy wrists from swinging an axe and milking cows had helped make Saucier a star hitter in college. After the war, he signed a minor-league contract, won three batting titles and was named player of the year in 1950 by *The Sporting News*.

Still, fame never stopped Saucier from taking offseason roustabout jobs in the oil fields, where he invested his baseball earnings to drill for crude, which was then selling for about \$3 a barrel.

He signed with the Browns in 1951, realizing a childhood dream conjured on the wooden grandstand at Sportsman's Park in St. Louis. He played with or against Ted Williams, Yogi Berra, Minnie Miñoso and Paige along with Texans Dr. Bobby Brown and Eddie Robinson.

But Saucier is most remembered for a wacky public relations stunt engineered by Browns owner Bill Veeck, who brought in 3-foot-7-inch Eddie Gaedel to pinch-hit for Saucier during a game.

In 1952, Saucier was at spring training when he was called back to active duty during the Korean War. He'd already been dealing with chronic problems with his throwing arm, and after his discharge in 1954, he took a job as a district landman for Humble Oil Co. in Tyler.

Saucier never attended another major-league game. He worked in the oil and finance business until he was 85.

Regrets? No way.

"Baseball opened a lot of doors for me," he says. "I just happened to be in the right place at the right time." ■

# Hearty Soups

Enticing ingredients and easy options have you set for the coldest of days

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Pozole verde is one of my favorite soups to make when feeding a crowd. Pozole is a traditional Mexican soup that can be made with chicken or pork. (*Verde* means green.) It's the absolute perfect bowl to enjoy all winter! It comes together quickly and is even tastier the next day for lunch.

## Pozole Verde

### SOUP

- 1 pound tomatillos, husks removed, rinsed**
- 1 large onion, halved**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, halved, seeds removed for less spice**
- 2 cloves garlic**
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano**
- 10 cups water, divided use**
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, or more to taste**
- 2 teaspoons ground black pepper, or more to taste**
- 1 bunch fresh cilantro, coarsely chopped**
- 4 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts**
- 2 cans white hominy (15 ounces each), drained and rinsed**
- Lime wedges, for serving**
- Salsa, for serving**

### FRIED TORTILLA STRIPS

- 6 corn tortillas**
- ¼ cup vegetable oil**
- 1 teaspoon salt**

- 1. SOUP** Add tomatillos, onion, jalapeño, garlic, oregano, 4 cups water, salt and pepper to a large pot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer 15 minutes.
- 2.** Using a large slotted spoon, remove tomatillos, onion, jalapeño and garlic from the broth and add to a blender with 1 cup of the cooking water and cilantro. Start blender on low, then work up to high until ingredients are smooth. Taste and add salt as needed.
- 3.** Add blended sauce, chicken and the remaining 6 cups water to a large pot. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer 30–45 minutes or until chicken is fork-tender. Remove from pot and shred.
- 4.** Add shredded chicken and hominy to the pot. Simmer 15 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning.
- 5. FRIED TORTILLA STRIPS** Slice tortillas into ½-inch strips. Heat oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add tortilla strips in batches, stirring often, and fry until crispy and lightly browned. Remove from oil, place on a paper towel-lined plate and sprinkle with salt.
- 6.** Serve soup hot with tortilla strips, lime wedges and salsa.

**SERVES 6**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifelifebake.com](https://www.sweetlifelifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Creamy Cauliflower Hominy Soup.





## Nonna's Quick Pasta Soup

MARIA MEARS  
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC

This is an easy dinner option that can be ready in under 30 minutes. It features orzo, a tiny, rice-shaped pasta that absorbs the flavors of the broth beautifully. It's a versatile dish that can be customized by adding your favorite vegetables, herbs and protein, like chicken or beans.

- 5 tablespoons (5/8 stick) butter**
- 5 cloves garlic, minced**
- 4 cups chicken broth**
- 1 1/4 cups orzo**
- 1/2 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese, divided use**
- 2 teaspoons salt, or more to taste**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper, or more to taste**
- Fresh parsley, minced (optional)**

1. Melt butter in a 2-quart saucepan over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté 1 minute, stirring often to avoid browning.
2. Pour in chicken broth and orzo and stir to combine. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium and simmer. Cook orzo according to package directions, stirring occasionally, until al dente.
3. Remove from heat and stir in half the Parmesan cheese. Add salt and pepper.
4. Ladle into bowls and top with remaining Parmesan cheese and parsley.

SERVES 4



\$500 WINNER

## Shrimp Chowder

AMY BARILE  
MIDSOUTH EC

Barile's chowder is a comforting and flavorful dish that combines the sweetness of corn with the rich, savory taste of shrimp. It's an easy-to-make, satisfying meal that feels indulgent yet light, making it an ideal choice for weeknight dinners or cozy gatherings.

- 6 slices fully cooked bacon, diced, reserving 1 tablespoon fat**
- 1 tablespoon (1/2 stick) butter**
- 3 stalks celery, diced**
- 1 small yellow onion, diced**
- 4 cloves garlic, minced**
- 1 teaspoon salt, or more to taste**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper, or more to taste**
- 2 tablespoons flour**
- 2 1/2 cups milk**

- 1 can whole kernel corn (15 ounces)**
- 1 can cream-style corn (14.75 ounces)**
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- 1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined**
- 1/3 cup half-and-half**
- Green onions, minced, for serving**

1. Add bacon fat, butter, celery and onion to a Dutch oven or large, deep saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until tender, about 4 minutes. Add garlic, salt and pepper and cook an additional 30 seconds.
2. Sprinkle flour over the vegetable mixture. Stir to coat and allow to cook about a minute more. Slowly add milk to the mixture, stirring to eliminate any lumps.
3. Add both cans of corn and cayenne. Let cook until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes.
4. Add shrimp and cook about 3 minutes. Stir in half-and-half.
5. Remove from heat, taste and add salt and pepper if desired.
6. Serve warm, topped with bacon and green onions.

SERVES 6

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**SUMMER PASTAS** DUE JANUARY 10

It's time to put your garden's fresh vegetables and herbs to good use. Send us your best summer pasta recipe, and our favorite will win \$500. Enter by January 10.

**UPCOMING: MAKE IT SPICY** DUE FEBRUARY 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

## Chicken and White Bean Soup

JENNY HARTSFIELD  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

Hartsfield's soup is another great recipe for a busy week, delivering the rich, slow-cooked flavors of an all-day soup in a fraction of the time. White beans pair with green chiles to complement perfectly poached chicken. Serve with a crusty bread or tortilla chips—so scrumptious.



- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 7 cups water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon (1/8 stick) butter
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 1/2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

- 4 cans white beans (15 ounces each), undrained
- 2 cans mild chopped green chiles (4 ounces each)
- 8 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese
- Sour cream, for serving
- Tortilla chips, for serving

1. Add chicken, water, salt and bay leaf to a Dutch oven or large saucepan and cook over medium heat. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and cover. Simmer until chicken is fork-tender, 15–20 minutes.
2. Remove chicken and shred, reserving broth.
3. In another Dutch oven or large saucepan, add olive oil, butter and onions and cook over medium heat 15 minutes, stirring often.
4. Stir in garlic, cumin, oregano and cayenne and cook an additional 2 minutes. Add white beans, green chiles, shredded chicken and reserved broth. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes.
5. When ready to serve, stir in cheese. Serve hot with sour cream and tortilla chips.

SERVES 10

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Nuts About Pecans

After Missourians built the world's biggest, Seguin rallied to reclaim the crown

BY CHET GARNER

**HERE IN TEXAS**, we like to have the biggest of everything, whether it's boots, burgers or bulls. So I wasn't surprised to learn that we even claim the original world's biggest pecan, proudly displayed on the lawn of the Guadalupe County Courthouse in Seguin, about 35 miles east of San Antonio. I decided it was a story (and a nut) I needed to crack for myself.

Seguin has a population of about 35,000 and boasts a lively downtown shaded by towering pecan trees. It's appropriate considering pecans are one of the town's most valuable resources and grow plentifully along the Guadalupe River.

So after filling my belly at Burnt Bean Co. with a platter of Tex-Mex barbecue, it was time to fill my head with nutty facts.

I crossed the street and found the original giant pecan in all its glory in front of the courthouse. While not technically a real pecan, this concrete rendition was placed here in 1962 and measures more than 5 feet long and 2½ feet wide. It was impressive for sure but not as dramatic as the battle it spawned.

Twenty years later, in 1982, farmers in Brunswick, Missouri, claimed the title with a 12-foot pecan that weighed over 12,000 pounds. In 2002, Seguin native John Pape set out to make a bigger one but didn't know about the one in Missouri's pecan capital, and so his 11-foot pecan on wheels never wore the crown. But in 2010, the city of Seguin banded together and crafted a 16-foot pecan that brought the title securely back where it belongs.

The current king of pecans is polished up and ready for photos just outside the Pecan Museum of Texas in Seguin. Everything is bigger in Texas, even if it takes a few years. ■

ABOVE A rather large nut. Oh, and that's Chet perched upon it.

**TCP** Watch the video on our website and see all his 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.

## JANUARY

10

**La Grange Dale Watson**, (979) 968-9944, [thebugleboy.org](http://thebugleboy.org)

**Elgin [10–11] Bastrop County Junior Livestock Show**, [bastrop.agrilife.org/bcjl](http://bastrop.agrilife.org/bcjl)

11

**Corsicana Mimosas at the Market**, (903) 654-4852, [facebook.com/corsicanamainstreet](http://facebook.com/corsicanamainstreet)

**Monahans Resolution Run**, (432) 943-2187, [monahans.org](http://monahans.org)

17

**Amarillo [17–18] Beautiful Blue Danube**, (806) 376-8782, [amarillosymphony.org](http://amarillosymphony.org)

**Galveston [17–18] Yaga's Chili Quest & Beer Fest**, (409) 770-0999, [yagaschiliquest.com](http://yagaschiliquest.com)

18

**Copperas Cove Polar Bear Plunge 5K**, (254) 542-2719, [copperascovetx.gov](http://copperascovetx.gov)

**Fredericksburg Book Festival**, (830) 997-6513, [fredericksburgbookfestival.org](http://fredericksburgbookfestival.org)

**Garland MLK Parade & March**, (972) 381-5044, [garlandtxnaacp.org](http://garlandtxnaacp.org)

**Granbury Goosebump Jump**, (817) 573-5548, [visitgranbury.com](http://visitgranbury.com)

**Johnson City Snow Day 2025: Frosty Fun Fest**, (844) 263-6405, [sciencemill.org](http://sciencemill.org)

**Fredericksburg [18–19] Hill Country Gem & Mineral Show**, (325) 248-1067, [visitfredericksburgtx.com](http://visitfredericksburgtx.com)

**Kerrville [18–19, 25–26, Feb. 1–2] Renaissance Festival**, (214) 632-5766, [kerrvillerenfest.com](http://kerrvillerenfest.com)

20

**Fort Worth** **The Music of Sam Cooke**, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

**Port Arthur** **MLK Brunch**, (409) 543-3727, visitportarthurtx.com

21

**Tyler** **Ain't Too Proud: The Life and Times of the Temptations**, (903) 566-7424, cowancenter.org

23

**Abilene** **[23-25] Texas Shuffle Showdown**, (325) 695-4713, skatinplaceabilene.com

24

**Crockett** **Shenandoah**, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

**Tyler** **[24-26] Gem and Mineral Show**, etgms.org

25

**Brenham** **Simon Theatre 100th Birthday Celebration**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

**Burnet** **Chuck Wagon Chow Down**, hlsl.org

31

**Bastrop** **[31-Feb. 1] Mardi Gras**, (512) 332-8984, bastroptxmardigras.com

## FEBRUARY

1

**Horseshoe Bay** **Boots and BBQ**, (325) 388-3440, highlandlakescasa.com

6

**Kerrville** **ARTrageous**, (830) 896-9393, caillouxperformingarts.com

### TCP Submit Your Event

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

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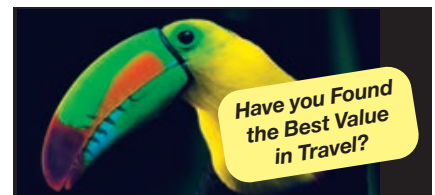
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Mexico Colonial Cities	8	1195
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Mexico Copper Canyon Train	8	1695

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# Blade Stunner

*Beautifully made, magnificent to look at, this knife is a work of art at only \$99*

It's not often you happen upon a bladesmith who has gem cutting skills. But finding needles in haystacks is what we do best, so when we saw this master craftsman's handiwork, we made certain to procure some of these Southwestern masterpieces to complete our collection.

The stainless steel blade, bolster and pommel are exquisitely etched and would have looked great with a less ambitious handle. But the results of overachieving are stunning here. The turquoise-blue colored handle is ablaze with assorted stones like jasper, marble, sunstone, and coral that have been hand cut and inlaid in a Southwestern motif.

**But we don't stop there.** While supplies last, we'll include a pair of \$99, 8x21 power compact binoculars and a genuine leather sheath FREE when you purchase the Sedona Knife.

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## Knife Specifications

- 5" etched stainless steel blade; 9-1/2" overall length
- Turquoise-colored handle with accent stones including coral, marble, sandstone, tiger's eye, jasper and sunstone

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# Parks

Set down your walking stick and rest a moment. Take in the natural majesty of the park around you. Bird watching, hiking, camping and more—there’s something out here for every Texan with an itch to explore.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

1 THERESA MCKEE  
FANNIN EC

A golden sunset with a kayaker paddling across Lake Ray Roberts.

2 PEGGY BRYANT  
PEDERNALES EC

Davis Mountains State Park.

3 CHARLES BAXTER  
COSERV

A great blue heron in Caddo Lake State Park.

4 MIKE PRESTIGIACOMO  
BARTLETT EC

“Where is the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang?”



2



3



4

## Upcoming Contests

- DUE JAN 10 **Patterns**
- DUE FEB 10 **Family Vacation**
- DUE MAR 10 **Catch of the Day**



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

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



# The future of hearing aids has arrived

**NEW! HORIZON IX HEARING AIDS**

**Alarming fact: More than 48 million Americans hear so poorly that their quality of life significantly suffers as a result.**

The problem: Most wait too long to act, hoping their hearing will improve on its own. Sadly, it never does. But now, a game-changing device is making waves across the industry, and experts say it's the biggest breakthrough they've seen in over a decade.

## It's the new Horizon IX hearing aid.

Horizon IX is currently the best-selling device at renowned U.S. company, hear.com, developed by top audio engineers from Signia. Their goal was to combine the best possible speech clarity with a comfortable, invisible design using cutting-edge German technology.

"It's a hearing aid people actually want to wear," says hear.com co-founder Dr. Marco Vietor. "It offers amazing speech clarity and smartphone connectivity in a virtually invisible design — and all that for a reasonable price!"



## What makes them so special?

It's one of the world's first hearing aids with dual processing. This is special because it's the first time engineers have been able to pack not one, but two state-of-the-art computer chips into a device this small. And with double the power comes double the clarity.

## What do Horizon IX hearing aids have to offer?

- **Amazing Speech Clarity™**  
Effortlessly understand every word, thanks to dual-processing
- **Bluetooth connectivity**  
Stream music and phone calls directly to your hearing aids
- **Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries**  
28+ hours of battery life and a portable case for on-the-go charging
- **Easy, comfortable fit**  
All-day wearing comfort, easy to combine with glasses
- **Free smartphone app**  
Adjust settings for every listening situation easily via smartphone

This means that Horizon IX hearing aids offer all of the usual benefits of modern hearing aids with the added bonus of something completely new: they can process speech and background noise independently, then combine them for unparalleled, crystal clear sound.

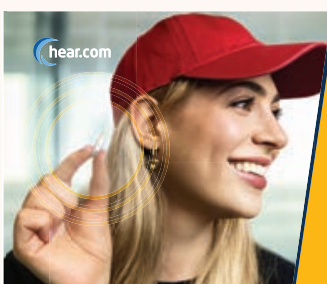
## Where can I get Horizon IX?

As of December 2024, hear.com has partnered with over 1,200 specialists nationwide, ensuring Horizon IX devices are available across the U.S.

Now, you can join 425,000 Americans who are already enjoying effortless hearing with Horizon IX. Simply text "HEAR" to (786) 618-2573 or visit [hear.com/tx](https://hear.com/tx) to **check if you qualify for a 45-day no-risk trial:**

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