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AUGUST 2026



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The largest one-day powwow in Texas offers a platform to revel in heritage and tradition.

By Mark Wangrin
Photos by Tiffany Hofeldt

Getting Around Texas

Meet the 'grandfluencer' who's inspiring folks to get out and see all they can.

By Claire Stevens
Photos by Diann Bayes

ON THE COVER

Jazlyn Espinoza, 7, of the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, based in Livingston.

Photo by Tiffany Hofeldt

ABOVE

Diann Bayes, in the Panhandle town of Farwell, is a fifth-generation Texan eager to show off her state.

Photo courtesy Morgan Taylor

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Great Strides

JAPAN IS TURNING FOOTSTEPS into clean electricity using piezoelectric technology.

The technology is embedded in floor tiles in high-traffic areas—such as a Tokyo railway station with over 3.8 million passengers daily—where each footstep depresses the material slightly, generating a small electrical current. The electricity is used to power LED displays and ticketing systems.

“The shadows sway and seem to say, ‘Tonight we pray for water—cool water.’”

—DALE EVANS AND ROY ROGERS

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The headline for my life, in five words, is ...

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

Here are some responses to our May prompt: **The greatest innovation in my lifetime is ...**

The internet. I can communicate with *Texas Co-op Power* with one simple click.

LORETTA BEDFORD
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC
SAN AUGUSTINE

The cellphone. The worst is also the cellphone.

DAVID WALICEK
GVEC
YOAKUM

Central heat and air.

JANE PATTERSON
BOWIE-CASS EC
TEXARKANA

Indoor toilets.

VICTORIA VAWTER
WOOD COUNTY EC
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The decoding of the human genome.

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HOWE

Visit our website to see more responses.



TCP Contests and More

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Smoothies

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Christmas Fails

RECOMMENDED READING

Want to celebrate Mead Day, which is the first Saturday in August? We took readers to Rohan Meadery in August 2016. Find the story on our website, where we have an archive of issues going back to 2004.



ENTER ONLINE

JUNE 2026 Giant Footsteps

“Thanks for a great article about a great lady, Opal Lee. Juneteenth freed all of us. We celebrated 250 years July 4, and she has lived through nearly 40% of American history.”

LAWRENCE RAGAN
PEDERNALES EC
DRIPPING SPRINGS



ROBERT SEALE

A True Gem

Your June issue was the best ever. Opal Lee is well named—she is a true gem [*Giant Footsteps*]. What a difference one person can make.

I also loved the article by John Millard on the Julian Onderdonk painting [*J.O. Was Here*]. What a coincidence that the author happened to see a photo of the painting the same day he had walked in that exact spot.

Diane Lyerly
Pedernales EC
Austin

I am a 79-year-old white woman. I grew up in the Jim Crow era and have memories of how Black folks were treated.

We must never forget Opal Lee.

Jean Bryant
Deep East Texas EC
San Augustine

What an amazing and inspiring life Ms. Lee has lived. Helps us realize you



CHRIS WORMELL

can never do enough to make our world a better place.

Anita Patel
South Plains EC
Lubbock

Road Well Traveled

The route described in *Go the Other Way* [June 2026] is not just scenic. Travelers on this route are on a portion of the La Bahía Road, which connected Spanish missions in Goliad and East Texas.

The route was also driven by me many times in an oil-field summer job back in the early '80s.

James Barrow
Karnes EC
Hindes

Less Mess, Please

My partner and I took road trips last year across 15 states. It was quickly apparent to us how tidy the highways and roads were elsewhere [*A Tidy Revolution*, March 2026].

Texas should be making a far stronger effort to endorse our Don't Mess With Texas campaign and walk our talk.

Shelley Meyer
Pedernales EC
Canyon Lake

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.

 Texas Co-op Power

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The largest one-day
powwow in Texas offers
a platform to revel
in heritage and tradition



BY MARK WANGRIN
PHOTOS BY TIFFANY HOFELDT

Sharing *the* Trail

Crowded around solitary drums in the four corners of the sacred dance floor are men who are about to play a song they've never heard before.

Standing with the requisite stillness of stalking a deer, a dozen dancers await the first beat. They are in full regalia, some in earth tones and dabbed with war paint, some in neon trim or modern sports team logos, their feet clad in meticulously stitched and beaded moccasins.

They all have a story to tell. They don't yet know how they will tell it. They will cede to the beat *how* they tell it and where their spirit guides them.



Around them are three judges, armed with small clipboards and discerning eyes. They can't say what exactly they want from the dancers, just that they will know it when they see it.

Up on the stage overlooking the spectacle, master of ceremonies Marty Thurman succinctly describes what is about to unfold: "Organized chaos," he says with a smile.

This is an outsider's introduction to powwow competitions, where Native American performers who have "followed the trail"—remained true to their bloodlines—let centuries of tradition, very little of which has been written down, inspire their sense of belonging.

One Saturday every November—for the last 32 years—the Travis County Expo Center hosts the Austin Powwow, a festival of Native American crafts, culture, food and community. There's handcrafted jewelry and hula dancing, a nod to the event's focus on dance and multicultural appeal. And in the expansive food trailer court, don't skip the Navajo tacos, a culinary delight on Native American fry bread.

The main event is the powwow itself. Derived from the Algonquian *pau wau*, a word for a medicine man or shaman, modern powwows have evolved as an expression of spiritual identity as tribes were continuously driven from their ancestral lands and pressured by cultural assimilation.



OPPOSITE The Fort Peck Sioux drum group from Montana at the Austin Powwow, a festival of Native American crafts, culture, food and community at the Travis County Expo Center.

TOP Jazlyn Espinoza, 7, is the 2025–26 junior tribal princess for the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas. She is flanked by two tribal dancers.

ABOVE Adrian Redbird performs his dance in the arena. He was one of more than 100 competitors at the powwow.



“It’s the largest one-day powwow in Texas,” says Nan Blassingame, arena coordinator and a member of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes who moved to Austin in 2003. “Everyone wants to see all the dancers come in at once at noon. Some will go out and go shopping in the market, get in the Indian taco line. Some stay inside and watch the powwow. So, it’s just so much to see. It’s really like three days of powwow rolled into one day.”

Over the course of 12 hours, beginning with the gourd dance, which honors elders, at 10:30 a.m., the floor is in almost constant motion, with dancers of all ages, from tiny tots to juniors to adults to golden age divisions. Twirling to the beat and native lyrics sung by a group of eight to 12 drummers, they compete for prestige and prize money, wearing the markings of their tribes—be it Alabama-Coushatta or Dallas Cowboys.

Head judge Sophia Thurman, Marty’s wife, selects the judges, based on knowledge, dedication, lack of conflicted interest—and the trust that they know it when they see it.

“Something about the dance catches your eye,” she explains. “Something about it makes you think it’s the best dance.”

Whether it’s a strict cultural interpretation or an iconic hodgepodge, the dancers consider their regalia a sacred representation of themselves. It’s not a costume.

“A costume is what you pretend to be,” says Marty Thurman, of Sac and Fox Nation heritage. “This is who we are.”

Steven Toya Jr., from Burleson by way of Zia Pueblo, New Mexico, has danced and sung in almost every state wearing the “Mother Earth colors,” accented by the four sacred Pecos colors: red, white, yellow and black.

Bare-chested except for a bone breastplate and wearing pigtails, a silver double-cross and buckskin leggings, the industrial tire salesman strives to resemble his great-great-grandfather—the last president of the Pecos Tribe.

“We live in a society where we’re not just Native, but we also live in the white Western world. So it’s two worlds coming together—duality,” Toya says. “We practice our traditional custom and culture. And then there’s some of us that still go to church on Sundays, still practice religion, whatever you know your calling is. It’s always still having that tie back to our traditional culture.

“For us as Native Americans, we always have a protocol, you know, a rite of passage.” In other words, he says, to dance a certain way or style, one has to experience initiation into those respective societies.

Sometimes that initiation goes unfulfilled.

Ralph Pacheco grew up thinking he was Hispanic. Or white. Or South Texas missions Indian (the product of Spanish missionaries’ attempts to assimilate Native Americans centuries ago). Or whatever society said he was at the time.

“I wasn’t Mexican, and I wasn’t white. So at that point, I walked away thinking I was nothing—nothing. I don’t have an identity,” says Pacheco, who sold jewelry at the powwow. “Then later, my elders came and said, ‘We’re the Indians that come from the mission.’ And so it was like a dirty secret. We just don’t talk about it.”

Inspired, Pacheco did more than talk about it. He traced his lineage back to the 1700s, through connections with the Alamo and the Texas Revolution. Now he serves as de facto historian for the Native American Cultural Center in Austin.

Sometimes that initiation comes early. And sometimes it must wait.

Jazlyn Espinoza, 7, is the 2025–26 junior tribal princess for the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, based in Livingston.

"I enjoy the dancing and being a princess for my tribe," she says.

Her parents travel with her and maintain her Instagram account. Mom Kristina Abbey was raised on tribal land.

"I was surrounded by my Native American heritage but never took advantage of the teachings until now," Kristina says. "I am learning alongside my daughter."

Sometimes the initiation is hidden in plain sight.

Daniel "Dio" Mireles' parents were Hispanic, so he grew up in East Austin believing he was Hispanic.

When he was 12, some cousins mentioned he was adopted. He dismissed it at the time as adolescent teasing but heard the same message about six years ago from another relative.

Neither his father, who had died, nor his mother, then in her 90s, had ever said a word about it. Intrigued and remembering how his birth certificate has his father's signature in place of the obstetrician's, he had his DNA tested. The results confirmed what his relatives said but also gave him an answer he wasn't seeking—he was overwhelmingly Native American.

"I kind of suspected I might be because I was always

enjoying going to these powwow festivities," Mireles says.

He pieced together, from records and chats with his family, that he was born in Austin and adopted from a Catholic orphanage in San Antonio and that he might be from the Kickapoo tribe.

Sharon, his wife who is of British descent, says, "He spent his whole life thinking he knew who he was and then realizing he didn't and liking who he might be.

"It's a puzzle with a lot of missing pieces."

Among them are specifics. DNA can legally set paternity or condemn a murderer, but it cannot confirm what Mireles knows unequivocally. For that reason, he is legally barred from wearing an eagle feather in his headdress. He has Native American blood—73% of it—but he can't be recognized under the auspices of the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, which says only Native Americans who can document their bloodline can legally possess plumage from the revered avians.

His birth certificate is devoid of information about his birth parents.

So he had an artist make a replica of an eagle feather from a turkey feather.

That he dances with a replica in a dance that reveres tradition is not lost on him. Yet it's that escape from individuality to community—from conformity to consciousness—that identifies the only prey he's pursuing on the trail of his true identity.

"You feel the energy, the sound of the healing, the singing," Mireles says. "It just releases what you know, makes you feel good inside of your heart, your soul, your mind—brings you all together."

What's at the end of the trail is for you to decide. ■

Get Moving

The 2026 Austin Powwow is November 21. Get tickets at austinpowwow.net.



OPPOSITE, FROM LEFT Fancy bustle dancers perform. Steven Toya Jr. of Burleson wears the "Mother Earth colors," accented by the four sacred Pecos colors: red, white, yellow and black.

LEFT Daniel "Dio" Mireles grew up in Austin believing he was Hispanic, but he later learned he's about three-quarters Native American, a culture he loves celebrating because it "makes you feel good inside of your heart, your soul, your mind."



1 A vintage neon Mobil Oil flying horse sign in the window of the Flying A Classic Car Club Museum in Albany.

2 Cadillac Ranch outside Amarillo.

3 The iconic Texas Star Ferris wheel at the State Fair of Texas.

4 The *Owl Family* mural in downtown Brenham, painted by Jeff Soto in 2017.

5 A 3D mural at the Pop Art Museum in San Angelo.

6 The Official International World Headquarters of How Big Is Texas in Bullard.

7 Diann Bayes at Sea Rim State Park south of Port Arthur. In 2020, she began her quest to see and share as much of Texas as she could.

8 The American Windmill Museum in Lubbock.





BY CLAIRE STEVENS • PHOTOS BY DIANN BAYES

GETTING AROUND TEXAS

Meet the 'grandfluencer' who's inspiring
folks to get out and see all they can



HOW BIG IS TEXAS?

Diann Bayes wanted to know. Sure, she could've Googled it and gotten an answer, but she had a better idea.

She drove the entire perimeter of the state, along with Debra Bustos and Morgan Taylor, two colleagues in the travel industry.

"I called them. I'd known them not long at all. And I said, 'Would you like to go with me?' " Bayes says. "Immediately, 'Yes, we want to go.' "

In June 2020, once pandemic travel restrictions were lifted, the three women packed into a rental car loaded with luggage. Their route, which started in the North Texas town of Gainesville, would take them 3,331 miles around the state. (For reference, the drive from New York City to Los Angeles is about 2,800 miles.) They kept to major roads while sticking as close as possible to the state's borders, which was particularly difficult in wide-open West Texas.

It wasn't a race. Bayes, a road trip enthusiast who insisted she do all the driving, made it a point to stop in as many towns and roadside attractions as possible over their nine-day expedition.

They visited Paris' cowboy hat-topped Eiffel Tower and the Kolache Shop in Brazoria, watched a sunrise from South Padre Island, grabbed a steak dinner at Terlingua's Starlight Theatre, saw the University of Texas Permian Basin's Stonehenge replica in Odessa, and checked out the world's littlest skyscraper in Wichita Falls.

"Those little gems are everywhere in this state," Bayes says.

As they journeyed, Bayes documented the trip on her newly created blog, How Big Is Texas, listing every stop along the way and all the parks and museums she would've stopped at if only there'd been more time. It was the start of a new calling—as a travel blogger. Her whole goal, she says, is to help others experience the kind of joy she gets from collecting treasures, memories and stories and head out on their own quests.

"There's cool stories just everywhere," Bayes says. "That is the appeal to me. I love being able to find those stories."

After her trip, Bayes heard from a man who was going to follow her route, though he planned to take a full 30 days to complete the loop. As he traveled, he called periodically to update her on his progress.

"He told me that he had lost his wife years earlier and he just kind of stopped traveling, stopped doing things," Bayes says. "He said because he saw what we did, it encouraged him to get out."

That was exactly what Bayes hoped her blog would accomplish—that it would inspire others to get out and see more of the world.

"People who don't go make me sad," she says. "I mean, there are a lot of people who never leave past their county or leave past, you know, two or three counties away."

Bayes, who spent more than 30 years working in the tourism industry at restaurants, hotels and visitors bureaus, just wants people to get out and explore. It doesn't have to be fancy. Most of her blog is about road trips she takes alone or with friends, often just over a weekend.



In 2021, she teamed up with Darla Dear, her high school best friend and college roommate, for a tour of Texas' "most mispronounced towns and cities." The pair traveled to Colmesneil (COLE-muh-neel), Humble (the "H" is silent), Buda (BYOO-duh), Gruene (GREEN) and Boerne (BER-nee). At each stop, they made friends with locals who affirmed the proper pronunciation.

In 2022, Bayes and Dear spent a long weekend visiting every Buc-ee's in Texas—34 at the time. The friends ate only food purchased from the mega-gas station for the duration of the trip.

"Probably my favorite had to be when we did our Beaver Nugget and wine pairing," Bayes says. "We just were laughing in our hotel room. I mean it was just so funny to us."

JUST GET GOING

To start traveling more, Bayes says, the best thing you can do is just go. There's something for everyone in Texas.

For music lovers, she recommends checking out historic dance halls, like Gruene Hall. In Lubbock, the Buddy Holly Center offers a look into music history.

History buffs already know the Alamo but may have missed the nearby San Fernando Cathedral, the final resting place for some of the Alamo defenders. Bayes recommends Mission San José for the story of pre-statehood Texas.

Foodies have a whole host of options in Texas, including some restaurants that recently received Michelin stars, but Bayes says she's found the best barbecue in small towns at family-run joints.

In the Hill Country, Fredericksburg is a designated Dark Sky community with excellent stargazing opportunities. Big Bend National Park and the surrounding communities also offer incredible night skies with views of the Milky Way.

A state parks pass is only \$70 for a whole year of access to our 88 parks. Go for the natural beauty but also for their historic sites.

But the destination isn't always the most important part of a trip. A sunset or sunrise can be enjoyed just about anywhere, and Bayes will never pass up a chance to sit and watch one (and snag a quick picture). And when she's traveling, she doesn't hesitate to pull over if she sees something that intrigues her.





OPPOSITE Darla Dear, left, and Bayes during a long weekend in 2022 when they visited every Buc-ee's in Texas—34 at the time. A signpost at Bayes' headquarters points the way to some of Texas' most uniquely named towns.

LEFT From floor to ceiling, the headquarters' walls are covered in Texas memorabilia acquired from friends and on her travels.

Dear was happy to reunite with Bayes for the trips—and to have the ultimate Texas tour guide. “Just being in the car and getting to spending time with her, she is such a positive person,” Dear says. “I think I know everything there is to know about Texas, but then whenever I get with Diann, she shames me.”

The key to Bayes' ambitious tours of the state, Dear says, is meticulous planning. “She has a schedule, and she sticks to it. She has everything mapped out.”

In 2023, Bayes did a “global tour” of Texas, visiting the towns of Athens, Bogata, Carthage, Geneva, Klondike, Naples, New London, Palestine and Trinidad.

And last year, she completed a long-term goal of visiting all of Texas' 254 counties, though not in a single trip. She's currently working on visiting every state park and all eight of the state's minor league baseball stadiums.

All of it gets documented on the blog, and Bayes keeps her followers updated on social media and started a podcast too. In late 2025, she transitioned to working full time on the blog. Aware that she's an anomaly, starting a social media career in her 60s, she calls herself a “grandfluencer.”

“I'll own that,” she says. “The whole history of my life has led to this.”

Bayes, a fifth-generation Texan, has lived in 22 Texas towns in her life, knows the state well and is eager to show it off, especially the parts off the beaten path.

“Some people say Texans are arrogant,” she says. “I'm one of those proud Texans, and I don't think of it as arrogance. I think of it just as pride, and I hope that other people have that same pride.”

Bayes and her husband, Dan, recently moved to Bullard, near Tyler, where they are members of Cherokee County Electric Cooperative. In their new backyard, Dan constructed a she-shed to serve as a headquarters for her work.

Like Bayes, the office—she calls it the Official International World Headquarters of How Big Is Texas—is full of stories. The building is modeled after a store her great-grandfather owned in Troup. She displays a quilt from her grandmother

and a set of dominoes from her great-grandparents that are almost too worn to use anymore.

From floor to ceiling, the walls are covered in Texas memorabilia acquired from friends and on her travels. She leaves the playlist she made for the original perimeter trip on repeat as she works.

“I just have fun memories of things and places I've been, stories that I remember,” she says. “I've got art from people I know and from people I don't.”

There are still plenty more trips she wants to take. “I will look at a map and just go ‘OK where have I not been?’ ” she says. (The list is quickly shrinking but includes 10 state parks, Fiesta San Antonio and Washington's Birthday Celebration in Laredo.)

“I like to go to state parks. I like to go to historic sites. I like to see what the story was. I love town squares, especially in small towns, and I love a diner. I love something that's not fancy. I want to go in because you're going to hear people talking in there.”

A few years back, she visited the London Museum, a small museum in East Texas that tells the story of a 1937 natural gas explosion at a school in New London that killed nearly 300.

At the café across the street from the museum, she met a man who had been a first responder that day. At 101 years old, he was one of the last living rescue workers. He told Bayes about the impact of the explosion on his life and how in the aftermath of that tragedy, legislation passed to add odor to natural gas. It's the stories like his of towns like New London that Bayes says she wants to bring attention to.

“We need to figure out how to tell a story to get people to go see them and maybe go into the grocery store, buy a few groceries or go buy some stamps or something,” she says. “Because otherwise you lose those stories and you lose that town.”

“I want people to go see them, so I'm going to tell that story all day long.” ■



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THIS NOTICE OF capital credits allocations is issued in accordance with the bylaws of Fannin Electric Cooperative.

Fannin EC is pleased to announce it has allocated the 2025 calendar year net margins from the retail sale and distribution of electricity to the 2025 member-consumers as credit to such patrons’ individual capital accounts in Fannin EC. This allocation was made to all patrons purchasing electricity from Fannin EC and was made for \$165,403.

Before allocations are made to the patrons, the estimated margins are first spread among Fannin EC’s different revenue classes. Allocations for each revenue class are then made pro rata on the basis of patronage (a measurement of usage or purchases). For Fannin EC, patronage is the dollar amount billed to you for electricity sold over the total dollar amount billed for electricity sold to all patrons. This patronage is determined on the basis of each revenue class and results in a separate allocation factor for each revenue class.

To calculate your portion of the patronage capital credits allocation, multiply the factor listed below for the applicable revenue class by your 2025 dollar amount billed by Fannin EC.

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RC4	Irrigation	0.0042664164
RC5	Small Commercial	0.0050726723
RC6	Large Commercial	0.0064074464
RC8	Churches	0.0045470645
RC12	General Service	0.0036161106
RC13	Churches—Large	0.0051948597

The above allocations were made by virtue of the fact Fannin EC is a not-for-profit cooperative owned by the member-consumers who purchase electricity from it (also called patrons). As a not-for-profit cooperative, Fannin EC is:

- ▶ Democratically controlled by its members.
- ▶ Operated for the benefit of its members.
- ▶ Operated at cost with respect to electricity purchased by the patrons.

In order to operate at cost, Fannin EC is required by its bylaws to allocate its margins (revenue billed for electricity sold in excess of the actual operating costs and expenses for such electricity sold) to its patrons as credits to each patron’s individual capital account. The amount credited to your capital account is commonly referred to as “patronage capital,” “patronage capital credits” or simply “capital credits” and represents your ownership in Fannin EC.

The patronage capital credits allocated to your individual capital account for the 2025 margin are not redeemable in cash and may not be applied to your power bill.

As a cooperative, Fannin EC’s primary sources of capital for its current and future operations are patronage capital and lender financing. Common uses of patronage capital credits include, but are not limited to, the following:

- ▶ Construction of new electric distribution plant facilities (for example, power lines and substations)
- ▶ Maintenance and repair of existing electric distribution plant facilities
- ▶ Reduction of interest cost by lowering the amount of future borrowed capital and paying down existing debts
- ▶ Maintenance of a reserve to protect against storms and emergencies
- ▶ Satisfaction of loan covenants

Pursuant to the bylaws of Fannin EC, the board of directors has the responsibility and authority to determine when and to what extent patronage capital will be redeemed to the patrons (i.e., paid in cash). The decision to redeem patronage capital is based on whether or not such redemption will impair the financial condition of Fannin EC. The board of directors generally strives to redeem patronage capital credits of prior years on an annual basis and will make this annual determination by taking into consideration the above list at a later point during the year.

Since patronage capital represents a patron’s ownership in the cooperative, you are encouraged to notify Fannin EC of any changes to your mailing address. Additionally, if there are questions regarding your patronage capital account and how allocations of patronage capital are calculated, please contact the cooperative as follows:

Fannin Electric Cooperative

Attn: Karen Wood, CFO
P.O. Box 250
Bonham, TX 75418-0250
Phone: (903) 583-2117
Fax: (903) 583-7384

August Billing Schedule

Cycle 1 Dates		Cycle 3 Dates	
BILLING	August 4	BILLING	August 18
DUE	August 21	DUE	September 5
DISCONNECT	September 8	DISCONNECT	September 21
Cycle 2 Dates		Cycle 4 Dates	
BILLING	August 11	BILLING	August 25
DUE	August 28	DUE	September 12
DISCONNECT	September 14	DISCONNECT	September 28

Celebrating 35 Years of Service

AFTER MORE THAN 3½ decades of dedicated service, Fannin Electric Cooperative proudly recognizes the retirement of Joe Rhudy, who retired May 29.

Born in Bonham, Rhudy was raised in Ector, a small community he has proudly called home for nearly his entire life. The youngest of four children, with two brothers and one sister, he often joked that his parents “saved the best for last.” His father worked as a mechanic for the Katy Railroad while his mother was an Avon sales representative.



Family has always been at the center of Rhudy’s life. He and his first wife raised two children together and had one granddaughter, Ellie Jo. Following his first wife’s death in 2022, he married Becky in 2025. Through their marriage, his family grew to include three step-children and eight additional grandchildren.

Outside of work, Rhudy has enjoyed a wide variety of activities throughout his life. He spent many years playing softball and riding horses. He cherished the time spent helping his daughter, Audra, pursue her passion for softball, catching for

her during pitching lessons and traveling across the country to attend select tournaments and collegiate games. He enjoys watching his granddaughter, Ellie Jo, play basketball and softball and especially treasures their ice cream dates together.

Rhudy also enjoyed spending time with his son, Cole, through Boy Scouts, particularly the many trips they took to Camp Dierks. Today, he enjoys making memories with his family by riding side-by-sides, attending concerts, listening to music and gathering around a large bonfire whenever possible. He and Becky enjoy traveling together, visiting all nine grandchildren, exploring the countryside and appreciating the journey as much as the destination.

Rhudy began his career with Fannin EC, then known as REA, on October 29, 1990. During his first 13 years at the co-op, he worked on the brush crew, now known as the right-of-way crew, serving as supervisor for those final three years. Throughout his career, he also worked as a digger truck operator, meter reader and substation groundskeeper and was responsible for maintaining the grounds at the cooperative’s headquarters.

His commitment to safety was exemplary. Recently, he received recognition for an extraordinary achievement: 35 years without a lost-time injury. This remarkable accomplishment reflects the professionalism, dedication and safety-first mindset he demonstrated throughout his career.

As he begins retirement, Rhudy looks forward to spending more time traveling the country in his new fully enclosed air-conditioned side-by-side, taking in the scenery and exploring new places along the way. Most importantly, he plans to spend more time with all nine of his grandchildren and continue his favorite role of all: being the best Papa Joe possible.

Fannin EC sincerely thanks Joe Rhudy for his 35 years of dedicated service and wishes him and Becky many years of happiness, adventure and cherished family memories in retirement. ■

Fannin Electric Cooperative

CONTACT US

2201 FM 87, Bonham 75418
P.O. Box 250, Bonham, TX 75418
Local (903) 583-2117
Toll-Free 1-800-695-9020
Web fanninec.coop

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John Ed Shinpaugh

Chief Financial Officer
Karen Rintelmann

Chief Technology Officer
Wesley Hicks

Chief Operations Officer
Beau Williams

Director of Engineering
Tyler Hockenberry

Line Superintendent
Rodney Gammons

Board of Directors
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Seth Mahler, Secretary-Treasurer, District 4
Scott Gibbs, District 1
Mark Posey, District 2
Brad Connelly, District 5
Alfred Scott, District 7

24/7 Outage Hotline Numbers

For information and to report outages, please call us.

LOCAL
(903) 583-2117

TOLL-FREE
1-800-695-9020

ABOUT FANNIN EC

Fannin EC owns and maintains about 2,100 miles of line to provide electric service to more than 8,900 members in Collin, Fannin, Grayson, Hunt and Lamar counties.

MEMBER BENEFITS

- Variable billing
- Automated meter reading program
- Bills paid with Visa, Discover, American Express and Mastercard
- Free bank draft service
- Security lighting
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- Pay by phone at 1-844-965-1348

VISIT US ONLINE
fanninec.coop



Check us out at
TexasCoopPower.com/fannin



DON'T GO OUT ON A LIMB

Safety for you and your children is a top priority at your electric co-op.

Kids don't always know—or remember—what can be dangerous, so it's up to all of us to watch out for them.

Follow these safety rules for power lines:

Don't plant trees or install tall playground equipment under or near power lines.

Don't build tree houses in trees near electric lines.

Don't allow children to climb trees near power lines.

Teach your children to always look up to check for power lines before climbing trees or any tall objects.

Keep children away from ladders and equipment that may be near power lines.

And the No. 1 safety rule for everyone to remember: Never touch a power line or anything that's touching a power line. Look up and live!

Your electric cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.

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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Austin, TX 78701

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Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.



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includes tax,
shipping &
handling



POLES AREN'T FOR POSTING

It's tempting to post signs on utility poles—but it's dangerous for you and for your co-op's employees.

**Help us keep our lineworkers safe.
Don't use utility poles as bulletin boards.**

PHOTO: DAVE SHAFER

Foreign objects on utility poles make it more difficult and dangerous to maintain these critical components of your power delivery system.

Electric cooperative workers find all kinds of no-nos on utility poles, such as yard sale signs, basketball hoops, deer stands, satellite dishes, lights and birdhouses.

These obstructions are dangerous for employees. Unwelcome clutter on utility poles can compromise lineworkers' safety equipment, leaving them vulnerable to electrocution.

Anyone posting items on utility poles also is at risk of exposure to thousands of volts of electricity pulsing overhead. Always stay at least 10 feet away from utility lines.

Think before you post that sign!

Your electric cooperative encourages you to always practice safety.

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In Good Spirits

The Wittliff Collections celebrates 40 years with a new exhibit

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK

CORMAC MCCARTHY'S WRITING DESK and the last guitar pick used by Stevie Ray Vaughan are part of a new exhibit that celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Wittliff Collections—a research center, archive and museum on the Texas State University campus in San Marcos.

The exhibit, *The Spirit of the Wittliff in 40 Objects*, showcases 40 items—some iconic and some obscure—that embody the essence of a collection that's dedicated to preserving the cultural heritage of Texas, the Southwest and Mexico.

Originally founded in 1986 by screenwriter Bill Wittliff and his wife, Sally, the collection started as the Southwestern Writers Collection with the archive of folklorist J. Frank Dobie. A few years later, Wittliff donated his production archive of the Emmy-winning *Lonesome Dove* miniseries, which he wrote, and convinced many of the crew, including the set and costume designers, to do the same, creating a permanent exhibit.

In 1996, the Southwestern & Mexican Photography Collection was established, followed by the Texas Music Collection in 2017.

Literary curator Carrie Fountain selected the items for the new exhibit. "I saw it as an opportunity to really learn the collections myself," says Fountain, a New Mexico native and the 2019 poet laureate of Texas who joined the Wittliff last July.

Her goal was to make a well-rounded exhibit with multigenerational appeal. The exhibit entrance features one of Willie Nelson's bandannas and a Wyatt McFadden photograph of Beyoncé sporting pigtails, a headband and a T-shirt showing a photo of Nelson—also in pigtails and a headband—illustrating one generation's influence on the next.

During the curation process, Fountain gravitated toward items that "signified a larger narrative or an interesting little piece of a larger narrative." One of those objects was a historical American Girl doll named Josefina Montoya. It's accompanied by correspondence between the Pleasant Co., which manufactured the doll, and historian Marc Simmons, who oversaw a multiyear process to ensure the doll was a historically and culturally accurate depiction of a girl living in 1824 New Mexico.

First drafts of famous works and inklings of future success by writers Sandra Cisneros, McCarthy and

poet Naomi Shihab Nye are also on display. Other unique highlights include a drafted alternate ending scene of the movie *Cast Away* by William Broyles Jr. and the first letter author Rick Riordan received from an editor about *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, a series that would later achieve global fame.

"(Bill Wittliff) wanted these materials to inspire people," says Texas music curator Hector Saldaña, a former music journalist for the *San Antonio Express-News* who joined the organization in 2017. Saldaña has fond memories of his three-hour job interview with Wittliff that "flew by" thanks to Wittliff's charisma, along with Wittliff's last visit to the gallery just days before his death from a heart attack in June 2019.

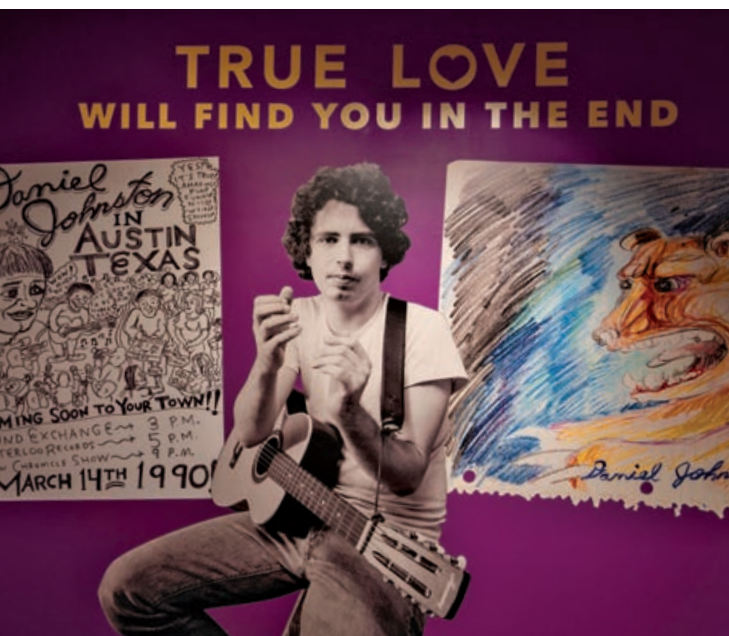
Saldaña, like Wittliff before him, loves seeing students motivated by the first drafts on display and the perseverance of following a dream. "I always try to notice what people are attracted to," says Saldaña, who crafts exhibits based on observations, including *The Selena Effect*, an exhibit about the Grammy-winning Tejano singer that runs through December 6.

When an unpublished photograph of teenage Selena dancing on stage by photographer Al Rendon was displayed in a remote gallery corner, Saldaña noticed students taking selfies and gathering around it, deep in thought. He instantly became curious about the emotions the image evoked in younger generations.

"It was right then that I thought of the title *The Selena Effect* and knew I would do some kind of exhibit about that feeling," he says. The exhibit inspired a Texas State class assignment in the fashion merchandising department about how to style Selena today.

Several Wittliff exhibits focus on recent acquisitions, including the archives of Grammy-winning singer-songwriter Shawn Colvin and Austin artist Daniel Johnston and a first look at the 2024 McCarthy acquisition that doubled the size of the collection. These, along with the permanent *Lonesome Dove* exhibit, are open to the public for free.

One of the most pivotal moments for the Wittliff Collections was finding a home at Texas State, Saldaña says. The collection is funded by the university, an endowment from the Wittliff family and donations. Located on the seventh floor of the Albert B. Alkek Library, the 15,000-square-foot space went through



two expansions, in 2009 and 2020, with plans to expand further in the next five to 10 years.

The university's May 2025 master plan included a new campus building for a dedicated gallery and programming space, while the current location will be utilized for research. A fundraising drive for the expansion is underway to raise \$20 million, which the university will match.

"The biggest challenge has been processing acquisitions," says Saldaña, noting it's very labor-intensive, and staffing would likely increase with the expansion. The museum has a staff of 15, including photography curator Carla Ellard. In March, Marise McDermott, former president and CEO of San Antonio's Witte Museum, took over as executive director.

The team's focus is programming and processing notable acquisitions, including works of artist Kerry Awn, singer-songwriter and actor Stephen Bruton, country musician and songwriter Chris Wall, and folk singer Carolyn Hester. The museum is in the process of acquiring the archives of *Yellowstone* screenwriter Taylor Sheridan.

"Everyone that works at the Wittliff realizes ... we are only

temporary stewards of this material," Saldaña says. "We're privileged to do it."

Fountain is focused on the future and keeping a pulse on topics researchers and students want to study, drawing inspiration from the collection's founding archive of Dobie, who said, "Great literature transcends its native land, but none that I know of ignores its soil."

That weighs on Fountain. "For me, the future of the Wittliff is both expanding the geographical definition of the American Southwest and making that bigger geographically, culturally (and) artistically," she says. "It's a tremendous responsibility." ■

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT *The Spirit of the Wittliff in 40 Objects* exhibit features author Cormac McCarthy's desk, a bronze bust of author Larry McMurtry by sculptor Clete Shields, and the archive of musician and artist Daniel Johnston.

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



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

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

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It's About Time

How cowboys counted the hours out on the dusty trail

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY BRYAN PETERSON

COWBOY TIME ISN'T fast or slow. It isn't tied to a clock at all. It's tied to the sun, the herd and the work.

On cattle drives of long ago, the day began before first light. At dawn, men were in the saddle, driving cattle north to Abilene or Dodge City in Kansas. They worked till sundown. No whistle blew, no shift horn called them home. The only time that mattered was daylight and whether the herd was settled for the night.

Even so, cowboys had their own kind of alarm clock. It was the cook's bell.

Legendary rancher Charles Goodnight invented the chuck wagon in the 1860s, repurposing a heavy-duty government wagon as a kitchen and pantry on wheels. And with the chuck wagon came the

sound that structured cowboy life. When the cook struck his triangle of iron, it was dinnertime. Cowboys joked that the cook had the only watch that mattered.

At night, men took turns watching the cattle. Time wasn't measured in minutes but in watches—three shifts through the night. There was the first guard, the mid-night guard and the morning guard. Dying campfire embers and the movement of stars and the moon helped tell the passing of time in the dark.

A cowboy might sing his herd to sleep, humming trail songs or gospel tunes under the stars. The cattle calmed to the music, and time passed by melody more than clock.

Even distance was measured differently.

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



Cowboys spoke of horse time. They'd say: "That's a two-horse ride from here." Time was bound up with distance, and distance with the stamina of your mount.

Some cowboys did carry watches—tough old Elgin or Waltham pocket watches, often bought when railroads made timetables important. But plenty of them would tell you: "The only watch I need is the sun."

They were more on God's time than man's time.

Writers caught on to this too. Andy Adams, a cattle driver himself, described in *The Log of a Cowboy* trailmen rising with the dawn, eating when the cook said so and changing guard by the stars.

J. Frank Dobie wrote that a cowpuncher "eats when the cook's ready, he sleeps when the guard lets him." Larry McMurtry gave us cowboys singing to their cattle through the night, timing their lives by starlight and dust.

So cowboy time was different. It was steady. It ran sunup to sundown, with a few hours stolen under the stars. It was measured by horses, by bells, by songs—by the needs of the herd, not by a clock on the wall.

And maybe that's why cowboy time still has a hold on us here in Texas. Even if we don't ride herd anymore, there's something in us that remembers. We work till the sun goes down. We eat when the food's ready. We measure time by what matters, not by what buzzes on our phones—or at least we'd like to.

In a world of atomic clocks, digital seconds and meetings scheduled down to the minute, cowboy time whispers a different wisdom: Don't count every minute—just do the work until the day is done. ■

After-School Snacks

Readers share family sweet treats that answer the final school bell

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

I'm a dipper. I love to dip fries, nuggets and tortilla chips, but I especially love to dunk fresh fruit into something creamy. My honey yogurt dip takes the joy to the next level—try it with watermelon, peaches and berries. It pairs perfectly with any fruit you have on hand.

Honey Yogurt Dip

1 cup plain yogurt
2 tablespoons honey, plus more for serving
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon vanilla extract
Sliced fruit, for serving

1. In a bowl, combine yogurt, honey, cinnamon and vanilla. Drizzle with additional honey, if desired.
2. Serve with sliced fruit.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Lemon Sheet Cake With Lemon Yogurt Glaze.





Peanut Butter, Crackers and Marshmallows

KAREN FAUBUS
SOUTH PLAINS EC

This snack originates in central Mississippi, where Faubus' grandmother and her siblings grew up enjoying it. Faubus now makes it for her own grandchildren. Sweet and satisfying, sometimes the best snacks are the simplest.

- 5–6 saltine crackers
- ¼ cup peanut butter
- 1 cup mini marshmallows

COOK'S NOTE: It's easy to burn these melty treats under the broiler, and broiler temperatures vary by model. Keep a close eye on the crackers, and don't let them stay in more than 2 minutes.

1. Preheat oven to broil.
2. Place crackers on a baking sheet. Spread peanut butter on each cracker. Top with mini marshmallows.
3. Broil 1–2 minutes or until marshmallows are lightly browned.

SERVES 1



\$500 WINNER

Grammie's Rice Krispies Squares

TINA WEBB
BLUEBONNET EC



Webb's mother-in-law made this recipe for her children and grandchildren for years. I can see how these tasty treats—popular in the Midwest and known as scotcheroos—became a family favorite. Rich with peanut butter goodness and topped with chocolate, these bars are a well-deserved delight after a day of classes.

- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 6 cups crisp rice cereal
- 1½ cups semisweet chocolate chips
- 1½ cups butterscotch morsels

1. Coat a 9-by-13-inch pan with cooking spray.
2. In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, bring corn syrup and sugar to a light boil, stirring occasionally. When the mixture starts to boil, remove from heat and stir in peanut butter until smooth. Stir in rice cereal.
3. Spoon mixture into prepared pan and use the back of a spoon to gently press mixture evenly into pan.
4. In a microwave-safe bowl, heat chocolate chips and butterscotch morsels in 15-second increments, stirring each time, until fully melted. Spread evenly over cereal mixture.
5. Allow to cool at least 1 hour at room temperature, then cut into rectangles.

MAKES 20 BARS

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

SMOOTHIES DUE AUG 10
We toast the new year with the best from your blenders. We'll print our favorite smoothie recipes from readers in the January issue. The winner gets a cool \$500.
UPCOMING: LEMONY DELIGHTS DUE SEP 10



ENTER
ONLINE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



No-Bake Oatmeal Balls

ELIZABETH COWAN
FANNIN EC

Growing up, Cowan and her siblings nicknamed these "booze balls" because of the piquant kick from the Tang powder. Don't worry, there's no actual booze, but this no-bake snack packs a punch! Coat in your choice of coconut, powdered

sugar, cocoa powder or a combo. The balls can be stored in the fridge for a week of ready-made snacks for hungry kiddos.

OATMEAL BALLS

2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened
3 cups powdered sugar, sifted
1 cup firmly packed brown sugar
½ cup cocoa powder
1 cup Tang powdered drink mix
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
1 cup chopped pecans
1 cup seedless raisins
2 cups rolled oats

COATING

1 cup flaked coconut (optional)
½ cup powdered sugar (optional)
1 tablespoon cocoa powder (optional)

- 1. OATMEAL BALLS** In a large bowl, cream butter, powdered sugar and brown sugar until light and fluffy. Add cocoa, Tang powder and vanilla. Mix well.
- 2.** Stir in pecans, raisins and oats. Cover

Snacks for an Easy A

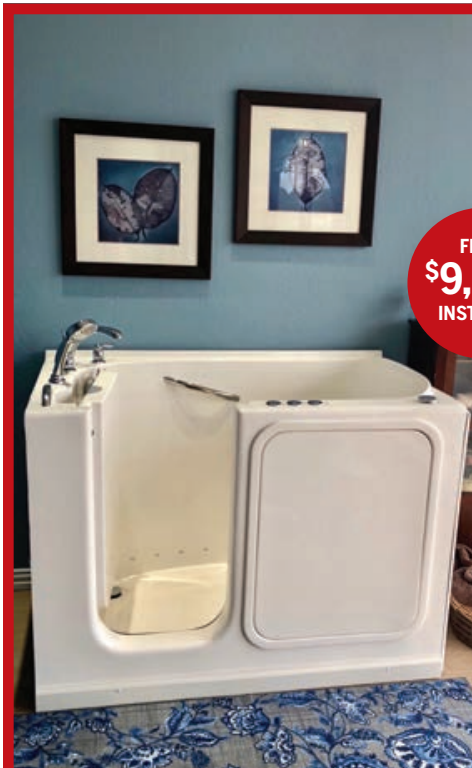
- Apple slices + string cheese
- Hummus + carrot sticks
- Mini microwave popcorn bags
- Fresh sliced melon
- Berries + yogurt
- Pepperoni + cheese
- Dried apple chips
- Trail mix
- Premade smoothies
- Cheese + crackers
- Sliced peaches + cottage cheese
- Hard-boiled eggs + sliced turkey

—Vianney Rodriguez

and chill dough at least 2 hours or overnight.

- 3.** Form mixture into 1-inch balls.
- 4. COATING** Roll each ball in coconut or powdered sugar or in a mixture of powdered sugar and cocoa. Cover and store in fridge.

MAKES 40-45



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heartfelt sentiment

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

The Palace in Paris

Statesmanship and storytelling at the Sam Bell Maxey House

BY CHET GARNER

IF YOU'VE EVER wondered what it felt like to be a big deal in 19th-century Texas, I'd suggest a stroll through the Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site in Paris. And yes, that's Paris, Texas—where the Eiffel Tower wears a cowboy hat.

Built 1866–67, the Maxey House is a pristine example of High Victorian Italianate architecture—which is a fancy way of saying it looks like it belongs in a period drama. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and restored in 1980.

Walking through the house feels less like touring a museum and more like you've interrupted a well-appointed 1870s dinner party. The wide balcony and tall windows were designed to battle the Texas heat, though I suspect they were also perfect for watching neighbors and discussing politics.

Sam Bell Maxey wasn't just any resident in Reconstruction-era Paris. He was a veteran of the Mexican-American War and a former Confederate general. Later he served as a state and then U.S. senator.

Following the Civil War, senior officers in the Confederacy were not allowed to hold political office, but Maxey received a pardon from President Andrew Johnson after a personal vouch from Maxey's U.S. Military Academy classmate and friend, Ulysses S. Grant. During his two terms, Maxey was known as "the Beaver of the Senate" for his work improving transportation and infrastructure.

What struck me most wasn't just the grandeur of the home but the humanity. The preserved letters, clothing and everyday objects tell a fuller story—of ambition, loss, recovery and resilience during one of Texas' most turbulent eras. Outside, the gardens offer a tranquil respite, a soft contrast to the political storms once likely debated inside.

The Maxey House isn't just a monument to one man's legacy; it's a reminder that even in a small Texas town, the currents of our nation flowed right through the front door. ■

ABOVE Chet was struck by the humanity evident at the Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site in Paris.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all of 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.

AUGUST

5

De Leon [5–8] Peach and Melon Festival, (254) 893-6600, pmdfestival.com

6

Dalhart [6–8] XIT Rodeo & Reunion, info@xitrodeoreunion.com, xitrodeoreunion.com

8

Corsicana Mimosas at the Market, (903) 654-4850, visitorscorsicana.com

Dublin [8–9] Chicken House Flea Market, (254) 223-1879, bit.ly/chfleaemarket

Henderson [8–9] East Texas Sacred Harp Convention, (903) 985-3084, easttexasfasola.weebly.com

10

Bastrop [10–Sept. 19] Soul Circuit: Juneteenth Rodeos in Texas, (512) 303-0904, bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

14

Levelland [14–16] Horse Sales, (575) 309-6322, levellandhorsesales.com

16

Fort Worth Summer Sizzler, bit.ly/summersizzlerdfw

San Antonio Summer Film Series: *Take It Away: The Rise and Fall of Tejano Hollywood*, (210) 299-4499, briscoemuseum.org

20

Midland [20–23] County Fair, (432) 247-1189, midlandcountyfair.com

21

Wimberley Bat Watch,
(512) 660-9111,
wimberleyparksandrec.com

22

Castroville [22-23] St. Louis Day, (830) 931-2826,
saintlouisday.com

26

Brady [26-29] Heart of Texas Honky Tonk, (325) 597-1895, hillbillyhits.com

28

Fort Worth [28-29] Chris Munch & Adam,
(512) 817-9535,
fortworth.blcomedy.com

Irving [28-30] DFW Fiber Fest, (214) 799-1347,
dfwfiberfest.org

29

Baytown Caribbean Vibes,
(281) 810-2990, acedistrict
baytown.org

McKinney [29-30] Summer ArtFest, (202) 810-2101,
millhousefoundation.org

SEPTEMBER

4

Boerne [4-6] Kendall County Fair, (830) 249-2839,
facebook.com/kendallcounty
fairassociation

Rockport [4-6] Fiesta en la Playa, (361) 314-2226,
acmtexas.com

5

Austin Bat Fest, (512) 441-9015, roadwayevents.com

Bedford Beats and Eats Fest, (817) 952-2100,
bedfordtx.gov

TCP Submit Your Event

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

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A Once-in-a-Generation Opportunity

Some coins mark time. Others make history. The 2026-W American Silver Eagle Proof

does both. For people who remember the excitement surrounding dual-dated 1976 Bicentennial coinage, the significance of 2026 needs no explanation. For those new to the scene, this represents an opportunity that won't come again in our lifetimes.

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Even before the official release date of February 26, single 2026-W Proof American Silver Eagles recorded pre-sales of just over 209,000 coins, or about 42% of its stated 500,000 mintage before the coin was even available. The remaining coins from the first allotment have since been sold. While the Mint does intend to strike the remaining authorized mintage, don't run the risk of missing out on acquiring a true legacy for you and your family that will be prized for generations to come.

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Underwater Life

From our backyards to our beaches, Texas waters are teeming with life. These readers have us hooked, so pull on your boots and wade on in. The water's fine.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 LOREN ANDREW
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

"My daughter, Addison, took this inside the aquarium at the Houston Zoo."

2 CRYSTAL VALDEZ
LYNTEGAR EC

"My daughter, Natalie Valdez, took this picture at an aquarium. She is an aspiring photographer who loves animals of all kinds."

3 KORO CURRIESAN
SAN BERNARD EC

"A shell looking like butterfly wings."

4 HARRISON NASH
BLUEBONNET EC

"This is from a memorable day on the Devil's River where the target species was smallmouth bass."



Upcoming Contests

CHRISTMAS FAIRS DUE AUG 10

BARNES DUE SEP 10

SWAMPS DUE OCT 10



**ENTER
ONLINE**

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Underwater Life photos from readers.



Wallow Awhile

Maybe pigs are onto something with their love of mud

BY CYNTHIA L. MATLOCK

ILLUSTRATION BY
GEORGE SWEETLAND

IF YOU'VE SPENT any time around pigs, you know one thing for sure: They like mud. I learned this firsthand growing up on a farm, where I often admired and despised the pigs we raised. Especially when they wallowed in the mud on hot summer days.

At feeding time, if the hogs were not already in the pen, my sister and I would have to go out into the woods and round them up, chasing them through the brush and trees. Sometimes, instead of heading to the trough, they'd detour down to the creek, flopping joyfully in the mud. Ugh!

I often wished I could hose them off first—clean them up before feeding them—as drying mud covered their hides, from their snouts to their hooves. One would open his mouth as if smiling and follow us along the fencerow with

his curly tail wagging.

How disgusting but freeing. It seemed incredibly liberating to get muddy, smile and not worry about what anyone thought.

As much as I wrinkled my nose, I came to understand why they did it. Rolling in mud cools pigs down quickly—by nearly 4 degrees, according to some sources—far more efficiently than sweating. Our white Yorkshires, with their sunburn-prone pink hides, often stayed coated in mud, which worked like a natural sunscreen.

And I couldn't help but envy their wild abandon. The closest I've come to that exhilarating, freeing feeling is a good jump in a swimming pool. Or a swerve in a car to splash through standing water. As the years roll on and adult responsibilities pile up, it can be harder to make time to unwind—for most of us.

While I've been dodging dirty things all my life, others have been diving right in—literally. Near my childhood home in Jacksonville, mud is always part of the scene. Crowds of off-roaders come roaring in on all-terrain vehicles, trucks and dirt bikes, churning up treacherous pits and sending mud flying as engines growl and vehicles launch into the air. Mud fights draw big crowds—slick with thick, sticky mud. It's all in good fun.

When life feels heavy with frustrating deadlines, unnerving family drama, surprise bills and unexpected detours, it makes me want to run through mud or a puddle.

Naturally, children can't resist the pull of a fresh puddle after a heavy rain. They stomp through the shallow water, sending droplets dancing in the air. Even more fun is plopping down, feeling the squishy mud ooze between their fingers and shaping it into a rounded mud pie.

Maybe that's why mud and water play still calls us. It's not just for pigs, or kids, but for all of us. Jump in, let's wallow awhile. ■



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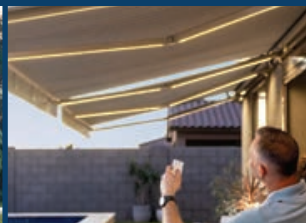
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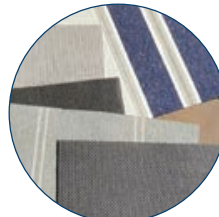
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