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JULY 2026

Down the Rabbit Hole

Jeffie Brewer's
sculptures steal glances
from their many admirers





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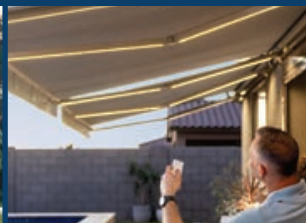
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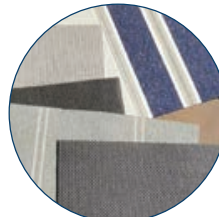
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July 2026



10

06 A Big Leap From Doodles

Colorful, whimsical animal sculptures across Texas escape from Jeffie Brewer's workshop.

Story and photos by Anna Mazurek

Crash Course

In this town—population zero—first responders from across the globe hone lifesaving skills.

By Bob McCullough

04

Currents

The latest buzz

05

TCP Talk

Readers respond

16

Co-op News

Information plus energy and safety tips from your cooperative

25

Footnotes in Texas History

Page Earners
By W.F. Strong

26

TCP Kitchen

Don't Skimp on Shrimp
By Vianney Rodriguez

30

Hit the Road

Waiting on the Wings
By Chet Garner

33

Focus on Texas

Photo Contest:
Seasoned Snaps

34

Observations

Heart of Stone
By Jobeth Pilcher

ON THE COVER

Jeffie Brewer found success after getting "dipped into the art world and wrung out."
Photo by Anna Mazurek

ABOVE

Disaster City offers a variety of large-scale disaster simulations that prepare first responders for the real thing.
Courtesy Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service

Patriots in Texas



BAILEY ANDERSON WAS a young man when he fought in the American Revolution as a private with troops from South Carolina. He was in his 80s when he fought in the Texas Revolution. When he died in 1840, he was buried in Harrison County, in East Texas.

Anderson is one of 69 veterans of the American Revolution confirmed to be buried in Texas. Clovis H. Brakebill wrote about most of them in an ambitiously researched book published in 1998. You can find the full list and the book at the Texas Sons of the American Revolution website.



TCP Contests and More

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FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Ride the Rails

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Simple Dimples

A New York woman applied for a patent in 1921 for a spring-loaded device that pressed rubber tips into users' cheeks to create faux dimples. Something to think about **July 9, National Dimples Day**.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

Need a hobby? Learn to ...

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: **Moms are ...**

Doing a million little things no one sees and all the big things everyone feels.

HILARY GRAHMANN
FAYETTE EC
FLATONIA

The only human being who can open a car door while carrying a child, a bag of groceries and a purse and be talking on her cell at the same time.

BJ MAYO
CONCHO VALLEY EC
MILES

The thread that holds everything together.

CLADY PAUL PAGE
JASPER-NEWTON EC
KIRBYVILLE

The ones you still reach for without thinking.

JAMES VOYLES
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC
TYLER

Visit our website to see more responses.

MAY 2026 Wet Texas

“What excellent photos by Erich Schlegel. It was a delight to enjoy the vistas of the western part of our state and share its beauty.”

MARTHA EVERMAN JONES
VICTORIA EC
VICTORIA



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Hooked These Readers

There was perfect timing with the photo of Blue Hole (above) capturing a large catfish resting on a ledge [*Wet Texas*, May 2026].

Kathy Smith
Trinity Valley EC
Kaufman

There appears to be a large flathead catfish swimming. As an avid fisherman, this caught my attention.

Drew Douglas
Trinity Valley EC
Athens

Finding Fossils

I have all my life had fun searching for arrowheads and fossils in Texas [*He Kept Digging*, May 2026].

Glenn Snyder
Fannin EC
Blue Ridge



COURTESY KENNETH GARRETT

We Wuz Informed

The winner of your *My favorite Texas saying* ... Finish This Sentence feature was a bit too cleaned up from the original [May 2026]. I can still, after 80-some years, hear my father saying, “The sun has riz, the sun has set, and we ain’t left Texas yet.”

Jim Evans
Victoria EC
Schertz

A Red Flag?

There is a picture of a lady refilling her hummingbird feeders with red-colored water [*Fast and Curious*, April 2026]. I have always been told to never use red dye in the water.

Deborah Earnest
Sam Houston EC
Dayton

EDITOR’S NOTE: Author Sheryl Smith-Rodgers explains, “It’s highly recommended that you don’t use red dye. The Browns say they add only a drop or two to each gallon of sugar water mixture, and that’s so they can see the water levels in their feeders.”

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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A BIG

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LEAP FROM

OODLES

Colorful, whimsical animal sculptures across Texas escape from Jeffie Brewer's workshop

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ANNA MAZUREK

Sometimes success looks like a 10-foot-tall teal bunny. That was the case for Jeffie Brewer: "You struggle as an artist for a long time to get a footing and get a break, and then you get the break."

His break was that bunny design.

The whimsical, minimalist metalwork changed the course of his career—and ultimately his life—nearly 20 years ago. And so today, a version of the bunny stands guard outside Brewer's studio on the outskirts of Nacogdoches, where the artist's creations are dreamed up, brought to life and shipped all over the world with the help of a small team.

Decades before any of that, Brewer's path to finding his artistic voice took a long and winding path that began in his father's junkyard in Palestine. "I had always been the kid who drew and made stuff," he says.

But after a failed attempt at "making it big"—maybe as a comedian—in Los Angeles at 18, he moved back home and studied at a few different colleges before earning a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Sam Houston State University, where a final-semester class sparked his interest in sculpture.

He completed two master's degrees in art at Stephen F. Austin State University while searching for his artistic voice. After graduation, Brewer stayed in Nacogdoches to teach at his alma mater in the late 1990s. He taught a variety of courses, including art appreciation, painting and 3D design.

His artistic style bounced "all over the place," he says, including painting, drawing and using a plasma cutter to cut shapes out of steel.

Jeffie Brewer in his Nacogdoches studio with his colorful critters—all descendants of an oversized teal bunny he sculpted 20 years ago.



"The real shift happened when I stopped making art for other people and just made what interested me."

"At my core, I'm a redneck kid who got dipped into the art world and wrung out," he says. "The real shift happened when I stopped making art for other people and just made what interested me."

In 2004, he raised his nephew for a year while the child's parents were stationed overseas in the military.

"His parents were both in Afghanistan and Iraq. Having this kid around changed my philosophy of how I made and worked in art," Brewer says. "I made a little bit more of a jump toward figurative, representational sorts of things."

Birds were a common theme during this period, but he later started doodling bunnies while working at his wife's advertising agency.

When Brewer returned to working in steel after a two-year hiatus, the first thing he made was a bird, inspired by his drawings, to put in the arboretum beside his office in the SFA art department. It was stolen a week later, inspiring Brewer to make a new sculpture that was "too big to steal." His next design—that giant 3D bunny—was inspired by his mindless doodling.

"The bird had been just a cut-plate steel piece, but with the bunny, I saw a chance to try something different, something with more dimension and presence," Brewer says.

The bunny was an instant hit—a "eureka moment" for him. "I got to see how people interacted with it, and it revolutionized the way that I thought about art," says Brewer, who wants people of all ages to walk away from his work feeling something.

On a whim, Brewer entered the bunny in a South Carolina public art show. He won, and that got him mentioned in *The New York Times*. The bunny made an appearance in New Orleans, putting him on the radar of the world-renowned Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas, which included his work in a later show.

"After that, it's been chaos," Brewer says. He kept his foot on the gas, leading to increased exposure, commissions and new animal designs, including armadillos, giraffes, cats and crocodiles.

He made the leap to full-time artist in 2019 and has a team of four full-time assistants, including two SFA grads. At any

OPPOSITE Brewer grinds the edges of a steel sculpture at his rural workshop across from a cow pasture.

BELOW Larger pieces, like the robot along Brewer's driveway, are usually made from steel for durability. He uses aluminum for the smaller ones.

given time, his team is working on four to eight projects—among them an 8-foot-tall purple kitty or an 8-foot hot pink wiener dog. His three real dogs, Olive, Odie and Vinnie, are always on hand to provide emotional support.

Brewer's work is evenly split between commercial and university clients, galleries (his work is in a dozen across the country), and personal commissions from

individuals. His large pieces sell for tens of thousands of dollars, and smaller pieces available on his website go for about \$200.

In 2024, Brewer and his wife, Angie, self-published a colorful soft-cover photo book, *Joy Machine*, that showcases his sculptures.

Every piece is made at his rural workshop across from a cow pasture. A rusted steel gate with the silhouette of five of his famous bunny designs leads to a tree-lined driveway, a sculpture trail really, with an 8-foot purple robot and other artwork scattered in the nearby woods.

One of his most notable permanent public works in Texas is the 12-foot-tall purple bull that stands in front of a water tower on State Highway 46 in Boerne. Others include 58 sculptures at the Bark Yard dog park in Allen—where his 30-foot dog collar is used as a shade structure—and the yellow armadillo outside Covenant Children's Hospital in Lubbock.

"Lubbock loves Jeffie," says Elizabeth Grigsby, the executive director of the Lubbock Arts Alliance.

She first discovered Brewer's work more than a decade ago while serving on a committee to select art to display along highways. Since then, his work has appeared in the Lubbock Arts Festival and twice along intersections. One piece was a 13-foot-tall pink flamingo designed to celebrate an art donor's 100th birthday (Brewer also made a smaller version for her assisted living facility that she decorates for each season).

"What I find most interesting about Jeffie's artwork is that when you look at it, you immediately know what it's meant to represent—there's no confusion about the subject," Grigsby says. "Yet it's presented in such a unique, colorful and stylistic manner that it captures your imagination. He blends clarity with imagination so that the work feels both playful and sophisticated."

Constructing a 500-pound metal bunny is no easy feat. While Brewer, a member of Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative, initially drew his animal designs by hand, he now creates them digitally. The files are sent to a local laser cutter, which trims the figures out of metal. The larger pieces are usually

made from steel for durability, while the smaller ones are aluminum.

"We have to build an inside structure and then wrap it and then we have to meticulously weld it all out," Brewer explains about the multiweek process. "And then go back and grind all the welds off so it looks seamless."

The final step is powder coating the pieces to add his signature bright colors. Brewer initially hand-painted all his sculptures with a waterborne enamel before switching to powder coating for its longevity. He still hand-paints pieces upon request. "I'm a big fan of the teal," says Brewer, noting that blue shades are the most requested, followed by red.

As he continually ships pieces to clients across the country with the help of his staff, he says he still can't wrap his head around his success. He's just glad to be able to do this work.

"I don't have a master plan or some big vision board. I just want to keep working, keep building and see where it takes me," he says. "As long as I'm able to make things that connect with people and keep the lights on, I'm happy." ■





CRASH COURSE

BY BOB MCCULLOUGH

In this town—population zero—first responders from across the globe hone lifesaving skills

WHAT KEVIN PRICE SAW in July 2025 cannot be re-created: trees ripped from the ground and entire structures effortlessly swept away by the Guadalupe River as it rose 34 feet, devastating communities in the Hill Country and killing more than 135.

What came next he had seen before: a carefully coordinated search-and-rescue effort. Those skills and strategies are carefully replicated and reinforced on a continual basis at a training complex unlike any other in the world on the outskirts of College Station.

Welcome to Disaster City, part of the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service, called TEEX. Price is a training manager there. The city's "mayor"—Scott Salter, rescue program director—says it's dedicated to preparing first responders, rescue technicians and emergency management professionals in the most challenging and chaotic environments imaginable.

"Disaster City provides realistic, high-fidelity disaster simulations so responders can develop the skills, confidence and teamwork needed to protect communities when they're in need," Salter says. "It's one-of-a-kind in scale, complexity and realism. While other states operate regional training

centers or individual rescue props, no other facility combines the size, diversity of environments and multidisciplinary training elements found at Disaster City."

The facility is widely recognized as the premier urban search-and-rescue training site in the U.S. and one of the most advanced in the world, Salter says.

TEEX built Disaster City in the late 1990s to meet a growing need. It was an outgrowth of the intense training program for firefighters that dates back to 1929, when the State Firefighters' and Fire Marshals' Association of Texas chose Texas A&M University as the site for a permanent school for firefighters.

Salter says two events proved to be the tipping point for the establishment of Disaster City: the 1993 New York World Trade Center below-ground parking lot bombing and the 1995 federal building bombing in downtown Oklahoma City. Such large-scale emergencies required better planning and better strategies than had been available.

"Texas has also faced many major disasters," Salter says. "The most prominent in recent years include the widespread 2011 wildfires, the 2013 fertilizer plant explosion in West, Hurricane Harvey flooding in 2017, and multiple oil refinery and chemical plant incidents along the Gulf Coast."



OPPOSITE Technical training at Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service's Disaster City prepares crews to safely perform high-angle rescues, rappelling and patient recovery using specialized rope systems and protective equipment.

THIS PAGE Campus exercises simulate real-world emergencies such as vehicle recovery and victim extraction, helping teams build readiness for complex crises.

Disaster City's Building 137, or the Rescue Building, is the hub of the 52-acre complex. This "city hall" houses classrooms, offices and support facilities. It's also the gateway to the disaster response training complex.

Dotting the landscape are multiple collapsed buildings that simulate damage from earthquakes and bombings. There's a passenger train derailment, complete with a locomotive and a heap of train cars. There's a crashed aircraft fuselage. There are underground tunnels, rubble piles, and structures used for breaching-and-breaking training. And that's just a sampling of the chaotic conditions that confront trainees.

"The true strength of Disaster City lies in the diverse training props available to instructors," says Kevin Farmer, a 20-year firefighter, paramedic and instructor with the nearby Bryan Fire Department. "Disaster City allows us to simulate some of the most complex and challenging rescue scenarios imaginable and to test our team to its full capability."

Basic to the rescue of disaster victims in all sorts of circumstances is expertise in the use of ropes. Trainees must master knot-tying and rigging and even understand the physics involved in the successful use of ropes to save lives. Grasping these fundamental principles leads to almost 100 specialized courses in technical rescue and disaster response.

The school offers a Federal Emergency Management Agency canine course that trains dogs and handlers. There's also a spokesperson training course that teaches how to communicate with an anxious public in the aftermath of a disaster.

"Among the rescue courses we offer, the structural collapse, rope/confined space and swift water/floodwater consistently attract the largest number of participants," Salter says. "Each year, more than 22,000 responders—representing Texas, the broader United States and international partners—participate in hands-on and computer-based training with TEEX and Disaster City. This diverse group includes firefighters, law enforcement officers, emergency managers, military personnel and international rescue teams preparing for deployment."

Disaster City has helped Texas lead the way in standardizing urban search-and-rescue training; improving communication through joint exercises involving fire, emergency medical services, law enforcement and public works; and enhancing flood and wide-area search protocols.

"After the July 4 Hill Country flooding, Disaster City played a major support role by providing highly trained wide-area search personnel," Salter says. "They assisted local authorities with searching in inaccessible flood zones, documentation of damaged infrastructure and debris field analysis, to name a few of their many contributions."

OPPOSITE First responders remove a mock victim from a train car.

RIGHT Disaster City, built more than 25 years ago, allows students to practice shoring operations, breaching collapsed structures and locating survivors under rubble.

THINK THROUGH THE UNTHINKABLE

The Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service encourages all Texans to take important preparedness steps before disaster strikes. Small actions today can significantly improve survival odds and resilience during a disaster.

- **Have a 72-hour emergency kit with water, medications, flashlights and essential documents.**
- **Create a family communications plan that includes meeting points and emergency contacts.**
- **Be aware of potential hazards—whether flooding, wildfires, severe storms or industrial risks—and sign up for local alerts.**
- **Map basic evacuation routes, whether the threat is a hurricane or a wildfire.**
- **Never assume you'll have time to prepare during an emergency. Start now!**





“Those responders that deployed to the Hill Country had been trained by TEEX at Disaster City, allowing agencies to work together seamlessly under extreme conditions.”

Kevin Price was one of those responders. The TEEX instructor spent a week amid the devastation and came away amazed by the immensity of what he saw: nature’s forces and the power of teamwork that came next.

Salter, an El Paso native who spent the early part of his career fighting fires in North Carolina, was among an international contingent of hundreds of responders who witnessed firsthand the pain and misery caused by the swollen Guadalupe and its tributaries a year ago.

Yet the disaster that remains foremost in his mind and the one that truly motivates him to help others is Hurricane Matthew, which struck North Carolina in 2016. The Category 1 storm caused catastrophic flooding that submerged neighborhoods, cut off highways and overwhelmed infrastructure.

“Working in that environment—swift water, debris-filled currents, compromised structures—was a stark reminder that disaster conditions don’t have to be extreme on paper to be devastating,” he says. “It also reinforced the importance of training responders in wide-area search, flood rescue and interagency coordination.”

Year-round Salter and his team help students respond to known disasters. But they’re also preparing for the disasters we haven’t seen yet. “As threats evolve, our training must evolve with them,” he says. “Thus, we are actively exploring several next-generation rescue and disaster scenarios.”

These include subterranean rescues in transportation tunnels and utility conduits; wind turbine rescues; accidents involving lithium batteries; and advanced industrial rescues focused on petrochemical, rail and energy industry emergencies.

“Our goal is to remain ahead of emerging risks and to ensure Disaster City continues to be the nation’s premier training environment,” Salter says.

He believes Disaster City’s greatest accomplishment is its role in transforming how responders train for large-scale, complex emergencies. They’ve also helped create a common language and operational standards for search-and-rescue teams, enabling agencies that had never trained together to operate seamlessly during real disasters.

But his greatest satisfaction still comes from seeing people arrive at Disaster City as students and leave as confident, highly skilled rescuers.

“Watching them push through difficult, exhausting training and then applying those skills in a real disaster is incredibly rewarding,” Salter says. “But there’s even deeper satisfaction knowing that our work strengthens the entire community. When a responder leaves Disaster City better prepared, that capability extends to every person they may someday help—neighbors, co-workers, total strangers.

“Being part of that chain of impact is what drives me every day.” ■

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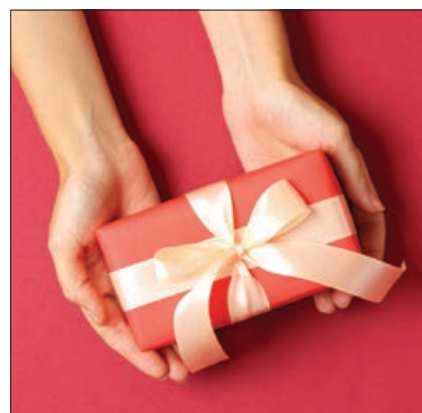
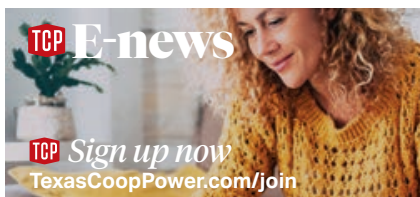
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MESSAGE
FROM
GENERAL
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JOHN ED
SHINPAUGH

Celebrate America's Big Birthday and Co-op Principles

THIS YEAR IS a landmark birthday for our nation—250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence. As I reflect on why I'm proud to be an American, I'm reminded of why I'm also grateful to be a member of an electric cooperative. The U.S. and the electric co-ops that serve it have similarities in the principles we're governed by.

One membership, one vote. This simple edict describes a fundamental element of the way cooperatives operate and is one of the Seven Cooperative Principles—Democratic Member Control.

Our country's founding principles resound within your electric co-op's structure and election process. Each year, as part of Fannin Electric Cooperative's annual meeting, members vote on director candidates—your co-op decision-makers. We put the decision of who should serve on our board in your hands.

Representative democracy is crucial to the co-op way, which is deeply rooted in goodwill and equality and maintains an overarching vision that benefits us all. That's the cooperative difference.

Autonomy and Independence is another cooperative principle we hold dear at Fannin EC. We maintain our autonomy by only entering into agreements with organizations and raising capital under terms that ensure we carry out the vision and meet the needs of our members.

We honor the trust of our members through judicious use of funds and know that integrity rivals electricity as our most precious resource. Without the confidence of our membership, we cease to operate effectively.

Finally, as July 4 nears, consider the principle of Voluntary and Open Membership. Fannin EC is open to all, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination. Perhaps there is no higher or more patriotic tenet to uphold. In times of strife or discord, I look to these unifying principles for comfort and inspiration and as a reminder of all that unites us.

Side by side with our members and neighbors, this Independence Day we honor our history and the spirit of cooperation that conceived this great nation. ■

July Billing Schedule

Cycle 1 Dates

BILLING	July 2
DUE	July 21
DISCONNECT	August 5

Cycle 2 Dates

BILLING	July 9
DUE	July 28
DISCONNECT	August 12

Cycle 3 Dates

BILLING	July 16
DUE	August 5
DISCONNECT	August 19

Cycle 4 Dates

BILLING	July 23
DUE	August 12
DISCONNECT	August 26



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Independence Day

Saturday, July 4
Our office will be closed
Friday, July 3, for the holiday.

**National Day
of the Cowboy**
Saturday, July 25

**National Disability
Independence Day**
Sunday, July 26

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A Remarkable Career

Fannin EC wishes Tim Kidwell a happy retirement

AFTER 18 YEARS OF dedicated service to Fannin Electric Cooperative, Tim Kidwell retired in May. During his time at the co-op, he played a significant role in strengthening and modernizing the distribution system while supporting major infrastructure projects across the region, most recently as a project manager.

During his career, Kidwell managed numerous large-scale projects associated with Bois d'Arc Lake and Lake Ralph Hall. His work included upgrading and rerouting distribution lines, removing facilities within inundation areas, raising distribution lines for sailboat clearance, constructing new substations, and providing electric service for pump stations, water treatment facilities and metering infrastructure.

Kidwell developed and implemented the cooperative's 10-year pole inspection program and oversaw annual pole inspections and replacement efforts that improved system safety and reliability. He also led reliability improvements through new large conductor distribution ties between substations, additional substation transformers and upgraded circuit protection.

Kidwell managed the inventory and electronic modeling of the distribution system, creating the foundation for major technology advancements including outage management, electronic staking, and supervisory control and data acquisition integration. He also improved member communication and after-hours dispatch capabilities through phone system enhancements and Cooperative Response Center utilization.

Additional accomplishments included managing projects to comply with Texas House Bill 4150 sailboat clearance requirements, overseeing communication pole attachment licensing and system inventory updates and helping launch a fiber attachment project funded by Texas Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment II for Fannin County.

He was also actively involved in the planning, design and construction management of the cooperative's new headquarters facilities.

As Kidwell begins retirement, he looks forward to spending more time with his wife, children and multiple grandchildren. The cooperative sincerely appreciates his years of service, leadership and lasting contributions to the membership and community. ■

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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24/7

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ABOUT FANNIN EC

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Shooting to the Top

Honky-tonk singer Al Dexter wrote his way to fame and fortune

BY CLAY COPPEDGE • ILLUSTRATION BY ERIC KITTELBERGER

ONE OF THE top-selling records of 1943 was by East Texas honky-tonk singer and musician Al Dexter. His recording of *Pistol Packin' Mama*—a catchy, danceable diversion for a war-weary country—hit the top of the pop and country charts.

Bing Crosby, accompanied by the Andrews Sisters, also had a hit with the song in 1943. Frank Sinatra sang *Pistol Packin' Mama* for 14 straight weeks on the *Your Hit Parade* radio show. Roy Rogers, Glenn Miller and Harry James released covers in 1944, even as *Life* magazine declared Dexter's claim to fame "a national earache." Hollywood took advantage of the song's popularity with a 1943 movie of the same name.

Within six months of its release, Dexter's original version sold 1 million copies and would go on to sell 2 million more. *Pistol Packin' Mama* paved an unlikely path for Dexter that led him from Jacksonville, Texas, where he was born Clarence Albert Poindexter on May 4, 1902, to fame and fortune.

Dexter's musical journey began in the 1920s when he managed to squeeze out a living by performing in East Texas. His first band was an all-Black combo consisting of a saxophone, piano, bass and drums. He told writer Nick Tosches that none of the white musicians he approached at that time wanted to play with him.

"They wanted to play Benny Goodman stuff, that kind of music," he said. Later, he put together a band for a honky-tonk near Longview, where his rollicking, barrelhouse sound caught the attention of the American Record Corp. label.

"The record company said they could not pay much royalty on records that sold for 16 cents wholesale," he recalled, "but I said I would take it, as I'm not doing much anyway right now."

Dexter's first hit, *Honky Tonk Blues*, which he co-wrote with James B. Paris, is often cited as the first song to use the term "honky-tonk." His biography on AllMusic acknowledges his contribution to the honky-tonk genre but adds: "The popular theory that Dexter actually coined the term can be blown full of holes; he had never heard of honky-tonk before his songwriting partner James B. Paris suggested it as a title in 1936."

In 1975, Dexter told Tosches how he came to write his million-dollar contribution to the American

songbook. The genesis of *Pistol Packin' Mama*, he said, occurred at a tavern, the Roundup Club in Turnertown, east of Tyler, which Dexter happened to own.

"I had a bunch of girls workin', and there was a little cross-eyed fellow who brought a girl in one night by the name of Jo Ann, and he asked me if I'd give her a job," Dexter said. "The next day three or four women came up in the same V-8 Ford that little cross-eyed feller drove up in the day before, and they're looking for Jo Ann."

"Jo Ann, she always said, 'I love that little cross-eyed man.' She didn't know he was a married man."

Dexter sold the Turnertown bar not long afterward, but he met up with Jo Ann again two or three years later, in 1942, when he was in another honky-tonk, trying to come up with a new song and listening to the jukebox playing the Bob Wills megahit *Take Me Back to Tulsa*. He noted the eight-bar chorus, eight-bar verse, eight-bar chorus structure and vowed to write a song with a similar arrangement.

"So I'm sittin' there, watching things happen, and in came this gal Jo Ann," he said. "She's scratched up and she looks like she's been fightin' with wildcats." Jo Ann explained to Dexter how the wife of the cross-eyed man had chased her through brush, brambles and barbed wire with a gun.

Said Dexter: "So I got the idea, 'Lay that pistol down, babe, lay that pistol down.' Got a woman after ya with a gun, you can't outrun the darned thing, so you gotta beg her to lay it down. So I went out to the car and started writin' these lyrics. I sang it over and over so I wouldn't forget it, and then I had my song."

That was the first of many. Twelve of Dexter's songs—all recorded from 1943 to 1948 and most of which he wrote—sold a million copies each. He was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1971 and posthumously into the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame in 2010.

Dozens of contemporary performers, including Mac Wiseman, John Prine, Ronnie Milsap, Glen Campbell and Willie Nelson, have introduced *Pistol Packin' Mama* and other Dexter songs to new generations of listeners. The fates of Jo Ann and the little cross-eyed man who inspired the tune are unknown. ■



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



Page Earners

Rare books can mean wealth on your shelf

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY SHAW NIELSEN

LARRY MCMURTRY ONCE claimed that he was mostly a book hunter who used his side hustle—being a writer—to finance his love of books and reading. He proved that with his 8,500-square-foot bookstore in tiny Archer City, near Wichita Falls.

My knowledge of that market, by comparison, amounts to about 5 square feet. So I stopped to see friends James Gannon and Blake Johnson. They operate a fine antiquarian bookstore called InkQ Rare Books in Addison.

Gannon and Johnson have a great deal of McMurtry's personal library on their shelves and a good deal of Bill Wittliff's, too, among many others of all genres. It's a magical place to browse (by appointment only).

I wanted their insights on the value of Texas collectibles—wealth that might be sitting on your own shelf. They told me that there are many, many caveats to determining the value of a collectible book—things like first or limited editions, signed copies, and condition among them.

They hesitate to say what a book is worth without taking a close look because there are so many variables. But they were able to give me some general guidance on retail values, which is the price you might get if a collector very much wanted your unique volume.

McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, in hardback, first edition, signed by the author, is worth a good deal: \$500–\$1,000, depending on provenance.

Signed editions of *Blood Meridian*, Cormac McCarthy's apocalyptic, anti-Western opus written during the 20-some years that he lived in Texas, are worth much more because he didn't sign books much at all: up to \$10,000.

Elmer Kelton's critically acclaimed *The Time It Never Rained* could bring \$600. What about Edna Ferber's *Giant*? A signed first edition with a perfect dust jacket: \$800.

Empire of the Summer Moon by S.C. Gwynne? The 2011 chronicle of the rise and fall of Quanah Parker and the Comanches has been a mega bestseller for years. There are many, many copies out there, but a signed first-edition hardback might fetch \$300–\$500.

As always, these are estimates. The market may be willing to pay a bit more or less, depending on many factors.

And then there are the rare older books, less known by the general public but still wonderful because they captured snapshots of life on the frontier.

For instance, *The Trail Drivers of Texas* by J. Marvin Hunter is worth perhaps \$1,000–\$2,000. And *The Adventures of Big-Foot Wallace*, published in 1870 by John Crittenden Duval, could fetch \$5,000 or more.

If you have Charles Siringo's *A Texas Cow Boy*, published in 1885, you could have a little gold mine on your shelf. In 2022, that book sold at auction for \$94,500.

Gannon and Johnson figure the most valuable Texas artifact is William B. Travis' victory or death letter written at the Alamo. It's housed at the Texas State Library and Archives, but if it were for sale, they estimate it would go for at least \$10 million and probably much, much more. ■

Don't Skimp on Shrimp

This seafood is swimming in flavor—plus there's firecrackers

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

My mami worked as a teacher's aide, and during her summer break she worked at the local shrimp factory. She sorted and packed shrimp alongside her friend Yolanda. They would walk home together, laughing, chatting and loaded with shrimp. This month seemed like the perfect opportunity to share her ceviche recipe.

Shrimp Ceviche

1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 cup fresh lime juice
1 serrano pepper, minced
⅓ cup finely diced red onion
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro, plus more for garnish
½ cucumber, seeds removed, finely diced
2 Roma tomatoes, diced
2 tablespoons Valentina hot sauce
½ teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 avocado, diced
Tostadas or tortilla chips, for serving

1. Dice shrimp, cutting each into 3–4 pieces, and place in a large glass bowl.
2. Add lime juice and serrano and stir to combine. Cover bowl and refrigerate 1 hour.
3. Stir in onion, cilantro, cucumber, tomatoes, hot sauce, oregano, salt and pepper. Taste and adjust seasoning, adding additional hot sauce or salt if desired.
4. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.
5. Before serving, gently stir in avocado. Serve with tostadas or tortilla chips and cilantro to garnish.

SERVES 4

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Creamy Chipotle Lime Shrimp.





Shrimp Oliver

CHRISTIE PARTEE
TRINITY VALLEY EC

The simplicity of this recipe caught my eye, but the flavor kept me coming back. Shrimp spiced up with Tabasco, cayenne and wine makes a great date night dish ... swoon.

4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
2 tablespoons minced onion
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 teaspoon paprika
¼ teaspoon Tabasco sauce
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 tablespoon flour
1 tablespoon water
¼ cup white wine
1 ½ teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
Cooked rice or pasta, for serving

1. In a skillet over medium-high heat, melt butter. Add onion and garlic and cook 2 minutes, stirring frequently.
2. Stir in shrimp, paprika, Tabasco and cayenne. Cover and reduce heat. Cook 7 minutes or until shrimp are fully cooked.
3. Stir in flour, water, wine and salt. Increase heat to high and cook, stirring constantly, 2 minutes, until sauce has thickened.
4. Stir in parsley. Serve warm, over rice or pasta.

SERVES 4

\$500 WINNER

Texas Two-Step Firecracker Shrimp Scampi

BARBARA SAVAGE
COSERV



Plump shrimp swimming in a spicy and buttery garlic lemon sauce is my idea of a good time. The Firecracker Cocktail Sauce brings the heat, which I couldn't get enough of. I served this with plenty of bread to sop up the delicious scampi sauce.



FIRECRACKER COCKTAIL SAUCE

¼ cup ketchup
1–2 tablespoons prepared white horseradish
2 tablespoons chunky salsa
1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
Dash Worcestershire sauce
1 teaspoon salt
Diced jalapeño peppers (optional)

SHRIMP SCAMPI

1 ½ pounds large shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
2 tablespoons olive oil
4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
5 cloves garlic, minced
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
Zest of 1 lemon
Juice of ½ lemon
½–1 teaspoon finely minced jalapeño pepper, seeds removed
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

COOK'S TIP: The Firecracker Cocktail Sauce can be easily adjusted for your spice level preference. The amount of horseradish, spice level of your salsa and whether you include jalapeño all will affect the heat of the sauce.

1. FIRECRACKER COCKTAIL SAUCE

In a small bowl, mix ketchup, 1 tablespoon horseradish, salsa, lime juice, Worcestershire sauce, salt and jalapeño, if desired, until well combined. Taste and add additional horseradish if desired. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.

2. SHRIMP SCAMPI Pat shrimp dry and season with salt and pepper. In a large skillet, heat olive oil and butter over medium heat until butter is melted and foamy.

3. Add garlic and red pepper flakes, if desired, cooking just until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add shrimp in a single layer and cook 1 ½–2 minutes per side, just until pink and opaque.

4. Remove skillet from heat and stir in lemon zest, lemon juice and jalapeño. Sprinkle with fresh parsley.

5. To serve, arrange shrimp on a platter and spoon garlic-lemon butter over the top. Serve warm with the cocktail sauce on the side for dipping or drizzling.

SERVES 4

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

HOLIDAY TRADITIONS DUE JUL 10

Food and family are hallmarks of the holidays. What recipe brings your household together? We'll print our favorites in the December issue, wrapping up \$500 for the winner.

UPCOMING: SMOOTHIES DUE AUG 10



CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

Cajun Shrimp and Andouille Pasta

MARK MCNIEL
PEDERNALES EC

McNiel has been whipping up this pasta since his college days at Texas Tech University. I can see why it would be a go-to after a day of classes and studying—it's pure comfort.

12 ounces uncooked rigatoni
1 pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 teaspoons Cajun seasoning
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 teaspoon dried rosemary
1 teaspoon celery salt
8 ounces andouille sausage, sliced diagonally into thin rounds
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon (½ stick) butter
1 red bell pepper, thinly sliced
5 cloves garlic, minced
½ shallot, finely diced
¼ cup white cooking wine or dry white wine



2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for garnish
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, divided use

1. Cook rigatoni according to package directions, reserving ½ cup pasta water.
2. In a bowl, combine shrimp, Cajun seasoning, smoked paprika, rosemary and celery salt. Stir to fully coat shrimp in seasoning.

3. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, lightly brown the sausage. Remove from pan and set aside.

4. To the same skillet, add oil and butter. Add seasoned shrimp and cook 1–2 minutes per side or until lightly browned. Remove shrimp and set aside.

5. Add bell pepper to the skillet and cook until softened, about 4–5 minutes. Add garlic and shallot and cook an additional minute, stirring constantly.

6. Add wine and lemon juice to the skillet. Deglaze the skillet by vigorously scraping the browned bits from bottom of pan. Reduce heat and simmer 3 minutes. Whisk in heavy cream, pepper and Parmesan until smooth.

7. Remove skillet from heat. Stir in cooked pasta, sausage, shrimp and 1 tablespoon parsley. Stir in pasta water, as needed, if the sauce is thick. Serve with the remaining 1 tablespoon parsley and Parmesan cheese to garnish.

SERVES 4

Not just another Hunger Game.



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Waiting on the Wings

The world's largest bat colony emerges from a cave outside San Antonio

BY CHET GARNER

THERE ARE TEXAS SUNSETS—and then there's the sunset I saw on the outskirts of San Antonio one evening: 15 million bats blotting out the sun. Evenings like this can only be witnessed at the Bracken Cave Preserve, home to the world's largest colony of bats and one of the largest concentrations of mammals on the planet.

After buying a required advance ticket online, I arrived just before dusk on the private property of Bat Conservation International as the summer heat began to fade and the air thickened with anticipation. I joined a group of batty tourists (like me) as we stood by and stared into a relatively small, eye-shaped hole in the ground. I couldn't wrap my head around the fact that there were millions of Mexican free-tailed bats hiding inside.

At first, it was subtle. A flicker. A ripple. Then the cave mouth began to churn like a living cloud. Suddenly, an endless ribbon of wings spiraled into the sky.

It wasn't a swarm but more of an organized cyclone twisting upward and over our heads. I felt bad for the first few bats that met the talons of hungry hawks waiting for their nightly meal. As the bat-nado grew, its fluttering sound turned into thunderous applause. I've seen bat colonies take flight before, but this was bigger and closer. And louder.

These bats fan out across Central Texas, devouring more than 100 tons of insects before returning by dawn. Farmers love them, scientists study them and visitors like me just stand there, grinning like we've stumbled into one of nature's best-kept secrets.

The whole evening reminded me that some of the most extraordinary experiences in Texas don't come with neon signs or funnel cakes but can still leave an impression that lasts a lifetime. ■

ABOVE Millions of bats race past Chet in search of their nightly meal.

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



Know Before You Go

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

JULY

9

Claude [9-11] Caprock Roundup, (806) 310-9044, claudetexas.com

10

Kemp Aley Picnic, (903) 880-3186, facebook.com/groups/aleypicnic

11

Weatherford Parker County Peach Festival, (817) 596-3801, peachfestivaltx.com

Kerrville [11-12] Summer Market, 1-800-392-9904, texasmarketguide.com

12

Plano '70s Pop Up Market, (469) 422-3885, bit.ly/70spopupmarket

15

Childress [15-17] Junior Rodeo Cowboys Association Rodeo, (806) 290-2848, jrcarodeo.com

Fort Worth [15-19, 21-26] Hamilton, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

17

Fairfield [17-18] Fuzzy Peach Festival, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Huntsville [17-18] Texas Thimble Trail, (936) 329-1376, texasthimbletrail.com

18

Bonham Margarita Rodeo, (903) 583-4811, bonhamchamber.com

Fredericksburg Wrede School Open House, (830) 685-3321, historicschools.org

23

Round Rock [23–26] Brick Rodeo, brickrodeo.com

24

Driftwood [24–25] Hill Country Rally for Kids Barbecue Cook-Off, info@hcrally.com, hcrally.com

Victoria [24–26, 30–August 2] *Singin' in the Rain*, (361) 576-6277, theatrevictoria.org

25

Bandera National Day of the American Cowboy, (210) 920-5180, banderabusiness.com

Buffalo Gap Tour de Gap, (325) 829-0617, tourdegap.com

Giddings Sip & Shop Christmas in July, (979) 542-3455, business.giddingsstx.com

28

San Angelo Buffalo Soldier Anniversary Day, (325) 657-4444, bit.ly/fortconcho

31

Schertz Cibolo Creek Ducks Unlimited Banquet, (303) 915-5371, bit.ly/cibolocreekdu

AUGUST

4

Fort Worth [4–9] *Suffs*, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

6

Corsicana [6–9, 13–16] *Finding Nemo Jr.*, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

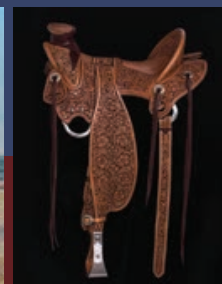
TCP Submit Your Event

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

40th Annual TRAPPINGS OF TEXAS

Opening Weekend: September 17-19

Celebrate the 40th annual exhibit and sale of contemporary Western art and custom cowboy gear at Trappings of Texas. The show continues through October 31, 2026, at the Museum of the Big Bend on the Sul Ross State University campus in Alpine, Texas.



Scan the QR code to win 3 nights in a Hotel Parker casita and tickets for the Trappings of Texas Opening Weekend



Images from 2025 Trappings of Texas (L to R): Eagle and Flower Spurs by Jerry Galloway, *Pease River Rebel* by K.W. Whitley, Saddle by Troy West


MUSEUM OF THE BIG BEND
museumofthebigbend.com



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WWW.HISTORICSCHOOLS.ORG



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24K Gold



24K Gold Field/
Silver Liberty



Silver Field/
24K Gold Liberty



Black Ruthenium/
24K Gold



Black Ruthenium/
Rose Gold

Actual size
is 40.6 mm

250 YEARS OF AMERICA. 40 YEARS OF THE SILVER EAGLE. Limited to 1,000 Silver Dollars— Don't Miss Out.

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary in 2026, Americans are honoring the enduring spirit of freedom first declared on July 4, 1776. This milestone year also marks four decades of the Silver Eagle, struck in one ounce of 99.9% fine American silver. Enhanced here with breathtaking finishes of 24-karat Gold, Black Ruthenium, or Rose Gold, America's most collected silver coin has been elevated into a true masterpiece. Together, these commemorative 2026 Silver Eagles pay tribute to a nation built on determination, self-rule, and pride in its ongoing journey.

One of the Most Popular Silver Coins on the Planet.

First struck in 1986, the Silver Eagle is one of the most popular silver coins on the planet. The official silver bullion coin of the U.S., it's revered for its classic Walking Liberty obverse design created by Adolph A. Weinman back in 1916 and impressive Eagle Landing reverse design created by artist Emily Damstra. These special 40th Anniversary coins are still official U.S. legal tender, struck in one ounce of 99.9% fine silver, but thanks to unique gilding they boast remarkable eye appeal that makes them stand out in a big way.

99.9% U.S. Fine Silver Coins Guaranteed.

The beautiful, unique gilded appearance of these coins makes them a valued addition to your collection that is sure to impress. Each is Brilliant Uncirculated, struck in 99.9% Fine Silver—lavishly layered (gilded) in 24-karat Gold, 24-karat Gold with a Silver Liberty or a Silver Field, or in Black Ruthenium with a 24-karat Gold or Rose Gold Liberty. Quantities are limited! Only 1000 of each variety of the Gilded Silver Eagles are available, so hurry!



Reverse side features
Emily S. Damstra's
beautiful landing eagle

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457209	Silver Field/24K Gold Liberty	\$139 + FREE S/H
457213	Black Ruthenium w/24K Gold	\$139 + FREE S/H
457212	Black Ruthenium w/Rose Gold	\$139 + FREE S/H
457214	Complete 5-Pc Set	\$645 SAVE \$50

*Coin prices are not based on the precious metal content of the gold or ruthenium

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Seasoned Snaps

Having learned a few things along the way, these readers choose their subjects wisely. All we know is, with this many years of experience behind the camera, you're bound to have a few big shots.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 PAUL GARCIA
MEDINA EC

"Taking in the beauty of the smallest things in nature."

2 TOM SLOTT
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC

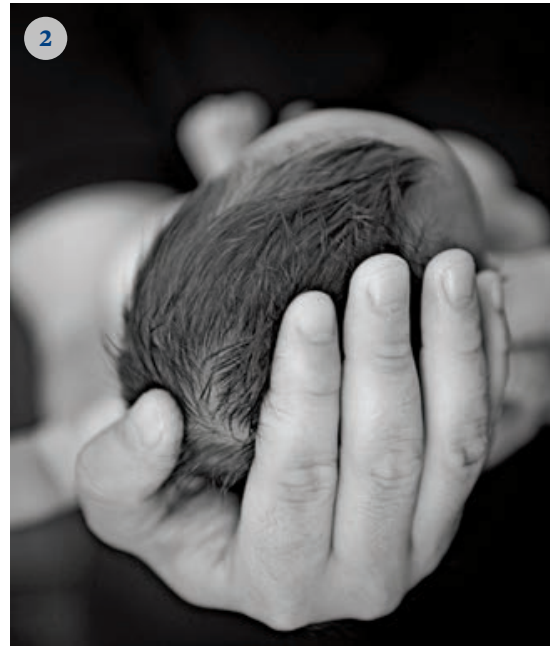
"A different perspective on what really matters."

3 MICHELE BENNETT
GVEC

"Wild turkeys in DeWitt County stay off the dinner table."

4 LAURA BREWER
COSERV

"Vibrant gazania flowers—almost a flush!"



Upcoming Contests

RIDE THE RAILS DUE JUL 10

CHRISTMAS FAILS DUE AUG 10

BARNs DUE SEP 10



ENTER
ONLINE

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Seasoned Snaps photos from readers.





Children look at the rocks at Parr Park Rock Art Trail in Grapevine. The park claims to have the biggest collection of painted rocks in the world.

Heart of Stone

You too can deliver a dose of unexpected joy with a simple rock

BY JOBETH PILCHER

A SMALL ROCK with the shape of Texas painted on it was recently found in the Netherlands. A message on the bottom directed the finder to “Keep or Hide” and included the name of a website. The finder posted a picture and indicated that the rock would be hidden again.

How cool is that?

I first became aware of this trend during the pandemic when I was reading about ways people were sending positive vibes during social isolation.

About the same time, I ran across the Facebook page for Fort Worth Rocks!! and found that many people were painting messages and pictures on rocks and hiding them for others to find. When someone found a rock, they posted a picture of it and often included a comment about how finding it had brightened their day.

I began painting rocks and hiding them in plain sight so that people in my area of rural North Texas would find them. They were colorful yet simple, with words like smile, joy and sing.

And they were a big hit. Many of my neighbors still display their finds on their mailbox posts. One started a mini painted rock garden, and others use them as paper weights or mantel displays.

Megan Murphy of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, is credited with starting the trend of hiding painted rocks. One day in 2015, she went to a beach seeking inspiration and wondered if others might also be there for that reason. So she began painting messages on rocks and leaving them for others to find. From that emerged the Kindness Rocks Project.

The trend spread worldwide. While many painted rocks continue to include words or messages, they increasingly include more artwork. But the overall objective hasn’t changed: to spread kindness. The hope is that finding a rock will brighten the finder’s day.

One of the most well-known locations in Texas is Parr Park Rock Art Trail in Grapevine. During the pandemic, resident Ron Olsen and his family painted 10 rocks and scattered them along the trail. The artwork began multiplying as other hikers added more. Thousands of rocks now line the path.

I visited the trail for my birthday, and it was worth the drive. The sheer number of painted rocks was almost unfathomable. One stone indicated the park had 24,459 painted rocks—a world record. Among rocks with Einstein’s face, the Beatles, realistic dogs and landscape scenes was a collection, each with a letter, arranged to spell out, “Will you marry me?”

International Drop a Rock Day is July 3. So get painting—and watch where you’re walking. ■



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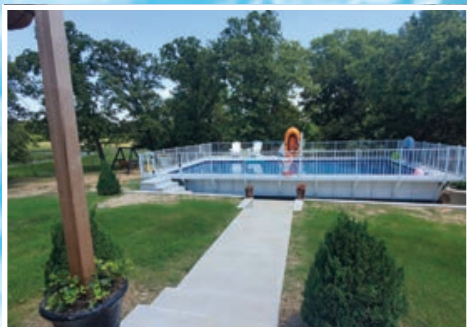
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