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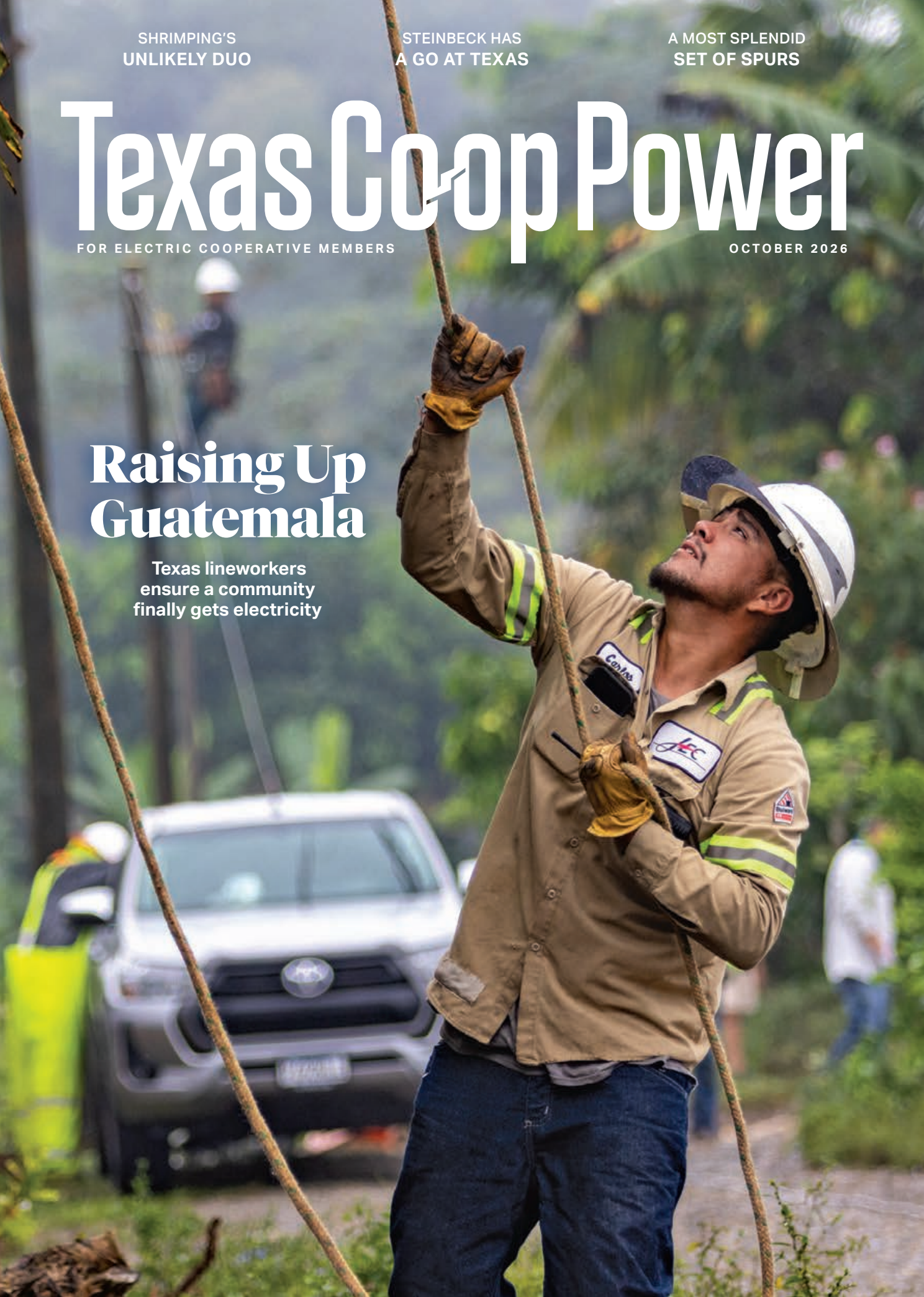
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OCTOBER 2026



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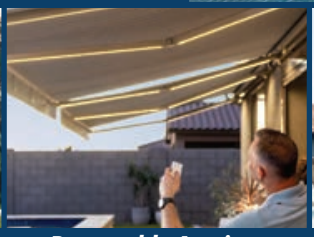
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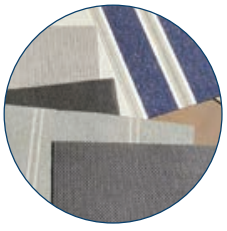
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October 2026



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Texas lineworkers bring life-changing light to a grateful community in Guatemala.

Story and photos by Chris Burrows

An Old Salt and a Seafaring Diva

As the Gulf shrimping industry dwindles, this 93-year-old—with his savvy first mate—still works the nets.

By Pam LeBlanc
Photos by Erich Schlegel

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ON THE COVER
Lineworker Carlos Rubio works in Yalicar, Guatemala, about a thousand miles from home.
Photo by Chris Burrows
ABOVE
Nikki Johnson-Kunz works alongside her husband, Jason Kunz, on the shrimper St. Vincent.
Photo by Erich Schlegel



Before electricity, a kerosene lamp was about the only reprieve from total darkness.

Bartlett Lit the Way

YOU'RE HOLDING THIS magazine because you're a member of an electric cooperative.

You're a member of an electric cooperative because you live in what used to be one of the darkest spots in the country—where utility companies refused to build infrastructure for rural Texans.

You're benefiting today from one of the earliest examples of crowdfunding, starting in 1935, when farmers and ranchers put up seed money and then secured loans from the Rural Electrification Administration to create their own power companies. Grassroots efforts like this took hold all across rural America.

But the first one was in Bartlett, a little Central Texas town.

And this month, Bartlett Electric Cooperative will hold its 90th annual meeting. The timing is perfect: October is National Cooperative Month.

> "I want my people out of the mud, and I want my people out of the dark."
>
> —U.S. REP. SAM RAYBURN, ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE PIONEER

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite Halloween costume was . . .

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 August prompt: **The headline for my life, in five words, is . . .**

It keeps getting better, friends.
GINA MARIE
BANDERA EC
BANDERA

Still becoming my best self.
MI-HYUN PARK
COSERV
FRISCO

Keep trying and keep smiling.
JOYCE GRISHAM
PEDERNALES EC
BLANCO

I am superwoman after all.
JANE PATTERSON
BOWIE-CASS EC
TEXARKANA

Uno mas cerveza, por favor.
BARNEY BASDEN
NAVARRO COUNTY EC
CORSICANA

Visit our website to see more responses.



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Swamps

RECOMMENDED READING
With Cooperatives, You've Got a Friend, a feature story from 2009, sheds some light on a business model that shines brightly across Texas. Find it on our website.

ENTER ONLINE



JASON DAVID PAGE

AUGUST 2026 TCP Kitchen

"Grammie's Rice Krispies Squares took me back to my childhood in Ohio. I have a 1971 booklet in which I wrote 'very, very good' by the scotcheroos recipe."

RAE ANN ELDER
SOUTH PLAINS EC
LUBBOCK

Yahoo for Scotcheroos

Scotcheroos [TCP Kitchen, August 2026] originated on Rice Krispies cereal boxes in the 1960s. And, yes, they remain popular in the Midwest. My family continues to enjoy them at nearly every gathering 60 years later.

Alice Darland
GVEC
Schertz

Cool Song Details

Cool Water [Currents, August 2026] was made famous by the Sons of the Pioneers, of which Roy Rogers was the original leader. Dale Evans was not.

The songwriter, Bob Nolan, was one of the group's original members. He penned it in 1936, and Rogers' band recorded it in 1941.

Chris Jones
Bowie-Cass EC
Linden

That Sonorous Voice

It's About Time [August 2026] is classic W.F. Strong writing. Without looking at the author's name, I knew who wrote the lazy, quiet story after the first paragraph. I heard him read it in my head.

Mr. Strong is a Texas treasure like Terlingua or J. Frank Dobie. Thanks for including the QR code so we can hear that sonorous voice read about cowboy time on a quiet Sunday morning. It touched my Texas soul.

Cela Clay
Bluebonnet EC
Austin

Rewarding All Month

Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoy the magazine. I try to limit my reading to make it last an entire month. It has made me laugh, smile and cry on occasion.

Mona Mather
GVEC
New Braunfels



BRYAN PETERSON

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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Texans work to deliver electricity to a remote Guatemalan village. "It's a lot more than turning wrenches," says co-op worker Oscar Medrano. "It's changing lives."



Texas lineworkers bring life-changing light to a grateful community in Guatemala

‘That’s What We Do’

STORY AND PHOTOS BY CHRIS BURROWS

An unexpected sound interrupts the morning routine in the remote small town of Yalicar, Guatemala, on November 6, 2025. Between the usual rooster crows, the guttural calls of howler monkeys and rumbling motorbikes, someone shouts “Headache!” in plain English.

Then, around a corner, another warning: “Headache!” as bits of wire clatter to the ground at the feet of electrical lineworkers and onlookers gathered around a power pole along a dirt road.

This is the sound of history.

More than 115 families live in Yalicar, about a mile from Mexico, along the Río Chixoy in northern Guatemala. Twenty-five years ago, this patch of rolling tropical lowlands was a rubber farm. After the farm shut down, around the year 2000, many workers stayed behind. They built homes, churches, a school—a community—without electricity. Until last November.

That’s when a group of 22 lineworkers from 10 electric cooperatives in South Texas traveled hundreds of miles, by air and treacherous roads, to this remote corner of Central America, where they rendezvoused with more than $270,000 worth of donated materials for a life-changing construction project. With the help of the local electric utility and engineers from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Texans built a power grid and wired 135 homes in 20 days.

As a man named Santiago watches workers wire the home where he lives with his wife and five kids, he says, “*Pienso que lo cambia todo* (I think it changes everything).”

Making Connections

On the first day of work in Yalicar, the Texans split into groups: construction and house wiring. The construction team climbs poles, mounts hardware, and raises lines and transformers. The other crew goes house by house, installing light bulbs, switches and power outlets.

They are welcomed into small, ramshackle homes where families sleep in hammocks and small beds in one or two rooms.

“I’ve never been somewhere where the people have dirt floors and thatched roofs and no insulation in their houses,” lineworker Greg Seiler says. “It puts a lot of things in perspective.”





LEFT Lineworkers Cipriano Amaro, below, and Robert Holloway wire a home.

ABOVE "It will benefit the children because they have the chance to study at night. In the past that was impossible," says a pastor named Alberto, whose last name can't be written in English.

OPPOSITE Locals watched the Texas crew's progress over the three weeks they worked in Yalicar.

Residents, who have little means, show their gratitude however they can.

"We were wiring a house, and this older gentlemen brought all of us a cup of Coke," Seiler says. "It wasn't cold, but we drank it. And I thought, this is pretty neat. He doesn't have much to give, but he's trying to be hospitable and show us his appreciation."

The lineworkers support local businesses, buying and munching on sweet, fresh rambutan, a fruit grown in Guatemala, and sourcing fresh socks. Saul Leyva needs a pair after he succumbs to a hidden stream. Unbowed by his wet pants and boots as he drives to the next pole, he says, "I still can't believe I'm actually here."

In addition to lineworkers from the local utility, Empresa Municipal Rural de Electricidad, the Texans are helped along by men in the village and eager and curious kids.

"I was up on the pole, and somebody was handing me up material that I asked for," Taylor McGaugh says. "I look down, and there's about five kids working the handline, which I was not expecting."

The Co-op Way

While the South Texans may feel at home in these warm surrounds, where cattle graze, pigs and chickens run wild, a Texas flag is raised alongside those of EMRE and Guatemala, and the chorus to *Take Me Home, Country Roads* is belted out from pole tops—they are hundreds of miles away and 90 years in the past.

In 1930s Texas, when investor-owned utilities refused to build lines to rural areas, farmers, ranchers and their families banded together and, with help from the newly formed federal Rural Electrification Administration, created electric cooperatives that now serve millions of Texans connected by more than 340,000 miles of power lines. This project in Central America came about because of a similar kind of cooperation.

"It's really an eye-opener to know that literally a mile from this village, people have had electricity for years and years," says Paul Bourland, a line superintendent, "and it's just because that's a private investor that refuses to build because there's no money out there.

"It's kind of like the reason co-ops exist."

For a lot of the lineworkers, it's a hard reality.

"Your emotions kind of got to you when you realized what you're actually doing for these people. Everything that they had in their house, I could put in the back of my pickup truck," Jeff Bilski says. "You see these people every day. The language barrier was difficult, but you could tell they were happy to see you. It was incredible.

"Sometimes at night, laying in bed, it would bring tears to my eyes."

Some of the families used jury-rigged solar systems or batteries to power small electronics or even charge cellphones, but for the most part, when the sun set, schoolwork, soccer and life stopped. Food was prepared over fires.

A man named Marcelino, whose native last name cannot be spelled out in English, is the elected leader for Yalicar. Like most natives of the area, he speaks Q'eqchi', a Mayan language.

"We never thought something like this could happen," he says through a translator. "But now I see the people working on the poles, I see the people working around us, and I'm really grateful and I'm really excited."

He has a message for the Texans in his town.

"From the bottom of my heart, I would like to say 'Thank you,' " he says. "Unfortunately we don't speak the same language, so we can't have a conversation, but I would like to thank them.

"They left their families, and they are giving their time to help us."

A New Era

Jesse Rivera isn't sure what to think one morning when he pulls up to a jobsite adjacent to the village's soccer field.

The Texan is used to being greeted by a gaggle of curious kids. But this morning, one of the older children, named Randy, is sweaty and wiped out.

"In Spanish, I'm like, '*¿Qué pasó que tienes?* (What's wrong?),' " Rivera says. "And he's like, '*Jugué fútbol toda la noche.*' They played soccer all night long. He gave me a hug, and he thanked me for it."

In ways big and small, life is changing in Yalicar.

"Most linemen never get an opportunity like this," Rivera says as he suits up to climb a pole in a marshy field far from modern comforts but perilously close to venomous pit vipers and tarantulas. "This is what we live for."

Texas is one of 19 states that have sent co-op crews to Guatemala and Bolivia since 2012 through NRECA International. All told, over the course of the past 14 years, more than 600 American lineworkers have built 155 miles of line in 40 communities as part of a commitment to the co-op principle of Concern for Community.

All told, this Texas crew outfits 87 poles, strings 5 miles of power lines and hangs six transformers—working sunup to sunset without bucket trucks or many of their usual tools—to bring power to 135 homes, a school, and a handful of churches and stores across the villages of Yalicar and neighboring Entre Ríos.

Toward the end of the trip, as they prepare to connect the newly built lines to the existing grid, lineworkers scatter around the village to watch for signs of trouble. EMRE workers insert a fuse, and popping noises ring out.

A frantic search confirms: It's just fireworks—the start of festivities.

"Every house was a celebration," Rivera says. "They were full of joy."

A new age has dawned in Yalicar, and hundreds of grateful Guatemalans enter the 21st century.

"I look over, and there's an iPhone plugged in, charging," lineworker Glenn Kelley says. "And then the very next neighbor, I go over there, and there's a kid sitting there, and a man's giving him a haircut with a pair of clippers plugged in."

The work has been grueling, but this moment is uniquely gratifying.

"Anytime you get the chance to help somebody out—that's kind of what we do in this industry," lineworker Matt Trenck says. "It's kind of a calling—overseas or next door, that's what we do."

Before the lineworkers leave town for the two-day trek back to Texas, they are invited to play in a village-wide soccer tournament. Ringing out when a rogue pass sails toward onlookers: "Headache!" ■

TCP Watch the video on our website to get to know the lineworkers and the folks they helped.

2025 Guatemala Delegation

Jackson EC: Paul Bourland, Martín Flores Jr., Carlos Rubio
Karnes EC: Glenn Kelley, Paul Rodriguez
Magic Valley EC: Felix Gauna, Manny Yanez
Medina EC: Edward Varnador
Nueces EC: Robert Holloway, Oscar Medrano, Manny Pina
Rio Grande EC: Cipriano Amaro, Saul Leyva
San Bernard EC: Jeff Bilski, Kevin Dvorak
San Patricio EC: Jesse Rivera, Martin Villarreal
South Texas EC: Taylor McGaugh, Greg Seiler
Victoria EC: Laddy Brown, Matt Trenck, Zeke Ybarra



An OLD SALT and a SEAFARING DIVA

As the Gulf shrimping industry dwindles, this 93-year-old—with his savvy first mate—still works the nets

BY PAM LEBLANC • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL



The sky looks as thick and gray as dryer lint when the St. Vincent glides away from Pier 19 and into the Galveston Ship Channel with Capt. Jerome Kunz at the helm early on a Sunday morning.

Pops, as Kunz is called, knows this channel well. He's been shrimping here since he was 10, and at 93 he's still dragging the nets twice a week.

I've come to Galveston in mid-May to join Pops and his daughter-in-law Nikki Johnson-Kunz, known as the Texas Shrimp Diva, on the St. Vincent and learn more about the shrimping business in Texas. Jason Kunz, Nikki's husband and the youngest of Pops' 10 children, is here too.

But this is no glamour tour. I'm warned that I'm likely to get wet, that the back-and-forth between shrimpers on the radio will get raunchy, and that the bathroom, if I need it, is a bucket. I have planned accordingly.

When we meet at the dock at 5:45 a.m., Pops nearly crushes my hand in his welcoming grip. Nikki, wearing a pink skirt and a pink-and-black checked cap that says "Texas Shrimp Diva," leads me on board and shows me where I can stand without getting in the way.

It's welcome advice. Moving around a working shrimp boat feels a little like jumping into a rumbling engine, with heavy moving parts that could tear off a finger or flatten a toe. But it's peaceful, too, with dolphins surfacing in the boat's wake and pelicans flapping overhead.

Pops, wearing faded jeans held up by suspenders, steers the 53-foot St. Vincent past a cruise ship roughly 20 times its length. As we approach the historic tall ship Elissa, docked in the harbor, he tells me how he got his start in the shrimping business.

When Pops was a boy, his father bought a small boat and, with no firsthand experience, rigged it as a shrimping vessel.

ABOVE The St. Vincent drags its nets near the cruise ship port in Galveston.

OPPOSITE Jerome Kunz, best known as Pops, embraces daughter-in-law Nikki Johnson-Kunz.


KATIE'S
SEAFOOD MARKET
SHRIMP
Diva
HH
HaliiCare

When Pops was 10, he quit school to help his dad provide for the family. At 15, he was patching and making his own nets, something he still does today.

"When I was just a little guy, I'd go out with him," Pops tells me. "I thought I was pretty good at it, and I guess I was because I'm still doing it."

Eventually, he bought his own boat. But the work has taken its toll. Pops walks with a stoop earned from decades of bending over the sorting box. He extends a finger to show me where the tip was cut off in an accident. He's suffered too many cuts and bruises to count. The work was hard, but after Pops married, it supported his growing family.

For years, he worked alone, getting up before dawn and driving 18 miles from his home in Hitchcock to the pier seven days a week. Now that he's older, he only heads out on weekends. Nikki, a 56-year-old retired property manager, started joining him in 2018, when she noticed her father-in-law's injuries.

"I'm only out here for him," she says. "His mentality is 'I can either hurt at home or hurt while I'm working.' He's the most honest and dedicated man I've met in my life—but he does wear me out."

It took about a year to learn the ropes, but now Nikki's at home working the winch, raising and lowering nets, and culling and sorting the catch. She's taken on a new mission, too—raising awareness about wild-caught Gulf shrimp. Her Texas Shrimp Diva page on Facebook has attracted 89,000 followers who tune in to watch videos of her and Pops on the job.





After half an hour, the boat slows. Nikki ducks into the cabin to yank on a pair of waterproof coveralls and boots. Her makeup is perfect; her nails are manicured.

"You ready?" Pops says.

Nikki nods and the pair head out on deck, where Pops cranks the winch that lowers a pair of 1,200-pound metal trawl doors into the water. The net spreads out between the doors, and Pops returns to the cabin to steer the boat forward. Fifteen minutes later, he raises the nets from the water while Nikki and Jason maneuver the load over a live well and guide a stream of shrimp in.

Suddenly, everyone's moving at once. Nikki scoops up batches of the catch and spreads them onto a table. She and Jason use metal blades the size of license plates to quickly cull out small fish, squid and crabs, which they carefully return alive to the Gulf. Larger shrimp are separated out for table use; smaller shrimp will be sold as live bait or to buyers who dry it for snacks. Everything will be sold off the boat back at the pier.

Three times the nets go into the water, and three times the shrimpers sort and cull, their arms moving so quickly they're a blur. Just after 8 a.m., Nikki gets a call.

"Woo-hoo!" she hollers, throwing her arms in the air. "Donny wants live bait!"

An hour later, as Pops turns the boat around to head back to the pier, he tells me that shrimping is a lot like gambling.

"It's just like going to Las Vegas and rolling the dice," he says. "One day you'll get 1,000 pounds, the next day 10 pounds. You don't know what's coming up. I still get a charge out of that."

Back at the pier, Donny Stanfield, the owner of Bait Daddys on the west end of Galveston Island, meets the boat. Nikki, Pops and Jason are ready with 40 pounds of live shrimp. Stanfield pays them $5 a pound; he'll sell it at his shop for $13 a pint or $23 a quart. Business is just gearing up now, but during the summer, Stanfield will sell 700 pounds or more of live bait on a busy weekend.

"She's done an amazing job of getting attention to an industry that needs it," Stanfield says of Nikki. "The markets have changed. It's just not the way it was, and there are no young ones coming up to take the place of the people doing it now."



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP Johnson-Kunz talks to a pelican, which the Shrimp Diva's 89,000 Facebook followers know she has dubbed Jasmine. Sorting shrimp fresh from the Gulf.

ABOVE The St. Vincent in its berth at Pier 19 in Galveston.

> "We're just asking you to buy a product of the United States. That's what keeps us on the water."

For Pops, it's a different world than when he started. Gulf shrimp populations have remained stable, according to data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, but declining profits have pushed out most shrimpers. Gulf-harvested shrimp accounted for 28.7% of the U.S. market in 1984 but just 4.5% in 2023. Shrimp imported from Ecuador, Indonesia and India has flooded the market, and American shrimpers can't compete with their prices, especially as diesel costs have climbed.

With profits down and the number of independent shrimpers down, jobs in welding, seafood processing and boat repair also have declined.

Exacerbating the problem, some restaurants, either inadvertently or knowingly, advertise Gulf shrimp when they're selling imported shrimp. (A December 2025 study by Houston-based SeaD Consulting, which developed a genetic test that can determine the source of shrimp, found that eight of 22 area restaurants it tested were selling imported shrimp advertised as Gulf shrimp.)

Last September, a state law requiring sellers to accurately label shrimp as wild caught, farm raised or imported went into effect. Look for the Wild Caught Texas Shrimp logo.

"It's simple. When you're at the grocery store, flip over that bag of shrimp and see if it reads product of Ecuador, Indonesia or China," Nikki says. "We're just asking you to buy a product of the United States. That's what keeps us on the water." ■

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MESSAGE FROM GENERAL MANAGER/ CEO

JOHN ED SHINPAUGH

Electricity Remains a Great Value

LATE LAST YEAR, the U.S. minted the final penny.

The one-cent coin was one of the first made in 1793 after the mint was established, but by the end of its run in 2025, a penny cost as much as 3.7 cents to produce. It just wasn't worth it to keep making pennies.

This got me thinking about how the value of things changes over time. A penny used to be able to get you a piece of candy, a stamp, even a newspaper. Not so much these days.

It might seem like a penny couldn't get you much of anything now. But there is something of value you can still get for a cent: electricity.

Let's pretend the average rate for a kilowatt-hour of electricity is 20 cents. (In actuality, it's several cents lower than that.) That's 60 minutes of 500-watt electricity for a dime, so a penny of electricity equates to 50 watt-hours. It's enough to power a 9-watt LED light bulb for five and a half hours—all for only a penny.

That value is just as evident in other situations. Take, for instance, your smartphone. Using the same 20 cents per kilowatt-hour price, one penny's worth of electricity allows you to fully charge your iPhone more than nine times. You can charge it every day of the year for about 40 cents total.

We're fortunate that electricity is such an excellent value because we have a huge appetite for it. We use it for lighting, heating, cooking, cooling, refrigeration, cleaning, washing, entertainment, communications—even transportation these days.

That's real value.

As technology has evolved, we've only grown more dependent on electricity. It's hard to even imagine life without it, and it's incredible to realize how much value it brings us, especially when you compare the cost of electricity to other goods.

Rising prices for gas, groceries and other goods put pressure on all of us, but I'm proud of the work we do at Fannin Electric Cooperative to minimize the impact of rising costs where we can and help keep electricity a great value.

The first electric cooperatives were created 90 years ago when investor-owned utilities decided it wasn't worth it to provide electricity to rural areas. They believed they wouldn't be able to make a profit.

But farmers recognized the value electricity would bring to their farms and homes and banded together to power their communities.

At Fannin EC, we're proud to continue the co-op tradition. Our team works hard every day to power our community with safe, reliable and affordable electricity. ■



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Indigenous Peoples Day
Farmers Day
Monday, October 12

Halloween
Saturday, October 31

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October Billing Schedule

Cycle 1 Dates

BILLING	October 2
DUE	October 21
DISCONNECT	November 4

Cycle 2 Dates

BILLING	October 9
DUE	October 28
DISCONNECT	November 12

Cycle 3 Dates

BILLING	October 16
DUE	November 5
DISCONNECT	November 19

Cycle 4 Dates

BILLING	October 23
DUE	November 12
DISCONNECT	November 30

Fannin Electric Cooperative

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PHOTO: GENO ESPONDA

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Taming the Trinity

One of our most vital rivers is also one of our moodiest

BY SCOT MCFARLANE • PHOTO BY DAVID WORTHINGTON

ON A HOT SUMMER EVENING in 1975, dozens of Texans filed into a high school auditorium in Trinidad, about 50 miles southeast of Dallas. They were there to answer one simple question: could, or more importantly *should*, the Trinity River be tamed? Everyone present knew that the river was changing—it wasn't quite so polluted anymore, at least—but the floods seemed to be worsening, ruining crops and drowning cattle.

Earlier generations had faced the same problems. And so that summer and the following winter, Texans gathered to debate what to do about one of the state's wildest, moodiest rivers.

The Trinity's extreme variability easily puts it among the most unruly American rivers. On its lower half, running from below Dallas to Trinity Bay on the Gulf, the channel might be a mere few hundred feet wide during low flows. But a flood in that same location can spread water more than 5 miles. This kind of variability made it hard to plan when and whether to plant crops or develop land within the flood plain.

Hundreds of Texans participated in official hearings like the one in Trinidad at towns along the Trinity, such as Crockett, Huntsville and Liberty, in 1975 and 1976. Archived transcriptions of these events created an invaluable record of how Texans grappled with what should be done about the Trinity.

These were raucous affairs, with booing, clapping and shouting, as wild as the river itself. Participants made their voices heard, and, in the process, they significantly influenced the management of the river that about half of all Texans depend upon today.

The stakes were high. Anything—livestock, crops, property—in the Trinity flood plain was vulnerable. Yet at the same time, the river's floods (and the nutrient-rich sediment they brought with them) were also what allowed farmers to grow much more than in the drier and less fertile uplands. The extensive network of earthen levees and reservoirs built by the 1970s, meanwhile, was doing little to manage the flooding.

Residents were divided on what to do about it. Some testified that bolder plans might solve the issue of flooding once and for all. The proposed Tennessee Colony Reservoir, for example, would have covered a good portion of the Trinity in Henderson, Navarro, Freestone and Anderson counties and would have been the largest lake (nearly 150,000 acres) solely in Texas.

But many other Texans were skeptical. What, they asked, was the point of flood protection when the management plans included permanent flooding? As a woman at the Fairfield hearing put it, covering up the "best land" with a lake didn't make sense.

Farther downriver, the construction of Lake Livingston in the 1960s had already forever flooded tens of thousands of acres. One rancher said he used to graze on land that is now "30 foot underwater, and I can't run no cows there now."

While the hearings could grow heated, with both sides lobbing accusations at the other, there was also widespread agreement that the Trinity was the lifeblood of these communities. People shared their stories, explaining the difference between a "clear rise" and a "muddy rise." A clear rise "does all the damage and doesn't leave you nothing," whereas a muddy rise "takes all your crops, but it leaves you better soil."

And thankfully, the days of "black rises"—when raw sewage flowed down from Dallas and Fort Worth, leaving massive piles of floating dead catfish—were over.

Ultimately, the consensus that emerged from the hearings of 1975 and 1976 was that the Trinity was best dealt with incrementally. Progress meant bringing more sewage treatment plants online, not canalizing the whole river.

We live with the results today: The Trinity River is now one of the most important rivers in Texas. More Texans live near and depend on its water than any other river in the state. While Houston and Dallas rely heavily on its water, the middle and lower sections are vital for ranchers, hunters and fishers.

But it remains untamed, too. More trophy-sized alligator gar, a massive, ancient fish, are caught on the Trinity than anywhere else in the world. These gar, along with many other animals, depend on the river's floods—a natural rhythm that endures thanks to all those Texans who shared their stories 50 years ago. ■

The Trinity River on a calm day in Dallas belies its reputation as one of Texas' moodiest rivers.



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

Steinbeck's Texas

The acclaimed author traced our roads in 1960 and couldn't outrun our pride

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN JAY CABUAY

I'M RATHER CERTAIN that most Texans have heard these words: "Texas is a state of mind, but I think it is more than that. It is a mystique closely approximating a religion."

John Steinbeck wrote that in *Travels With Charley: In Search of America*. Charley was a standard poodle and Steinbeck's traveling companion in 1960, when together they cruised America's highways and back roads in a GMC pickup truck with a makeshift camper that Steinbeck called Rocinante (named after Don Quixote's horse).

What may be news to many is that Steinbeck's comments about Texas went well beyond this sentence—10 pages beyond. The Pulitzer- and Nobel-winning novelist from California (and later New York) had a lot to say about our state in this nonfiction work, but, as people on the border say, he wrote it *con cariño* (with affection).

"When I started this narrative I knew that sooner or later I would have to have a go at Texas, and I dreaded it," Steinbeck wrote. "I could have bypassed Texas about as easily as a space traveler can avoid the Milky Way. Once you are in Texas it seems to take forever to get out, and some people never do."

Steinbeck's third wife, Elaine Anderson Steinbeck, was from Austin. "Even if I wanted to avoid Texas, I could not, for I am wived in Texas and mother-in-lawed and uncled and aunted and cousined within an inch of my life," he wrote.

"Staying away from Texas geographically is no help whatsoever, for Texas moves through our house in New York, and our fishing cottage at Sag Harbor. ... It permeates the world to a ridiculous degree."

Steinbeck lamented the struggles all writers have in trying to define Texas and Texans. He said they all end up "floundering" and lose themselves in "generalizations" that have little meaning. He said that he was no exception to this rule, but he tried anyway.

"Texas," he wrote, "is a state of mind. Texas is an obsession. Above all, Texas is a nation in every sense of the word."

But, Steinbeck noted, "A Texan outside of Texas is a foreigner." He said his wife claimed to be a "Texan that got away."

But he didn't buy it. He wrote, "She has virtually no accent until she talks to a Texan, when she instantly reverts. Soon she is saying yes, air, hair and guess with two syllables: yayus, ayer, hayer and gayus."

Texans claim "the right to secede at will," he wrote. "They want to be able to secede, but they don't want anyone to want them to."

And he learned about the serious business of football. "Sectional football games have the glory and despair of war," he wrote, "and when a Texas team takes the field against a foreign state, it is an army with banners."

Above all, Steinbeck knew well that Texans are tight. If you attack one Texan, you attack them all. They circle the wagons. There may be no "geographical unity in Texas," he wrote. "Its unity lies in the mind. And this is not only in Texas. The word Texas becomes a symbol to everyone in the world." ■

Campfire Favorites

Gather 'round the blaze, and we'll bring the treats

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

It's not a camping trip without s'mores! The 1927 recipe for s'mores, as written in a Girl Scouts guidebook, says to toast marshmallows over a fire "to a crisp gooey state." Today I'm sharing a skillet version that you can easily whip up in your trusty cast iron.

Skillet S'mores Dip

4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter
1 bag semisweet chocolate chips (12 ounces)
4 cups mini marshmallows
Chocolate graham crackers, for serving

1. Preheat a charcoal or gas grill for indirect cooking over medium-high heat.

2. Place a 10-inch cast-iron skillet on grill for 5 minutes.

3. Remove skillet from the heat and melt butter, covering the entire cooking surface evenly.

4. Add chocolate chips to evenly cover the bottom of skillet. Top with marshmallows.

5. Place skillet over indirect heat. Close grill or cover skillet with a lid. Grill 10–12 minutes or until marshmallows are slightly melted and lightly toasted.

6. Serve warm with chocolate graham crackers.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Dulce de Leche S'mores.



Cowboy Soup

CAROLYN CRUMP
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

After a day of camping, a hearty bowl of Cowboy Soup would really hit the spot. Budget-friendly to feed a hungry crowd, this soup has all the flavors of something that simmered all day.

1½ pounds ground chuck
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 small onion, chopped
1 can ranch-style beans (15 ounces)
1 can tomatoes with green chiles (10 ounces)
3 cans minestrone soup (15 ounces each)
Salt, to taste
Ground black pepper, to taste

1. Place a grill-safe medium pot on a preheated grill grate or coals. Add ground chuck, garlic and onion. Brown chuck, breaking up with a spoon, until fully cooked. Remove from heat, drain and discard drippings.

2. Return to heat and add beans, tomatoes and minestrone. Bring to a boil, then move pot to area of indirect heat on grill. Simmer 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Serve warm.

SERVES 6–8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPE PHOTOS: JASON DAVID PAGE. WINNER PHOTO: COURTESY DANIEL BATES



$500 WINNER

Fireside Banana Boats

DANIEL BATES
COSERV



I want to sit around sharing campfire stories and enjoying these banana boats every weekend. Warm banana, melted chocolate and ooey gooey marshmallows: the taste of a fun camping trip.

5 bananas, peel on
¼ cup chocolate chips
¼ cup mini marshmallows
Optional toppings: peanut butter chips, crushed graham crackers, nuts, caramel drizzle

1. With the peel still on, slice bananas lengthwise, cutting about halfway through so they open like a pocket.

2. Stuff each pocket with chocolate chips and marshmallows. Wrap each banana loosely in aluminum foil.

3. Place foil packets on hot coals or a grill grate 5–10 minutes, turning once or twice.

4. Carefully unwrap, add optional toppings and eat with a spoon.

SERVES 5

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Dad's Dutch Oven Peach Cobbler

EMILY TEMPLETON
BANDERA EC

Like all good camp recipes, the ingredient list for this one is short, though the taste is anything but. This cobbler is a warm delight after a day outdoors. Add everything to the Dutch oven and sit back to enjoy the fire while your dessert bakes.

2 cans sliced peaches (15 ounces each)
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
2 tablespoons brown sugar
1 box vanilla cake mix (13.25 ounces)
4–8 tablespoons (½–1 stick) butter, sliced
Whipped cream or ice cream, for serving

1. Lightly grease a seasoned Dutch oven and add sliced peaches, spreading to cover the bottom.

2. Sprinkle peaches with cinnamon and brown sugar. Stir to combine. Sprinkle cake mix over the peaches to evenly coat, breaking up clumps if needed. Place slices of butter, spaced evenly, on dry cake mix.

3. Cover and place directly on bed of coals, then carefully place 10 coals on lid. Bake 30–45 minutes, rotating every 15 minutes to evenly bake.

4. Serve warm with a heaping spoonful of whipped cream or scoop of ice cream.

SERVES 10

Before That Fire Goes Out

Why not go ahead and grill dessert too? When fruit is exposed to heat, the flavor intensifies, the fruit becomes sweeter and its natural sugars caramelize.

My favorite fruits to grill: pineapples, peaches, nectarines, plums, pears and bananas.

Select fruit that is ripe but still firm to the touch. Slice it in half or make the slices thick to prevent them from falling through grates.

Brush with a little oil to prevent sticking to the grill. Grill 2–3 minutes on each side, until slightly charred.

—Vianney Rodriguez



HOLIDAY GIFT TCP GUIDE

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Horror in the Court

Some say a ghost still haunts the scene of a grisly courthouse attack

BY CHET GARNER

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT historic Texas courthouses that makes them seem haunted even before anyone starts telling ghost stories. Maybe it's the ominous architecture, the creaking staircases, or the fact that generations of drama, heartbreak and attempts at justice have unfolded inside their walls.

In Gatesville, west of Waco, the Coryell County Courthouse doesn't just *feel* haunted. According to the folks who work in the building, it absolutely is.

The building is undeniably beautiful with its ornate statues and domed clock tower standing like a limestone castle in the center of town since 1898. Stepping inside feels like entering another century as sunlight spills into the marble rotunda and portraits of long-forgotten judges stare down from the walls.

But ask the courthouse employees, law officers and late-night visitors, and they'll tell you there's much to this building that can't be seen. Many claim they've heard footsteps echoing through the empty rooms while some describe cold spots drifting down the halls. Objects move without explanation, and some even claim to have seen figures and faces. Mysterious things were happening so frequently that the workers decided to name (and blame) a ghost from 1909.

Folks believe the spirit goes back to a shooting that took place in the 52nd District courtroom, where a man named John Hanes was killed by his alleged victim, 16-year-old Verna Ware, through a courtroom window. The hailstorm of bullets also killed two bystanders. There are still bullet holes in the door behind the witness stand.

Standing in that courtroom, I couldn't help but glance over my shoulder more than once. The old wooden floor and benches groaned, and the silence carried a strange weight as if the building was watching me. Or maybe that was just the ghost. ■

ABOVE Chet outside the Coryell County Courthouse in Gatesville. Inside, an eerie presence remains from 1909.

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.

OCTOBER

6

Floresville [6, 8–10] Peanut Festival, (210) 317-7094, floresvillepeanutfestival.org

8

Groves [8–11] Pecan Festival, (409) 962-3631, grovescofc.com

9

Grapevine Barn Dance at Nash Farm, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Fredericksburg [9–11] Texas Mesquite & Fine Art Spectacular, (830) 481-9601, texasspectacular.com

Muenster [9–11] Oktoberfest, (940) 759-2227, muensterchamber.com

10

Burnet Texas State Button Society Fall Workshop and Sale, (903) 815-4771, texasstatebuttonsociety.com

Eagle Lake Scarecrow Stroll, (979) 234-2640, coeltx.net

Luling Night in Old Luling, (830) 875-0123, lulingcc.org

Tehuacana College Hill Festival, (512) 667-6500, savetexashall.org

Chappell Hill [10–11] Scarecrow Music Festival, (979) 530-7582, scarecrowmusicfestival.com

Edom [10–11] Art Festival, (903) 258-5192, edomarts.com

16

Brenham [16–18] Texas Arts & Music Festival, (979) 337-7580, texasartsandmusicfestival.com

17

China Spring Fall Festival, (254) 836-1825, facebook.com/stphilipchinaspring

Kerens Cotton Harvest Festival, (903) 396-2665, kerenscottonharvestfestival.com

Huntsville [17–18] Fall Festival, (936) 295-8159, saintthomashuntsville.org

Slaton [17–18] St. Joseph Sausage Festival and Oktoberfest, (806) 828-3944, slatonsausage.com

18

Fredericksburg Alias Brass, fredericksburgmusicclub.com

22

Corsicana Boo on the Block, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

30

Burton Wine & Wander, (979) 289-3378, bit.ly/wineandwander

Grapevine Bewitched by the Barn, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

Kerrville [30–Nov. 1] Texas Fleece & Fiber Festival, (361) 537-0503, texasfleeceandfiber.com

31

Garland Spooky Sprint, (760) 669-6471, runsignup.com

NOVEMBER

7

Prosper Out of the Darkness Denton & Collin Counties Walk, (972) 837-3322, afsp.org

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Tailgating

Taking a break from a hard day's work, attending a parade and celebrating the big game are all good excuses for a tailgate party. These readers show us how it's done.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ





1 KORO CURRIE
SAN BERNARD EC
A patriotic pup.

2 JANVIER WERNER
COSERV
"Our little bottle-baby goat, Chloe, loves to join in any activity, especially if it involves friends and food."

3 LINDA STEINHEBEL
COSERV
"Grandpa and grandson take a break after working on the lawn mower."

4 ALMA GARZA
MEDINA EC
"Back when tailgating meant blankets in the back of a pickup truck bed, folding chairs and family making memories the South Texas way."



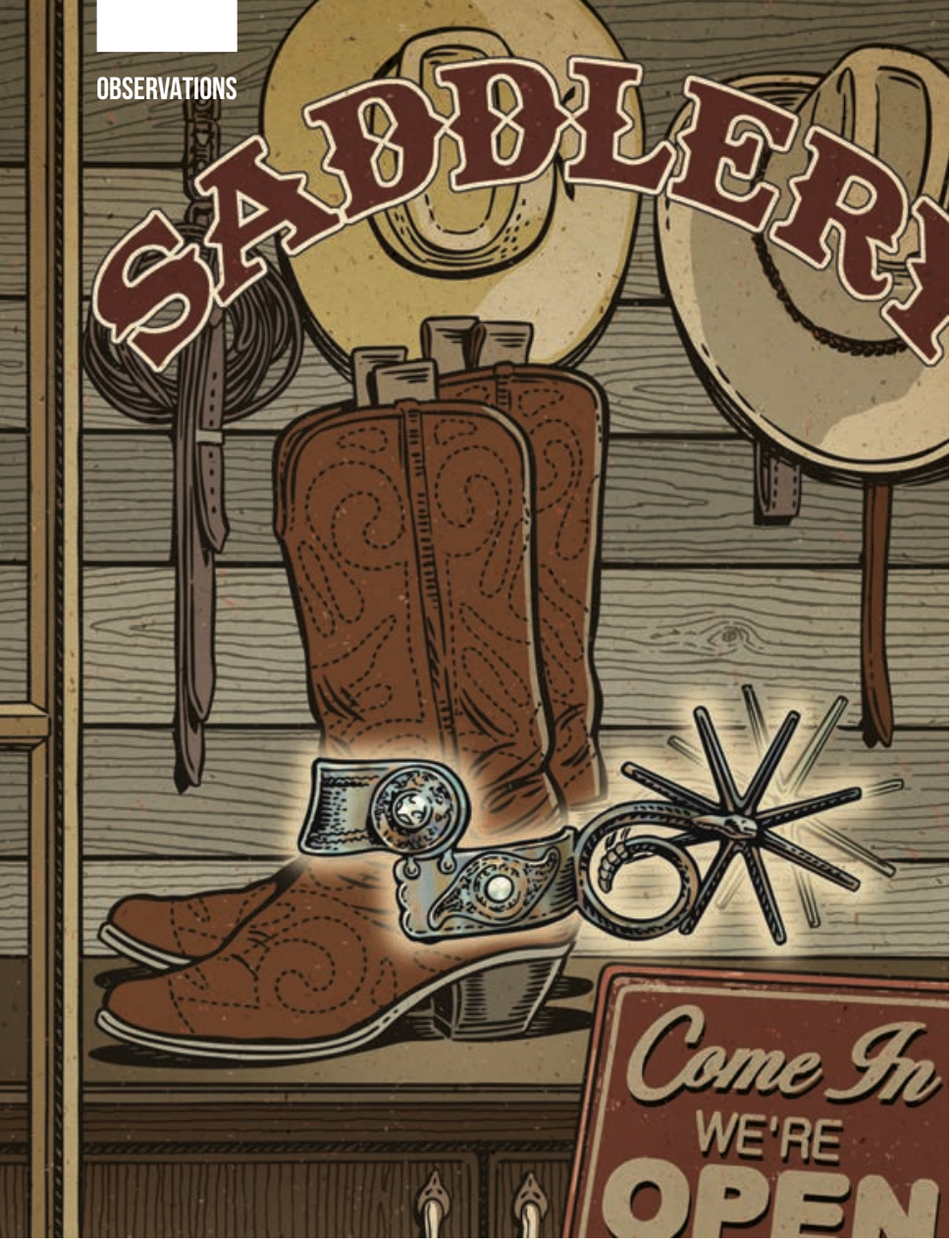


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IN THE GARDEN DUE NOV 10
COUNTRY CHURCHES DUE DEC 10

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



A Most Splendid Set of Spurs

Cowpunchers couldn't buy La Espuela Grandes No. 222, nor can this collector

BY HUGH EDMONDSON

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN KACHIK

WHEN MY FATHER found a single old spur on our ranch along the Goodnight-Loving Trail outside San Angelo more than 60 years ago, that sparked in me a lifelong fascination and a collection of hundreds of spurs representing dozens of craftsmen and more than 120 years of history.

But one eludes me, and it's a marvel.

Anyone with an interest in Kelly spurs has seen the cover of P.M. Kelly's Catalog No. 20 from 1927, with a picture of La Espuela Grandes No. 222. They were showy, oversized and, apparently, rare. They carried a hefty $100 price tag while most spurs in the catalog were $15 or less. Diamond Dicks, for example, were $10.

That cover image has little or no similarity to the first spurs crafted by Kelly, starting in the Panhandle in 1903 and later in El Paso. All this begs the question: Why did he make this elaborate, rather unpractical spur? He was a businessman focused on efficiency, productivity and output.

I suspect it was a marketing ploy. Of course, this is just speculation. But placed in a storefront window, a pair of extravagant La Espuela Grandes would loudly announce: We sell spurs!

That was the case at the R. E. Donaho Saddles & Cowhand Saddlery in San Angelo when Gov. Allan Shivers visited, according to a recorded interview between historian and writer Jane Pattie and Dr. Tom Reagan of Beeville, who was a knowledgeable resource on the topic of spurs and bits. The Donaho shop had La Espuela Grandes in the front window, and Shivers, governor from 1949 to 1957, borrowed them to wear to a special event.

Reagan says he tried unsuccessfully to purchase the spurs a few times, but they remained in the shop, on display, until one spur disappeared under suspicious circumstances. The remaining Kelly spur was copied by spur-maker Wallie Boone, creating a new pair—one marked "Kelly," the other "Boone"—and remained on display, until the "disappeared" spur was returned after a saddle shop employee died.

The employee's embarrassed wife returned the original. These three spurs a Kelly pair and Boone copy—now reside in the collection of Jay C. Lyndes in Montana.

There have been copies of La Espuela Grandes over the years, by Randy Butters and Jerry Wallace. They're exceptional in workmanship and fit the catalog description, and Gatesville collector Lloyd Mitchell included the Butters reproduction in his collection.

But I've never seen a genuine Kelly pair No. 222. I called Lyndes and offered $20,000 for his. "Well," he said, "I gave over $50,000 for them."

So, as I've done for decades, I'll just own them in my dreams. ■



Actual size is 40.6 mm

250 COLLECTION

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