

A GEM OF A THRIFT STORE
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RUNS THE SHOW

Texas Coop Power

FOR SAM HOUSTON EC MEMBERS

MARCH 2023

Herd Mentality

The Matagorda Bay
cattle drive is when cows
swim—across the Colorado

**SUPPORT
HELPING
HANDS**

SEE PAGE 19

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on Bills

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Cooperative

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High Satisfaction

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March 2023



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Gently Used, Generously Shared

A small thrift shop in the Hill Country funds scholarships for local students.

*By Kristen Pettineo
Photos by Scott Van Osdol*

10 Until the Cows Swim Home

The Matagorda cattle drive runs right through a river—as it has for 106 years.

Story and photos by Erich Schlegel

ON THE COVER

Randy Duncan, left, and Riley Rodriguez drive cattle into the Colorado River.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

ABOVE

Sally Clogston, left, founder, with April Langston, manager, of Pass It On.

Photo by Scott Van Osdol

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Antsy Onslaught

SCIENTISTS LAST YEAR came up with a global ant census, and it's unfathomable: 20 quadrillion. That's 20 followed by 15 zeroes. Think of it this way: Ants outnumber humans at least 2.5 million to 1.

And, no, most of them don't live in Texas, though more than 250 of the 14,000-plus species worldwide are native to our state.

The dreaded fire ant isn't one. They're invasive in Texas.



Bragging Rights

Sam Bennett of Madisonville became the first Texas A&M University golfer to win the U.S. Amateur Championship, last year. The title earns him a spot at the Masters Tournament; watch for him April 6–9.

The All-American's family are members of MidSouth Electric Cooperative.

TCP Contests and More

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March 6

National Dentist's Day

Did you know Texas has four dental schools? There's Texas A&M in Dallas, Texas Tech in El Paso, and University of Texas branches in Houston and San Antonio.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

IF I COULD FLY,
I WOULD ...

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.

Below are some of the responses to our January prompt: **The greatest Texan ever is ...**

Willie Nelson. Seriously, how is that even a question?

SHELLI CONWAY
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
ANNA

Quanah Parker, who tried to do the best for his people in war and in peace.

MIKE DENEHY
PEDERNALES EC
LAGO VISTA

Lyndon B. Johnson, because he brought electricity to the rural Hill Country.

AARON DENMAN
TRINITY VALLEY EC
KEMP

George Strait.

JACKSON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
VIA FACEBOOK

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Roy P. Benavidez, who received a Medal of Honor for a series of daring and extremely valorous actions during the Vietnam War in 1968.

MATTHEW D. KONOPA
PEDERNALES EC
SPRING BRANCH

Visit our website to see more responses.

TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM



Women's History Month

MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, Katherine Anne Porter survived a pandemic. At 28, she was hospitalized for months with influenza, and her hair turned white. Porter's harrowing experience informed the title story in her trilogy, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*.

Known for her precise, lyrical prose, Porter won a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award in 1966 for her *Collected Stories*.

The author's childhood home in Kyle, now the Katherine Anne Porter Literary Center, hosts readings by visiting writers and was designated a national literary landmark in 2002 with a benediction from Laura Bush. "This house now stands as a living memorial to one of our most beloved, and best, storytellers," Bush said.



COURTESY CHET GARNER

Afterlife Sentence

“Does anyone else think that’s carrying a grudge a little far? Really?”

LORENA BOREN
BAILEY COUNTY EC

Distant Relative?

According to the late El Paso historian Leon Metz, John Wesley Hardin’s father was a Methodist minister named James Hardin and moved from Virginia to Tennessee to Texas [Afterlife Sentence, January 2023].

Perhaps I am related to John. My great-grandfather was a Methodist minister named James Hardin and moved from Virginia to Tennessee to Texas. I wish to make three things clear: I do not own a gun; I am not a lawyer; and I want to believe that I am not a sociopath.

Vincent C. Kemendo
Pedernales EC
Canyon Lake

Thoroughbreds can do anything [Stable Futures, January 2023]. I’ve had 50 years working with them. I love them.

NANCY KEIM
VIA FACEBOOK

Welcoming an Opossum

I have always loved nature and try to read, read, read [Oh! Possum!, January 2023]. You gave me a wonder person, Martha Deering, who introduced me to an opossum. What a wonder that couple is, taking such care of this animal. She describes it in such fun ways.

Brenna Quebbemann
CECA
Comanche

I, too, have an opossum for a pet—one of God’s gentle creatures that unfortunately was given a very short life span. Ours is named Jones, and he travels with us when we visit state parks and other places in Texas. We rescued Jones from a county road where his momma met her fate. Thank you for letting readers know that North America’s only marsupial is actually a pretty cool critter.

Rick Martin
Coleman County EC
Santa Anna



KIRSTEN ULVE

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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

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

Texas Co-op Power

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POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Gently Used, Generously Shared

A small thrift shop in Comfort gives local students a boost for schooling

ASK MERCEDES ELLIS about her favorite place to shop, and her answer may surprise you.

You might expect the Texas State University student to rattle off well-known fashion brands or influencer-approved Instagram boutiques. Instead, she'll name a teeny, tiny secondhand shop in the small town of Comfort: the aptly named Pass It On.

It's not just that Ellis, 20, enjoys sifting through racks of other people's castoffs—though she does enjoy that. (In fact, she once found a pair of Gucci shoes for under \$10.) It's that more than anything, Ellis loves Pass It On because the store provides for its Hill Country community.

The shop offers a little bit of everything—clothing, furniture, books, appliances and seemingly everything between—at rock bottom prices. There's not much they won't sell. The inventory is unpredictable and priced to move. Recently there was an old leather dentist's chair for sale on the shop floor.

But here's what really makes Pass It On unique and why Ellis says she'll always be a customer: Nearly every cent of the store's proceeds funds college scholarships for students in the Comfort school district. Ellis herself received one of them.

"This shop has made so much possible for me," she says. "Being a college student, every dollar really helps. This scholarship makes a big difference for me and my family. It's a cycle of generosity, and I feel so grateful to be a small part of it."

April Langston is also part of that cycle of generosity.

Langston, a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative, never expected to run the 25-year-old nonprofit thrift shop. She spent her career working in public education, advocating for students with special needs in the Northside and Boerne school districts. But in 2014, not long after retiring, Langston's husband died in a plane crash. They were married 37 years. Her world fell apart.

"That's when all of my plans changed," Langston says. "I was retired and widowed. Suddenly I had all this time. I had to learn a different life. And it led me to Pass It On."

In processing her grief, Langston felt drawn to volunteer work and community outreach. At Pass It On, she does both.

Langston leads a small army of volunteers who do pretty much everything—process donations, organize displays, help customers—whatever it takes to keep the doors open and the lights on.

The store is only open for eight hours each week—Fridays and Saturdays from noon to 4 p.m. Despite the limited hours, Pass It On has raised big money for Comfort students seeking education beyond high school. Langston says the store provided \$65,000 in scholarships last year, up from \$50,000 the year before. In all, 191 students have received \$760,000 in aid.

"I guess it's really not that different from what I've done all my career," Langston says. "I've always worked in education, and I've always helped kids. The opportunity to go to college can change a child's life. I don't want anyone to miss out on that chance because they couldn't afford it."

"And that's why we're all here at Pass It On."

Langston doesn't like to turn anyone down. For the past two years, Pass It On provided scholarships to every student who applied—all powered by people's donations and, according to Langston, "a whole lot of Windex."

But the store isn't just a source of scholarship money. It's a legitimate shopping destination in Comfort, a town of about 3,000. Langston says there's always a line of shoppers waiting outside the door when she opens.

"When I tell you we've got something for everyone, we've *really* got something for everyone here," she says, laughing. "If you come to Pass It On and leave empty-handed, you aren't looking hard enough."

And that's one thing Langston makes clear. She isn't in the business of selling junk. Of course, they get offerings that don't make it to the shop floor, and those get donated elsewhere. But she's seen Prada purses, Coach bags, delicate glassware and fine china all come through her door. Sometimes, even she's a customer. Sure enough, Langston checks the tag on her shirt. She got it from—where else?—Pass It On.

Despite the tens of thousands of dollars in scholarship money provided over the years, Langston will tell you *she's* the one who's grateful. After the tragedy of her husband's death, she found meaning and purpose at the storefront on Front Street. And for her, that's priceless.

"I consider this my responsibility now," Langston says. "I feel God's hand over this work. And as long as I can keep up, I'll be here doing it." ■

TCP Visit Pass It On via video on our website.

YOU CAN HELP Pass It On accepts gently used items to support its scholarships. Make donations at 716 Front St., Comfort 78013.

OPPOSITE April Langston at Pass It On in Comfort.





Until the **COWS** Swim Home



STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

Huebner Bros. Cattle Co. cowhands drive their cattle off Matagorda Peninsula and across the Colorado River for summer grazing near Bay City.

IT'S A SCENE STRAIGHT out of a campy old Western.

After a long day of driving cattle—from 5 a.m. until dark—that ends with pushing the herd to a cattle trap by an old Army air base, full-time cowboy Stephen Weathers rendezvous with fellow cowboys finally relieved of their saddles.

“Then we’d sit around the campfire, cooking cans of pork and beans and have a great time joking around,” he says. “When we’d finally get to sleep in the bunkhouse, anyone snoring would get a cowboy boot thrown at him.”



The Matagorda cattle drive runs right through a river—as it has for 106 years

Except this isn't a dusty trail to Abilene, Kansas, but a Gulf beach in Matagorda County. And instead of a marathon drive, it's more of a bovine biathlon.

The biannual Matagorda Bay cattle drive is one of the most historic and unique drives in the U.S. For more than 100 years, the Huebner Bros. Cattle Co. has been moving its herd back and forth between winter grazing pastures on the 30-mile-long Matagorda Peninsula and the summer pastures on the family's ranch south of Bay City. The operation involves

swimming the cattle across the 15-foot-deep Colorado River close to where it empties into the Gulf of Mexico.

Keith Meyer, Huebner Bros. ranch manager, is the fifth generation of cattlemen in his family to organize and run these drives. "Our family has been moving and swimming cattle on and off Matagorda Peninsula consecutively since 1917," says Meyer, who's been involved since he was 6 or 7. "I've grown up working this cattle drive alongside my father and grandfather."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Logan Meyer, 14, awaits the cattle as they reach Matagorda Bay Nature Park. Lauren Spanihel-Wahlberg and Randy Duncan keep watch over the spring herd of some 800 cattle.

he drives move the cattle to the peninsula for the winter months, then move them inland in the spring, just before hurricane season begins and storms threaten their safety. The cowboys time the crossings to occur during periods of slack current, when tidal motion is minimal.

Every November, just before Thanksgiving, about 550 head of cattle are moved in two-story 18-wheeler cattle trucks from the Huebner ranch to a holding pen near the beach. This area is part of the Lower Colorado River Authority's 1,333-acre Matagorda Bay Nature Park. After passing the coastal fishing town of Matagorda, the cattle are hauled down FM 2031, past homes on stilts along the Colorado River to the west and past 934 acres of protected Matagorda Bay wetlands to the east.

Once the cattle have been delivered to the holding pen and the road is blocked, Meyer and his team of 10–12 drovers lead



“Our family has been moving and swimming cattle on and off Matagorda Peninsula consecutively since 1917. I’ve grown up working this cattle drive alongside my father and grandfather.”

the herd toward the water. Some of them are local youngsters on horseback who are learning from the more seasoned veterans.

At Matagorda Bay Nature Park, the cattle drive takes a right-hand turn at the miniature golf course to the river’s edge, and the 100-yard swim to the peninsula begins. A small flotilla of cowboys on motorboats ensures the cattle don’t stray, and in about 15 minutes, all are across.

By the return trip in spring, the herd of 550 grows to about 800 bulls, cows and calves.

“I used to love the cattle drive,” says Weathers, a member of Jackson Electric Cooperative, which serves this corner of Matagorda County. He worked the drive for about 15 years. “We’d get on the peninsula early the first morning and start riding west down the beach. We’d split up our team. Some riders picking up cattle along the beach, some in the dunes covered in salt grass.”

Even though this Beefmaster breed of cattle is known for hardiness in harsh, humid coastal climates, the mosquitoes and biting flies on Matagorda Peninsula can be too much



"It's straight out of the Old West but with a 21st-century spin."

for the herd to handle as the weather warms. The seasonal change challenges the cowboys too.

"The warmer temperatures have brought the rattlesnakes out of hibernation," Weathers says. "You'll find rattlesnakes sunning themselves on top of the salt grass, perched about leg high as we ride. The snakes and the biting flies are enough to force some cattle to swim across the river on their own."

Thus begins the trek back to the Huebner ranch.

"Our ranch pastures have had time to rest over the winter, and the cattle and calves are ready to get going inland," Meyer says.

Jeralyn Novak, communications coordinator for Beefmaster Breeders United, calls the Matagorda Bay cattle drive a modern-day *Lonesome Dove*. It's "straight out of the Old West but with a 21st-century spin," she writes.

Jeff Crosby, executive director of the Colorado River Land Trust, a nonprofit that works to protect land and water in the Colorado River watershed, witnessed a spring cattle swim firsthand. "This is an important part of our historical Texas heritage," he says.

The cowboys don't set or share dates for the spring or fall drives, so lucky onlookers have only the weather and tides to go by. After more than a century of trial and error, these efficient workers have the drive down to a science.

"Cattle drives are still done the same way," Crosby says, "because moving cattle from one location to another was perfected long ago." ■



TOP The Matagorda drive includes moving the Beefmaster cattle along sidewalks. ABOVE Jacie Wahlberg, 7, helps with the roundup.

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Sam Houston EC Bills Feature New Info

HAVE YOU LOOKED at the back of your Sam Houston Electric Cooperative bill recently?

“Recent bills have a new feature,” said Andrea Tassin, Sam Houston EC billing supervisor. “On the back, there is a graph that shows daily electricity consumption and the high and low temperature of that day.”

Previously, only consumer-members who used the mySamHouston portal or app could see this information, but now all members have access to detailed information about how and when they use energy.

“Now members can see how their daily electricity consumption is affected by fluctuating temperatures,” said Ricky Harrell, chief member services officer. “Our weather in Southeast Texas can change greatly month to month, and that impacts how your home uses electricity.”

Reviewing electricity consumption each month—or more frequently using Sam Houston EC’s online tools and mobile app—can help members see how small changes in the ways they consume electricity can make a difference and save them money. ■

Helping Hands Program Supports Those in Need



SAM HOUSTON Electric Cooperative’s Helping Hands program provides funding to help members in need pay their electric bills.

“The last three years have been incredibly challenging for many local families,” said Rachel Frey, Sam Houston EC chief communications officer. “We encourage our employees and members to contribute to Helping Hands.”

The program is funded entirely by contributions from Sam Houston EC employees and members. Since the launch of Helping Hands in 1992, Sam Houston EC members have donated nearly \$500,000 to their friends and neighbors in need. Older adults, people with disabilities and families who have experienced extraordinary circumstances have all received a helping hand from the program.

Call Sam Houston EC at 1-800-458-0381 to add a contribution to your monthly bill or make a one-time donation. The amount you give can make a big difference. ■

POWER TIP

Save energy and money by setting equipment like printers and scanners to automatically switch to sleep or energy-saver mode when not in use.

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Keith Stapleton

A Staple of the Cooperative

Chief communications officer retires from Sam Houston EC

AFTER NEARLY 40 YEARS of dedicated service, Chief Communications Officer Keith Stapleton has retired from Sam Houston Electric Cooperative. He directed member services, communications and billing, and many consumer-members of the Cooperative may remember interacting with Stapleton at annual member meetings or community events.

“As one approaches retirement, it’s easy to become nostalgic and get caught up in reminiscing about the past,” Stapleton said. “But I am so proud of how far Sam Houston Electric Cooperative has come. We often say our employees are ‘the best in the business.’ Please know that is not an exaggeration. It is absolutely true.”

Sam Houston EC and its employees appreciate Stapleton’s dedication to serving our consumer-members with great care and for helping guide the Cooperative during his career.

“Keith Stapleton played a vital role in the leadership of our Cooperative during his tenure at Sam Houston Electric Cooperative,” said Doug Turk, CEO and general manager. “We wish him the best in his retirement. One mark of a great organizational leader is that they selflessly take the time to prepare the

future leaders of the organization. Keith did just that during his time at Sam Houston EC.”

Following Stapleton’s retirement, Ricky Harrell was selected as the first chief member services officer in the history of the Co-op and will manage the member services and billing departments. He previously served as the manager of member services from 2008 to 2022, where he oversaw that department and billing.

“My short-term goals are to continue to provide excellent service to the members and other departments within the Co-op,” Harrell said. “My long-term goals are to make sure the employees have the tools and training necessary to provide excellent, proactive service well into the future.”



Ricky Harrell and Rachel Frey

Harrell started his career at Sam Houston EC as a meter reader in 1988. By 1990, he was a purchasing agent, and he was promoted to Coldspring branch manager in 1994. He stayed in that position until being named manager of member services. He also is a graduate of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Management Internship Program.

“These changes allow us to better position the Cooperative to meet members’ expectations and our Cooperative’s initiatives,” said Ryan Brown, assistant general manager. “Keith had a wealth of knowledge and experience in our industry, and we are excited to see Rachel and Ricky flourish in their new positions.”

Rachel Frey was selected as the chief communications officer following the retirement of Stapleton and will oversee member and employee communications and community relations.

“I am excited about this opportunity,” Frey said. “I want to work with our employees to expand our ability to connect and communicate with our consumer-members.”

She joined the Cooperative in 2014 as a communications specialist. She has earned the NRECA’s Certified Cooperative Communicator credential and graduated from the association’s management internship program in 2021.

“Ricky and Rachel have the experience and background that they need to help lead our cooperative during its next chapter,” Turk said. “I am confident that they will work hard to help ensure that our Cooperative thrives in the future.” ■

Sam Houston EC Welcomes a New Communicator, Will Holder

AFTER ALMOST 17 years, I couldn't stay away any longer.

I graduated from Livingston High School in 2006 before earning my Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photography with an emphasis on communication design from Texas State University. During my time as a Bobcat, I met my beautiful wife, Alicia. We moved to Leander, just north of Austin, where our daughter, Kynlie, was born.

Following four years of working for a high-volume school and sports photography business in Austin, I helped start a new photography company in the Beaumont area. I jumped at the chance to get closer to home.

I spent eight years working with schools, many from across Sam Houston Electric Cooperative's service area, to provide photography and year-book services as the director of operations and co-owner. It was a pleasure to play a part in the important moments of so many people's lives. Our family was also blessed with the birth of two sons, Jude and Walker, during that time.

Through all the good times, it still wasn't quite home.

While searching for a position that would provide a chance to grow professionally and spend more time with my wife and children, I was told

about a job listing at Sam Houston EC. I couldn't get my résumé together quickly enough.

A lot has changed in Livingston since I moved away 17 years ago. But one thing has definitely remained the same: the family spirit and hometown feeling I've never experienced anywhere else.

Outside of work, my favorite hobby has always been woodworking, thanks to Mr. Donald Boler. He taught me lessons in two years of high school wood shop class that have stayed with me for years, and he is a Sam Houston EC member.

Every time I finish a project, I run my hand over the surface

and hear him say, "Do you think that's good enough, or does it need another coat?"

It almost always needs another coat.

I plan to bring that same diligence and care to our members and employees through the Sam Houston EC Communications Department. While I may be new to the role, it seems so familiar to me because of the amazing people that I get to interact with every day.

I am excited to see a lot of familiar faces, and I look forward to getting to know new people. I look forward to sharing photos and stories about the Cooperative and our community with you all.

If I am not at work, check the lake or the deer lease, as I plan to take advantage of being back home and all the great opportunities our community has to offer! ■



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Members Report High Satisfaction

SAM HOUSTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE has once again received high marks in satisfaction from its members. For the third consecutive year, the Co-op's American Customer Satisfaction Index score topped 92.

"The 2022 ACSI of 92.5 is our highest ever, just besting 2021 and 2020 by a fraction of a point," said Rachel Frey, Sam Houston EC chief communications officer. "It's a reflection of the great service our Co-op employees provide to our consumer-members during a time of rapid growth and other challenges."

Companies from every business sector measure their performance with ACSI's metrics, and more than 600 electric cooperatives utilize the index.

To gauge Sam Houston EC member satisfaction in 2022, representatives from Sky-Base7—formerly known as Oppenheim Research—surveyed a randomly selected group of members each month via phone.

The researchers asked four questions for the ACSI survey, with responses scored on a scale from zero to 10:

- ▶ How satisfied are you with Sam Houston EC?
- ▶ To what extent does Sam Houston EC exceed your expectations?
- ▶ How close is Sam Houston EC to the ideal electric company?
- ▶ If given a choice, how likely is it that you would choose Sam Houston EC? ■



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Heat Pumps Are Back and Worth a Look

AMID THE ENERGY CRISIS of the 1970s, heat pumps were all the rage. The devices use electricity to efficiently transfer heat from a cool space to a warm space, making the cool space cooler and the warm space warmer. Because they transfer heat rather than generate it, heat pumps can efficiently create comfortable temperatures for a home.

They were largely cast aside after the energy crisis, but now they're coming back and even more efficient than they were 50 years ago. Some 40% of new homes in the U.S. are built with heat pumps, according to *Fortune*.

With heating and cooling costs making up most of the average home's electricity bill, maybe it's time you considered the mighty heat pump for your home. There are three main types, as described by the Department of Energy and *Consumer Reports*.

Ductless Air-Source Heat Pumps

For homes without ducts, air-source heat pumps are also available in a ductless version called a mini-split heat pump. In addition, a special type of air-source heat pump called a reverse cycle chiller generates hot and cold water rather than air, allowing it to be used with radiant floor heating systems in heating mode.

- ▶ These systems are easier to install, quiet and small in size.
- ▶ They're flexible for heating and cooling individual rooms and smaller spaces.
- ▶ There's no energy loss through ductwork, which accounts for more than 30% of a home's energy use for heating and cooling.
- ▶ Installation can be pricey, but federal incentives may be available.

Ducted Air-Source Heat Pumps

The most common type of heat pump is the air-source heat pump, which transfers heat between your house and the outside air. Modern heat pumps can reduce your electricity use for heating by about 50% compared to electric resistance heating such as furnaces and baseboard heaters.

- ▶ These systems move heat rather than converting it from a fuel like combustion heating systems do.
- ▶ Newer, more efficient systems now represent a legitimate space heating alternative in colder regions like the Northeast and Midwest.

Geothermal Heat Pumps

Geothermal (ground-source or water-source) heat pumps achieve higher efficiencies by transferring heat between your house and the ground or a nearby water source. They can reduce energy use, control humidity, are sturdy and reliable, and fit in a wide variety of homes.

- ▶ These systems tend to be more expensive to install but provide more energy savings for heating and cooling.
- ▶ They move heat through pipes buried underground.
- ▶ Compared to a conventional heating system, geothermal heat pumps can reduce energy use by 25%–50%.
- ▶ They're effective in extreme climates but not ideal for smaller lots and certain soil conditions. ■

Don't Go Out on a Limb

Safety for you and your children is a top priority at your electric co-op. Kids don't always know—or remember—what can be dangerous, so it's up to all of us to watch out for them. Safety rules for power lines:

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

Don't build treehouses in trees near electric lines.

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

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

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

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

Sam Houston EC encourages you to always practice safety.

Inspect Outdoor Tools Before Starting Yardwork

CAN'T WAIT TO get outside to start sprucing up your yard for spring? Take a few minutes before you power up your lawn tools to make sure they're in good shape for the season ahead.

Here are some tips for spring cleaning your power tools.

Dust tools off. Even if you store your tools in a cabinet over the winter, they can get dusty. And even if you cleaned them before you put them away for the season, you might find some residual grime and dirt on blades and filters. Use a damp cloth to wipe down all moving parts.

Inspect them for rust. Older tools are especially prone to rusting. Use steel wool to gently rub rust from metal parts. For tough spots, use a degreaser, and then spray the moving parts with a corrosion inhibitor or lubricant.

Do a test run. Before you start trimming hedges or mowing your lawn, turn your tool on to determine that it's operating properly. Odd noises, dull blades, loose bolts and frayed wires are warning signs that it needs repairing or replacing.

Working with damaged or malfunctioning tools can cause injuries. Keep yourself and your family safe by inspecting, repairing and replacing tools that could turn a beautiful spring into a disaster. ■



You Know Newbury

Even if the Texan's name doesn't ring a bell, his soaring folk, rock and country songs should

BY PETER BLACKSTOCK

NOT MANY PEOPLE knew Mickey Newbury's name when he made his first and only appearance on Billboard's Hot 100 pop chart in 1972—but they probably knew the songs he stitched together on *An American Trilogy*, one of the most unlikely hit singles ever.

Written 100 years before Newbury combined them, the folk songs *Dixie* and *Battle Hymn of the Republic* presented contrasting views of the American South. The former became an unofficial anthem of the Confederacy; the latter was written during the Civil War by a well-known abolitionist. Newbury added *All My Trials*, a traditional folk song popularized during the mid-20th century folk revival by artists such as Joan Baez.

His dramatic arrangement and recording of the three songs hit No. 26 on the Hot 100 in 1972. It also caught the attention of Elvis Presley, who made *An American Trilogy* a staple of his live repertoire. All of this might have made Newbury a one-hit-wonder footnote, but in fact his music offered a much deeper well for those willing to dive in.

Newbury had been on the charts before but as a writer—and with a similarly unlikely single. Fellow native Houstonian Kenny Rogers' first hit came from Newbury's pen. Rogers' 1960s band the First Edition had a top-five smash with *Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)*, a psychedelic rock song steeped in the counterculture of the era.

Rogers wasn't actually the first artist to record *Just Dropped In*. That was Jerry Lee Lewis, who subsequently took Newbury's *She Even Woke Me Up To Say Goodbye* to No. 2 on the country charts in 1969. By that time, Newbury's career as a writer had taken off, with artists ranging from Don Gibson to Solomon Burke to Eddy Arnold scoring hits with his tunes.

Suddenly, major record labels had reason to bet on Newbury's solo career. He responded with a magnificent string of solo albums from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s that rival the works of such masters as Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell.

His albums weren't big sellers, but fellow Texas songwriters took note. My first exposure to Newbury came many years later, when as a music writer I informed Townes Van Zandt in a 1992 phone interview that Newbury had been booked to open a show for Van Zandt and Guy Clark in Seattle. Van Zandt was thrilled at the news, then explained that Newbury

had been a mentor to both when they were getting their starts in Houston's folk clubs.

Newbury's influence on other writers ran deep enough that he gets name-checked in one of the most famous country songs of all time. Songwriters Chips Moman and Bobby Emmons wrote *Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)*, which topped the country charts in 1977 when Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson recorded it. In the chorus, they sang about "Hank Williams' pain songs and Newbury's train songs."

Newbury had a few train songs—*Frisco Depot* and *The Future's Not What It Used To Be* from 1971's *Frisco Mabel Joy* come to mind. But he had plenty of pain songs, too. The title track to 1973's *Heaven Help the Child* is almost epic in its grandeur of heartbreak, with Newbury's booming tenor soaring above a majestic orchestral arrangement.

Along with trains and pain, rain figured prominently in Newbury's music. It was more than just a lyrical metaphor: Newbury sometimes used rain sounds as bridges between tracks on his albums.

Newbury, who'd moved from Houston to Nashville when his career caught fire, eventually settled in the Pacific Northwest. He didn't record much in the 1980s and 1990s, but a late-career resurgence resulted in one of his finest albums, 2002's *A Long Road Home*, just a few months before his death. Lung-related ailments had left him mostly unable to sing in his final years; I caught his final public performance in November 1999 at a bar on the Florida-Alabama border, bravely delivered while he was hooked up to an oxygen tank.

That performance helped motivate me to assemble *Frisco Mabel Joy Revisited: For Mickey Newbury*, a 2000 tribute album featuring Kris Kristofferson, Dave Alvin, Bill Frisell, Chuck Prophet and others.

In his liner notes for *Frisco Mabel Joy Revisited*, the late, great Texas art critic Dave Hickey wrote about the Newbury album that inspired the tribute. He described Newbury's compositions as "tiny, perfect songs, perfectly played, perfectly sung and perfectly recorded in perfect time, with perfect intonation." ■

OPPOSITE Mickey Newbury, a songwriter's songwriter, influenced many fellow Texas artists.





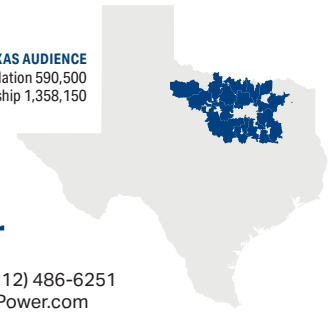
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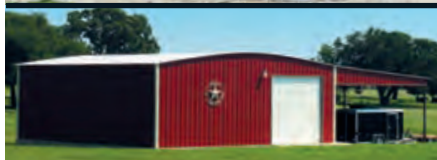
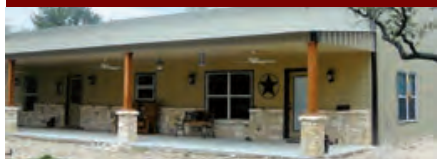
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TCP Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



hill that overlooked the vast and sunny Rio Grande delta to the south.

The 10,000-square-foot mansion was believed to be the largest adobe house in Texas at that time, 1935. It was built in a Spanish Revival style with imported Talavera tile, red clay tiles for the roof, wrought-iron gates and huge carved doors. The couple wanted their home to look like the elegantly appointed homes they had seen in the finer districts of Mexico.

After the Matthews died, the house was sold to a grapefruit millionaire, Frank Schultz, who added features like stone balustrades. Eventually the home was sold again and began to suffer from neglect.

The city of McAllen stepped in and saved it in 1998, and today Quinta Mazatlan and its 20 acres are a crown jewel of the city, described as a “mansion with a mission.” The world-class educational facility located in a Tamaulipan thorn forest is part of the World Birding Center and hosts the annual Monarch Fest to support the struggling monarch butterfly population.

Quinta Mazatlan’s grounds are teeming with native plants and serve as a rejuvenating garden for migrating exotic birds and pollinators. The property’s magical ambiance has made it a sought-after venue for couples wanting to say “I do” in a place they’ll always treasure remembering.

The Matthews were honored to know that the dream they had for their beloved home has been magnificently surpassed. ■

Of Birds, Butterflies and Brides

Quinta Mazatlan and its massive adobe mansion remain a McAllen jewel

BY W.F. STRONG

THE ROMAN PHILOSOPHER Cicero said, “If you have a library and a garden, you have all that you need.” Enter the gates of Quinta Mazatlan, and you’ll understand that wisdom.

This inviting refuge is seemingly a world away from the hustle and bustle of McAllen right outside the gates. Jason Chilton Matthews, who built the mansion in the 1930s, wanted it that way.

In every corner, there are Old World influences. There’s a tiled Roman bathtub, 9 feet long and 3 feet deep, and a tiled mural that has the words “*Labor Omnia Vincit*,” Latin for “work conquers

all,” which is Virgil’s praise for the life of the farmer in his poem *Georgics*.

Matthews was a renaissance man—a publisher, writer, composer, poet, scientist, soldier and pilot. He fought in 11 battles in World War I.

After Matthews traveled the world extensively, involved in various business enterprises with Marcia, his oil heiress wife from Pennsylvania, they settled in McAllen because he said it was the “crossroads of the Western Hemisphere.” He wanted to build a home that would be a showplace to entertain friends, and he found the highest point in McAllen: a

Cast Iron

Trusted cookware provides timeless value, indoors and out

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

There's no tool more cherished in a home kitchen than a well-seasoned cast-iron pan. Whether your skillet has been passed down for generations or is just starting to see its full potential, it's a go-to for many dishes. This tart lemon pie, from Fredericksburg Cast Iron Co., uses your pan in a somewhat unexpected way.

Lemon Skillet Pie

PIE

**½ cup (1 stick) butter, melted,
plus more for the pan**
1½ cups crushed graham crackers
½ cup sugar
3 cups sweetened condensed milk
3 egg yolks
¾ cup lemon juice
Pinch salt

TOPPING

1 cup heavy cream
3 tablespoons powdered sugar
½ teaspoon vanilla extract

GARNISH

Sliced lemons
Lemon zest
Fresh mint leaves

1. **PIE** Preheat oven to 350 degrees and lightly coat a 12-inch cast-iron skillet with butter.
2. In a bowl, combine graham crackers and sugar. Stir in melted butter until well blended. Press the crumb mixture into the bottom and sides of the prepared pan. Bake until firm, about 8 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, combine the sweetened condensed milk, egg yolks, lemon juice and salt and beat with a mixer for 4 minutes.
4. Pour mixture into baked pie crust and return the pan to the oven. Bake until the center is set, about 10 minutes.
5. Let the pie cool at room temperature for 30 minutes. Cover and then transfer to the refrigerator to chill until set, at least 1 hour.
6. **TOPPING** When ready to serve, make the topping. In a large bowl or using a stand mixer, beat the cream, powdered sugar and vanilla until fluffy. Spread onto pie and garnish as desired.

SERVES 8-10

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Texas Tater Tot Casserole.



Creamy Salsa Verde Pasta

JAZMIN ROMO
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

Creamy and herbal with just the right amount of heat, this salsa verde pasta features an easy-to-make sauce. Romo recommends using the extra sauce as a dip or spread on a toasted bagel.

- 3 teaspoons salt, divided use**
- 8 ounces linguine**
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened**
- 1 cup cilantro**
- ½ cup sour cream**
- ½ cup water**
- 3 green tomatoes, quartered**
- ¼ cup basil leaves**
- 2 serrano peppers, deseeded**
- 3 cloves garlic**
- 1 cube chicken bouillon**
- ¼ teaspoon pepper**
- 1 onion, divided use**
- 3 tablespoons butter**
- 1 cup shredded pepper jack cheese**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add 2 teaspoons salt and linguine. Cook pasta to al dente according to package directions.
- 2.** Meanwhile, in a blender combine cream cheese, cilantro, sour cream, water, tomatoes, basil, serranos, garlic, bouillon cube, pepper and remaining 1 teaspoon salt. Quarter the onion and add 1 quarter to the blender. Dice the remaining onion to yield ¾ cup and set aside. Blend sauce until smooth, taste, and add more salt or pepper to taste.
- 3.** Heat a 9- or 10-inch cast-iron pan over medium. Add butter. Once melted, add reserved diced onions and sauté until soft. Pour in blended sauce (you might

CONTINUED >



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Henry's Heavenly Chili

HELEN SANDERS
UNITED COOPERATIVE
SERVICES



Sanders' late husband, Henry, above, created this chili for the annual family reunion, where he would cook it over an open flame in a cast-iron wash kettle. If you prefer, leave out the alcohol.

SERVES 4-6

- 2 tablespoons bacon grease or vegetable oil**
- 1 pound ground beef**
- 1 pound ground pork**
- 1 onion, chopped**
- 2 jalapeño peppers, deseeded and chopped**
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped**
- 1 can diced tomatoes (14.5 ounces)**
- 1 can diced Hatch chiles (4 ounces)**
- 2 tablespoons diced chipotle in adobo sauce**
- ¼ cup chili powder**
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano leaves**
- 2 teaspoons cumin**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1-2 teaspoons pepper**
- 2 cups beef stock**
- 2 ounces beer**
- 1 ounce reposado tequila**

- 1.** Heat a cast-iron Dutch oven over medium-high and add bacon grease. Once melted, add beef and pork and cook about 10 minutes, until no pink remains.
- 2.** Add the onion, jalapeños and garlic and cook until vegetables are soft. Stir in tomatoes, chiles and chipotle. Add chili powder, oregano, cumin, salt and pepper and mix well, then add beef stock, beer and tequila and stir again. Reduce heat to medium. Cook 20 minutes, stirring often.
- 3.** Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer 1 hour, stirring occasionally.

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RECIPES CONTINUED

not use it all) and stir slowly to mix. Bring to a boil for 1 minute, then remove from heat.

4. Drain pasta and add to the cast-iron pan, carefully tossing with tongs to coat with sauce. Sprinkle with cheese and bake 15 minutes. Broil 2 minutes to brown the cheese. Garnish with more cilantro and basil, if desired.

SERVES 2-3

Dutch Apple Pancakes

GWEN JONES
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

Oven-baked pancakes are impressive with their highly puffed sides. This Dutch apple version is wonderfully spiced and makes for a great breakfast or dessert.

4 eggs

½ cup flour

**½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar,
divided use**



½ teaspoon baking powder

Pinch salt

1 cup milk

2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter, melted

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

**1 teaspoon ground nutmeg, divided
use**

4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

**1 large tart apple, peeled, cored
and thinly sliced**

1. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, flour, 1 tablespoon sugar, baking powder

and salt. Gradually whisk in milk until smooth, then whisk in melted butter, vanilla and ½ teaspoon nutmeg. Let batter rest at least 30 minutes and up to overnight.

2. When ready to bake, preheat oven to 425 degrees.

3. Heat a 10-inch cast-iron skillet over medium and add 4 tablespoons butter. Once melted, brush butter up sides of pan and remove from heat.

4. In a small bowl, combine ¼ cup sugar, cinnamon and remaining ½ teaspoon nutmeg, then sprinkle evenly over the melted butter. Arrange the apple slices over the sugar mixture, then sprinkle the remaining ¼ cup sugar over the apples.

5. Place the pan over medium-high heat and cook just until the liquid starts to bubble. Remove from heat and evenly pour the batter over the apples.

6. Bake 15 minutes, then reduce heat to 375 and bake 10 minutes more. Serve immediately.

SERVES 4



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Old Pete was a retired stuntman bursting with stories. There was the time he stared down a grizzly bear. There was the time he won a competition and got to kiss a Hollywood starlet as the prize. And there was the time he got into a fistfight with the Duke. Many stories. Some were probably even true. I know two things for sure: that he had an excellent collection of turquoise and that he owed me for a poker game he lost. The last time I saw him, he opened a drawer and pulled out a collection of beautiful Navajo turquoise jewelry to repay his debt. Pete's jewelry inspired our Tucson Sun Turquoise Collection.

This jewelry set features turquoise that's been gently enhanced to bring out its finest shades in a Southwestern motif. Finished with oxidized silver, this jewelry set captures the beauty and mystery of the Arizona desert. The rarest and most valuable turquoise is found right here in the American Southwest, but the future of the blue beauty is unclear. I recently spoke with turquoise traders who explained that less than 5% of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry. Once thriving, many Southwest mines have closed.

But Stauer saw this coming and is now one of the largest owners of gem-grade turquoise in the U.S. Don't miss your chance to own the diamond of the desert. Act now. This is one of our fastest sellers, and we only have a limited supply of Arizona turquoise available for this ad. See why Stauer remains the best bang for your buck!

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- Arizona turquoise. Oxidized silver finish. Ring: whole sizes 5-10. Pendant: 1 ¾" drop. Cuff: fits wrist to 7 ¼".

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

'Lonesome' in a Library

Texas State University houses memorabilia from the TV miniseries

BY CHET GARNER

WHEN I THINK OF the Wild West and the grit it took to be a cowboy, I don't think of yodeling Roy Rogers or Hollywood-perfect John Wayne. I think of Woodrow Call and Gus McCrae, covered in sweat and driving cattle in *Lonesome Dove*. I remember watching the 1989 miniseries with my parents and thinking, "Now these are real cowboys."

Every year thousands of faithful fans like me make a pilgrimage to San Marcos to visit a permanent exhibit dedicated to the classic production.

I rolled onto the campus of Texas State University and wandered past students to the seventh floor of the Alkek Library, which houses the Wittliff Collections. Screenwriter Bill Wittliff and his wife, Sally, collected writers' papers for years and decided to open them to the public. There are priceless papers from writers like Cormac McCarthy and Sam Shepard, but most come to see the work of Wittliff himself. He was the screenwriter who adapted Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove* novel into the award-winning miniseries.

Inside the exhibit, you'll find the cowboy outfits worn by Robert Duvall (McCrae) and Tommy Lee Jones (Call). There are arrows shot by Comanches as well as hats, guns and the wooden sign for the Hat Creek Cattle Co. that hung outside the fictional headquarters. They even have the deceased body of Gus that Call dragged back to Texas as a final act of friendship. Most amazing to me was the script used by Wittliff on set, with his tweaks and changes to lines to tell the best story possible.

I left inspired to tell more stories about the West—but only after I had properly binge-watched all six-plus hours of *Lonesome Dove* one more time. ■

ABOVE Chet alongside the cowboy garb worn by Tommy Lee Jones as the character Woodrow Call.

TCP Chet visits the mementos of real TV cowboys. Check out the video on our website and see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details.

MARCH

08

Elgin S.H.E.: Women in Business, (512) 285-4515, elgintxchamber.com

09

Abilene All That Jazz, (325) 676-9620, paramountabilene.com

Denton [9-12] Texas Storytelling Festival, (940) 380-9320, tejasstorytelling.com

Irving [9-12] Texas Steel Guitar Association Jam-boree, (817) 558-3481, texassteelguitar.org

10

Lindale Keeton Coffman, (430) 235-2100, outhousetickets.com

Round Rock Destination: Hope, (512) 868-2822, casawilco.org

Amarillo [10-12] Western Antiques and Collectibles Show, (806) 378-3096, amarillociviccenter.com

Mansfield [10-13] Arts Week, (817) 728-3383, visitmansfieldtexas.com

Bastrop [10-12, 17-19, 24-26] The Addams Family: A New Musical Comedy, (512) 200-3826, bastropoperahouse.org

11

Beaumont Bee Gees Gold: The Tribute, (409) 838-3435, beaumonteventstx.com

Burton Texas Ranger Day, (979) 803-0393, burtonheritagesociety.org

Corpus Christi Wine Festival, (361) 779-7326, corpuschristiwinefestival.com

Livingston Pioneer and Settler Day, (936) 365-2201, tpwd.texas.gov

Lufkin Gene Watson, (936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

13

Fredericksburg [13-18] Spring Break at the Pioneer Museum, (830) 990-8441, pioneermuseum.org

16

Canton [16-18] Van Zandt County Bluegrass Festival, (214) 802-5999, krlivemusic.com

17

Bryan [17-18] Watercolor Batik Workshop, (979) 704-3090, degallery.us

Denton [17-18] The Muse Invitational Motorcycle Show, (512) 522-5445, ridetexas.com

Tolar [17-18] Ceramic Expo and Handcrafted Items, (254) 716-5227, westceramicshow.com

Fredericksburg [17-19] Trade Days, (210) 846-4094, fbgtradedays.com

Tyler [17-19] Vintage Market Days of East Texas, vintagemarketdays.com

18

Brenham The Celtic Angels, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Del Rio Texas State Parks Centennial Dark Skies Celebration, (830) 395-2133, tpwd.texas.gov

Fredericksburg Hill Country Indian Artifact Show, (830) 329-2636, hillcountryindianartifacts.com

MORE EVENTS >

Submit Your Event

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



Spring break starts
here.

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Pick of the Month

Herb Festival at the Wynne Home
Huntsville, March 25
(936) 891-5024
texasthymeunit.org

Jump-start your spring by celebrating fragrant herbs and healthy veggies. Expect vendors, speakers, music, children's activities and plenty of plants at this free festival.

MARCH EVENTS CONTINUED

18 **Lewisville St. Paddy's Texas Style**, (972) 219-3401, cityoflewisville.com

Angleton [18-19] Market Days, (979) 849-4364, angleton.tx.us

19 **The Colony Luck of the Irish Triathlon**, (214) 370-9010, playtri.com

24 **Georgetown [24-25] Quilt Show**, (512) 869-1812, handcraftsunlimited.com

Hallettsville [24-26] South Texas Polka and Sausage Fest, (361) 798-2311, hallettsville.com

Burton [24-April 1] LaBahia Antiques Show, (979) 289-2684, labahiaantiques.com

25 **Bandera Ranching Heritage Day**, (830) 796-4413, banderatex.com

The Colony Mother and Son Adventure Day, (972) 625-1106, visitthecolonytx.com

Sabinal [25-26] Wild Hog Festival and Craft Fair, sabinalwildhogfestival.com

College Station [28-29] Anastasia, (979) 845-1234, opastickets.org

Kerrville Napoleon Dynamite: A Conversation With Jon Heder, Efrén Ramirez and Jon Gries; (830) 315-5483; thearcadialive.org

Abilene [31-April 1] Outlaws and Legends Music Festival, outlawsandlegends.com

Victoria [31-April 1] Friends of Flint Rifle Invitational Scholarship Shoot and State Cookoff, (210) 439-4191, friendsofflint.com

APRIL 01

Brenham Southern Raised, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Bryan Starlight Affair, (979) 485-5473, rmhc-ctx.org

Mason Spring Art & Wine Fest, (325) 347-5758, masontxcoc.com

Port Arthur Cajun Heritage Fest, (409) 985-7822, cajunheritagefest.com

Bellville [1-2] Texas Select Custom Cutlery Event, (713) 724-6813, texasselectevent.com

San Antonio [1-2] Fiesta of Gems, (830) 387-1766, swgms.org

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1 MARK HOLLY
BANDERA EC

"Little did we know that a major hurricane was about to impact Port Aransas. It was so sad to see the city devastated shortly after we left."

2 CASEY BRUNO
PEDERNALES EC

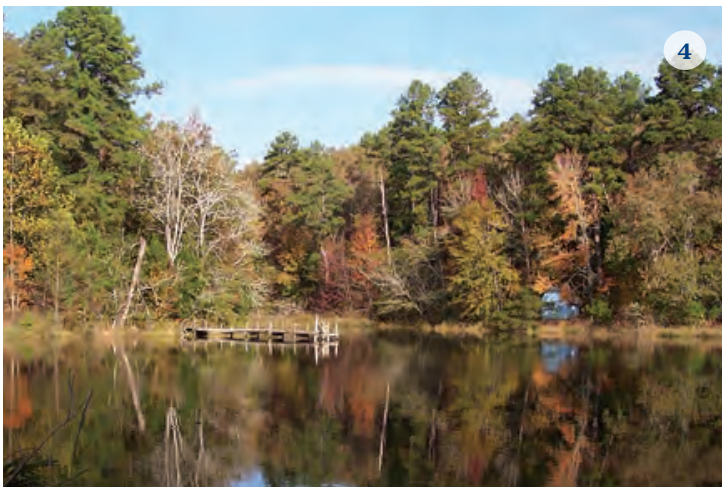
Sunset over Waterford Harbor Marina in Kemah.

3 PAIGE KILLIAN
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

"Please don't touch me!"

4 LARRY SELMAN
TRI-COUNTY EC

"This was taken by my wife, Gigi Selman. While driving down the road, she saw this hidden scene."



Upcoming Contests

- DUE MAR 10** Waterfalls
- DUE APR 10** Hoof and Horn
- DUE MAY 10** Night Sky



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Land, Sea or Sky photos from readers.



A Pet Project

An ailing feline finds her place at the head of the table

BY JESSICA RIDGE
ILLUSTRATION BY
STEPHANIE SINGLETON

I SET THE DELICATE china saucer before her, a tiny calico queen curled up on a quilt. On the dish is a dainty portion of cat food, heated to make it more enticing. The plate was a wedding gift a decade ago, shortly before my husband and I brought our little feline gourmand home.

Only the best for miss priss. She gives this morning's delicacy, whitefish and tuna, an imperious sniff, then looks up at me. *Is that the best you can do, lady?* Next up, canned salmon.

Isobel is 12 now, and she is dying.

Her green eyes gaze with the same peaceful focus, and she still flops over for belly rubs and purrs contentedly, but her decline, which had been happening in fits and starts, has gained momentum. And my husband, Jon, and I find ourselves vested with the worst, most

painful power—deciding when to let her go. It's a desperate sort of daily divination. *How much has she eaten today? Three bites earlier? Fantastic.* As she grows thinner.

And yet as best we can tell, she isn't suffering. So with our vet's blessing, we persist. I imagine Isobel as a discerning diner at a Michelin-starred restaurant for which I'm the hapless chef, subject to the mercy of her palate's whims. No thank you to tuna in oil today; yes please to catnip-laced crunchy treats.

Her haughtiness has hung on in other ways, too. She still emits an irritated squeak when our dog, Brienne, gets too close for her liking. She's never been a big fan of our coltish pup. Too friendly, too in her face.

But Isobel warmed up to us quickly. The day we brought her home, a volunteer at the animal shelter had asked if we'd like to meet the sweetest kitty in the whole place. Sure, we said. Almost as soon as Isobel emerged from her little metal crate, she settled into my arms. More like a puppy than a 2-year-old cat, really. The sad din of the shelter faded into the background as she stared up at me. Sold.

That night, she hid under the sofa in our apartment until I got home from work, when she finally ventured out from beneath her chenille hideout, to our soft-spoken jubilation.

We go back to the vet tomorrow, where I know the news won't be good. I've begun the steps to volunteer at the shelter where we found Isobel; I hope to guide another family to a cat as sweet as ours.

Until then, I've got plenty to keep me busy—a finicky, affectionate Isobel, as likely to snuggle up close as she is to turn up her nose. ■



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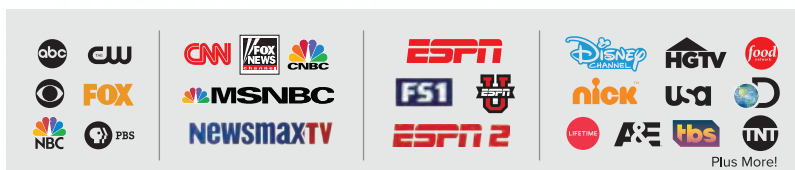
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