

Explore the Hill Country Win a Fredericksburg Getaway

TEXAS CO-OP POWER

SPECIAL
TRAVEL
ISSUE

HILL COUNTRY Ramble

Finding the sweet spot
in Central Texas

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King of Cigars
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Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park near Bend.

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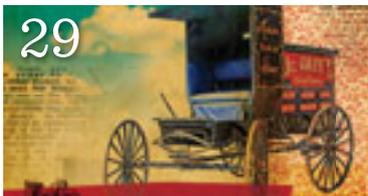
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Excerpt by Jimmy W. Arterberry

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FALLS: JULIA ROBINSON. DONATION: SPEEDKINGZ | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

ON THE COVER *Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store in Medina is famous for its apple pies, strudels and ice cream.* Photo by Julia Robinson

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Nurturing Wildflowers

I empathize with the reader's letter [*Habitat Destruction*, July 2018]. I, too, have noticed that untimely mowing has caused many wildflowers to disappear, which means habitat loss for those feeding on them.

My neighborhood subdivision has lovely homes with beautifully maintained yards and cultivated plants. I maintain my front yard to conform. I have a corner lot that has a county road on one side. I reserve a strip of property along the right-of-way for wildflowers, and I delay mowing there.

SARAH MILNER | FLINT
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

He Gets His Kicks

You so are right that Route 66 [*Rendezvous on Route 66*, July 2018] is celebrated in so many ways. I have been a ham radio operator since 1960, and each September, the Citrus Belt Amateur Radio Club in San Bernardino, California, sponsors Route 66 on the Air. I get to talk to my friends on the radio who are on the air up and down the old highway from Los Angeles to Amarillo to Chicago. I even have a T-shirt with the



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Head of the Pack

I enjoyed reading about Hunter Beaton's Eagle Scout project [*Carrying Through, Currents*, July 2018]. What a fine young man to take on this very worthwhile project that will be a gift to so many children in need for years to come. The article did not mention where Hunter will be attending college, but since my allegiance is to Baylor University, I was hoping that was his plan. He would be a great fit.

JUDY SCHMELTEKOPF | CHINA SPRING | HEART OF TEXAS EC



Route 66 logo on it that I wear during the event.

LEE E. KINARD | BURNET
PEDERNALES EC

Give Us Credit

The By the Numbers item in *Currents* in July could be misleading. It's possible that because there are so many people in Texas who are not in debt, that is what causes the state to rank 46th among all states in

average credit score. The longer a person goes without paying anything on time, the lower his or her score goes. So, it is possible that our low average just might mean that we have more people who are not in debt.

RUTH LAMPE | QUITMAN
WOOD COUNTY EC

New Favorite Author

East Texas Mojo [May 2018], about Joe R. Lansdale, introduced me to a writer with whom I was unfamiliar. Right away, I ordered three of his books and before I was half through the second one, I ordered four more.

FRAN LOMAS | SAN ANGELO

New London Explosion

In 1939, we were living in Atlanta, Texas, and one Saturday morning, I heard a loud explosion [*The New London*

School Explosion, January 2017].

I rode my bike uptown and found the Safeway store was only a pile of rubble. There had been a gas leak under the store.

CARROLL JOHNSON
BOWIE-CASS EC

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HAPPENINGS

Hill Country Goes Cajun

THE MEDINA LAKE CAJUN FESTIVAL started in 1981 as the Great Gumbo Cookoff to help keep the Medina Lake Betterment Association, a nonprofit civic organization, afloat. The event's name was changed in 1990 but still features a gumbo cook-off in addition to Cajun food and music.

It's always the fourth Saturday of September—rain or shine—in **LAKEHILLS**, which is in Bandera Electric Cooperative's service territory, northwest of San Antonio. Wayne & Same Ol' Two Step is among the featured performers this year.

INFO ▶ (830) 751-2727, cajunfestival-medinalake.com

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▶ Find more happenings online.

ALMANAC

100 Years Ago

ELIZABETH HOWARD WEST was named state librarian in 1918—the first woman to head a Texas state agency. She started the county library system and initiated services to minorities and the blind.

SPORTS SECTION

Wonder Arm Gives Out



Pitching star Nolan Ryan's career ended 25 years ago when he suffered a torn ulnar collateral ligament in a game at the Kingdome in Seattle. Bob Sherwin of the *Seattle Times* described that September 22, 1993, moment so eloquently: "A right-elbow ligament, 46 years, seven months and 24 days old, punished by more than 80,000 big-league pitches, had enough."

With that, just 11 days short of finishing his record 27th and final major-league season, Ryan, a Texas Ranger, left the game and took with him dozens of pitching records, including 5,714 strikeouts and seven no-hitters.

Ryan, who grew up in Alvin, entered the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1999 and is an executive adviser for the Houston Astros, one of his former teams.

CAJUN FESTIVAL: TIM CARROLL; RYAN: JONATHAN DANIEL | GETTY IMAGES

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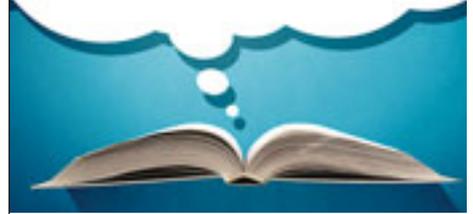
JOHN GRAHAM'S newspaper career began with a delivery route of 100 subscribers. Decades later, the third-generation newspaperman is owner and publisher of the *Lovington Leader*, a small paper in eastern New Mexico, and the *Denver City Press*, across the border in West Texas. For his work upgrading presses and keeping community-oriented papers going, Graham, president of the Lea County Electric Cooperative board of trustees, was inducted into the New Mexico Press Association Hall of Fame in 2017.



ON SEPTEMBER 4, National Newspaper Carrier Day, consider the role of small-town presses in Texas. Graham believes people should actively participate in their communities and that newspapers reflect the communities they serve. He applies this philosophy to his management of the *Leader* and to his life.



... AND READ A BOOK



To commemorate **National Read a Book Day**, September 6, the writers and editors at *Texas Co-op Power* tell about the latest books they read:

Chris Burrows: *The Night of the Gun* by David Carr. Journalist Carr turns his reporting chops on himself to uncover his own dark past in this memoir published not long before his sudden death in *The New York Times* newsroom.

Travis Hill: *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline* by George Saunders. Infused with equal parts humor and horror, these seven stories present a dystopian world in which theme parks are oases for the rich while the rest of humanity battles for scarce resources in a toxic wasteland.

Charles Lohrmann: *The World We Used To Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men* by Vine Deloria Jr. A renowned Native American legal and religious scholar reviews the history of traditional spirituality.

Jessica Ridge: *Commonwealth* by Ann Patchett. A layered, decadeslong meditation on the ways that love, loyalty and compassion converge as two families fracture and meld—chaotically, painfully and sometimes beautifully.

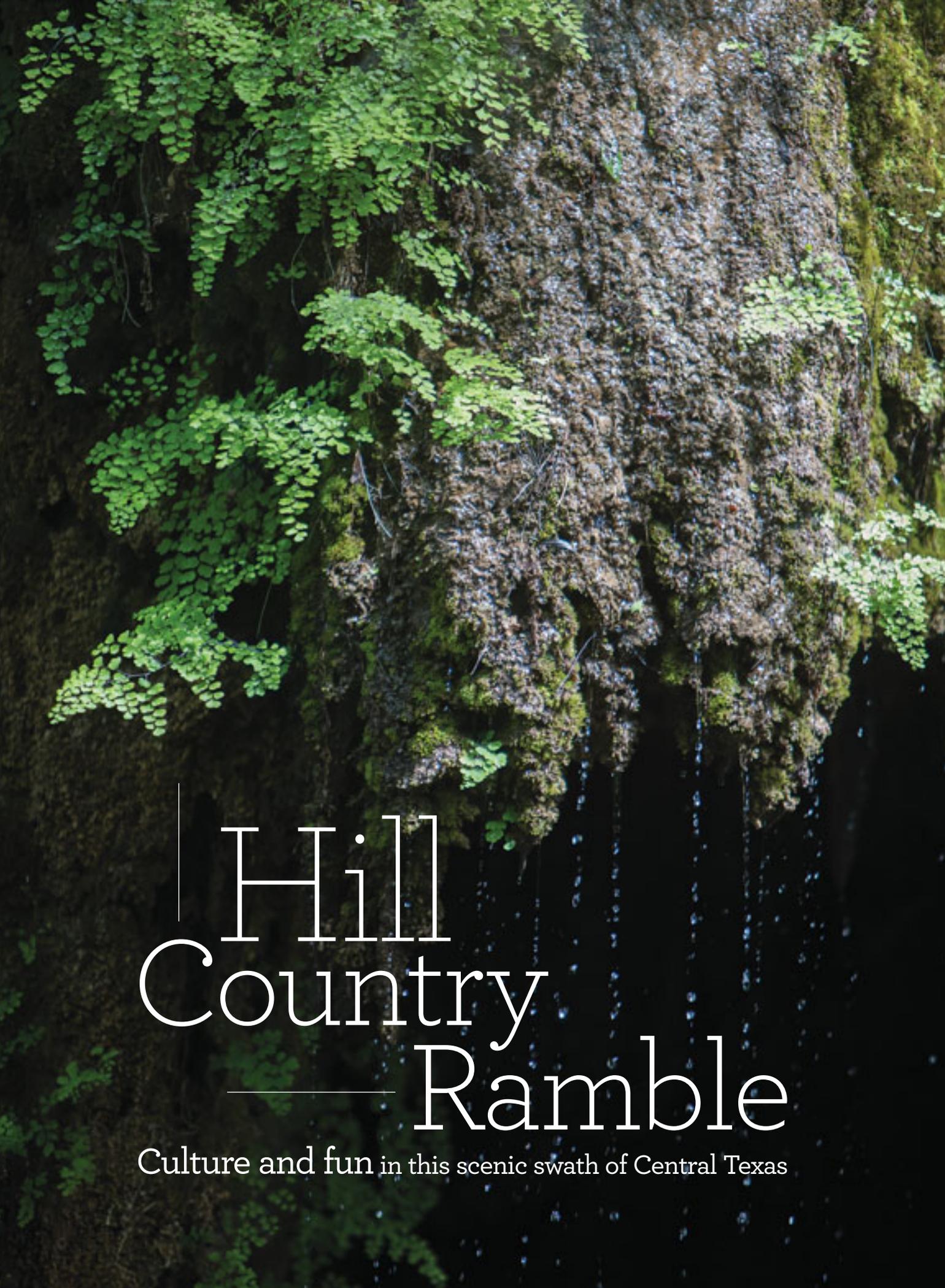
Tom Widlowski: *Bluebird, Bluebird* by Attica Locke. The Texas author's dark, heart-breaking murder mystery lays bare racial tensions in a fictional East Texas town.

TRAVEL: BY THE NUMBERS

American drivers in cars, trucks, minivans and SUVs logged 3,213,516,000,000 miles on the nation's roads in a 12-month period ending March 1, 2018, according to the Federal Highway Administration. Consider giving your car a break September 22, World Carfree Day.



TRILLION



Hill Country — Ramble

Culture and fun in this scenic swath of Central Texas

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I intended to try only the apple turnover.

Five minutes later, I stand at the counter, balancing a jar of apple butter, a jar of jelly, a strudel, a slice of pie and the turnover. That's when another visitor mentions the apple ice cream. "Why hasn't Blue Bell caught on to that flavor?" he asks the cashier.

I turn back to find the ice cream.

Outside Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store in Medina, I spread my bounty on a bright red picnic table and sample the pastries. I savor the pie's flawless golden crust. The ice cream is light, not too sweet, and goes down way too easy.

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JULIA ROBINSON



Opposite: A travertine formation at Gorman Falls in Colorado Bend State Park. Above: Living history re-enactors at Fort Martin Scott in Fredericksburg. Right: Apple turnover at Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store in Medina.



Such are the pleasures you'll find in the Texas Hill Country, which is adorned with gems like this shop. Visually, the region offers a rolling landscape of limestone-and-granite hills, clear rivers, cedar and cypress trees, and regional haunts that delight weekend visitors and seasoned travelers.

More than 150 years ago, German immigrants were lured to Central Texas by tales of fertile soil and freedom from oppression. Instead, they found rocky fields that had to be cleared by hand and the threat of contentious and fast-moving Comanche. The early settlers persevered and built towns of precise and tidy stone structures, each a day's wagon ride—about 20 miles—from its neighbor. Today, we know some of those settlements as Fredericksburg, Kerrville, New Braunfels, Medina, Mason, Llano and Camp Verde.



Starting in the southwest corner of the Hill Country, FM 337 between Camp Wood and Medina is one of the most scenic drives in Texas. Along a curvaceous stretch popular with motorcyclists, signs warn of “Falling Rocks” going east and “Fallen Rocks” going west, a curious temporal twist. The rise of the Edwards Plateau reveals itself along this 60-mile route, displaying limestone cliffs and following the meandering Medina River.

Along the way, I read about community history. Vanderpool grew out of a Republic of Texas land grant in 1849. Originally called Bugscuffle, the town was abandoned following Comanche raids but re-established in the 1880s. Camp Verde was established to service the region’s military outposts.

East of Medina, freethinkers, including doctors, scholars, philosophers and aristocrats who fled the German Revolution of 1848, sought to establish intellectual, secular and democratic societies advocating scientific reason and religious freedom. They built the towns of Boerne, Comfort, Luckenbach and Sisterdale. Residents met to discuss politics, philosophy and literature; in such meetings, they spoke in the intellectual’s language of Latin, so the towns were dubbed the “Latin Colonies” of Texas.

Boerne was founded in 1849 and originally named Tuscu-



WEB EXTRAS

► Read this story on our website to see a map of the Hill Country road trip.

Some of the largest calcite formations in the nation can be found here.



lum, after the home of Roman writer and orator Cicero. In 1852, it was renamed for Jewish-German journalist and satirist Karl Ludwig Börne. The town was known as a health resort in the late 1800s because of its proximity to Cibolo Creek and the Guadalupe River.

I drive north along FM 474 to find the Cave Without a Name. Mike Burrell, tour guide and cave manager, leads me down 80 feet of staircases through layers of geologic and human history. At the first landing, a pile of bones is evidence that eons of unlucky animals fell to their deaths through the small entrance above. Down another level, we find a ledge where a whiskey still dripped rebelliously during Prohibition.

In 1935, a group of youngsters shimmied down the sinkhole entrance with a kerosene lantern and crawled through a series of tight turns before finding cathedral-like rooms.

Burrell lights up the rooms as we walk through, one side formed by the subterranean streams of the Guadalupe River, the other by the slow drip of mineral-rich water onto the cave floor. Some of the largest calcite formations in the nation can be found here, and 3½ miles of the cave have been mapped, making it the seventh-longest in Texas.

We pass a small platform where the owners host concerts. Burrell replays a few previous performances on his

Opposite page, top: Love Creek Orchards' Apple Store. Opposite page, bottom: FM 337 between Camp Wood and Medina.



Above: Cave Without a Name, near Boerne. Left: Whiskey pecan and Key lime pie slices at Tootie Pie Co. in Boerne.

phone and offers me a chance to sing. I manage a few lines of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and marvel at the resonance.

Back at ground level, I rush to Tootie's. Ruby

Lorraine "Tootie" Feagan moved her 20-year-old pie company from Medina to Boerne in 2005. The new building, situated in a business park, serves as a bustling outpost for Tootie Pie Co.

To reach the unlikely address, I zoom past a wrecker service and RV repair shop to find the modest storefront, where cubicle walls support a chalkboard listing a dozen offerings and seasonal specials. It's not a homey setting, but the pies are delicious. I sample the heavenly chocolate, lemon icebox and pecan, rolling my eyes in delight.

Another day's wagon ride up Interstate 10 takes me to Comfort, where there are more than 100 historic buildings constructed before 1910. Seven of them, including the old Inguenhuett General Store, were designed by British architect Alfred Giles.

High's Cafe & Store drew in coffee lovers when it opened on

Fort Martin Scott was the first U.S. Army post on the Texas frontier.



High Street in 2005 and has become a reliable staple for chef-inspired café fare. Proprietors Denise Rabalais and Brent Ault attract a dedicated following, including a steady stream of locals who catch up and share a bite on the covered patio.

Comfort was another of the Latin Colonies, proud of independent thought and human rights for all. In 1862, eight years after the town's founding, the Confederate Army called upon the locals to join their side in the Civil War. Thirty-six men and boys who refused were killed.

I walk a half-mile down the street from the café to see the Treue der Union, or “Loyal to the Union,” Monument. Etched into the surface of the 20-foot-tall limestone obelisk are the 36 names. The 1866 dedication ceremony was front-page news even in *Harper's Weekly*.

East of Comfort, RM 473 turns onto Old Number 9 Highway and twists past fields of livestock penned by hand-stacked rock walls. Old Tunnel State Park was originally a railroad tunnel built in 1917 to link Fredericksburg to the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad. After falling into disuse in the 1940s, the area was turned into a state park; summering Mexican free-tailed bats took roost in the old tunnel.

I arrive around 7 p.m. and make my way to the viewing area just in time for the evening show. Three million bats stream out of the cave entrance in a counterclockwise wave of mammalian fluttering. “The bats circle around a few times to get elevation to get above the trees, and it looks like a tornado of bats,” says park superintendent Nyta Brown. “I never get tired of it.” Each bat eats its weight in insects each night.

Fredericksburg was first settled in 1846, the second colony founded under the direction of the Adelsverein, the Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas. Unlike the freethinkers, the settlers of Fredericksburg were religious—evangelical Protestants, Lutherans, Methodists and Catholics. Each was given a parcel of farmland and a lot in town where many built “Sunday houses” near their house of worship.

Fort Martin Scott on the southeast edge of Fredericksburg was the first U.S. Army post on the Texas frontier, built in 1848. The town had negotiated a treaty with the Comanche by 1847, and soldiers at the fort were the first line of defense.

Above: Doug Baum poses with two of his camels during Fort Martin Scott Days. Below: Ray Hernandez, known as Chief Broken Eagle, speaks with students at Fort Martin Scott.



I wander among well-preserved remnants of the fort on a “living history” weekend. The tents of re-enactors and educators line the circle track, and classes of fourth- and seventh-grade Texas history students visit the encampments of Native Americans, soldiers and other period actors.

In one corner, Ray Hernandez, aka Chief Broken Eagle of the Tonkawa tribe, has set up a teepee and shows family heirlooms to wide-eyed children. Rita Rice, the living history coordinator, appears in the officer’s quarters in 1890s period dress. She walks students and adults through the two-room structure, pointing out features of frontier living. “I love seeing the kids in awe when I describe what people lived like back then,” she says.

On the lawn just outside the fort, Doug Baum is tending his camels, Richard and Jadid. Curious groups gather to take

way. Just east of the dam and Inks Bridge, the park has become a civic art project of rock stacking.

Resident Belinda Morgan started the Llano Earth Art Fest to bring attention to Llano’s natural resources. The 2015 fest created the first World Rock Stacking Championship. The spring-time festival leaves stacks of rocks, called cairns, along the riverfront, inspiring others to contribute their own stack.

An ornate sandcastle grabs my attention as I pull into the parking lot. Then an 8-foot-tall dirt armadillo with a saddle on its back emerges from the bridge abutment. I pick my way down the granite boulders toward the water as rock cairns take over the landscape. Arches of rock defy gravity and rival the steel bridge over the river. On hot days, people create their stacks along the shoreline while standing in the cool water. This weekday, I see few visitors, and the park feels like an archaeological mystery created just for me.

Before I head back to the car, I try my hand at creating a stack, collecting medium-sized stones around my feet. Daily stress melts away, and my whole world joyously focuses on the fulcrum between rocks. Delightful.



North of Llano, I turn off Highway 16 at Cherokee and follow country roads to Colorado Bend State Park for a glimpse of Gorman Falls, a treasure of the Hill Country. The day is sunny but cool, and I head straight to the trailhead. Signs remind hikers to bring water and sunscreen, even though it’s only 1.4 miles to the falls. A few minutes on the trail helps me imagine an ill-prepared summertime hike.

pictures and ask why in the world there are camels in Texas.

Baum explains that in 1857, U.S. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis directed the importation of 34 camels from Egypt to establish a camel corps based in Camp Verde. The animals quickly proved their worth by carrying twice the usual load of survey teams and mail-carrying ventures.

The Civil War interrupted and ultimately doomed the camel experiment, but Baum keeps the curious story alive with this Texas Camel Corps. “I fell in love with the camels and had to get a few of my own.” He now leads camel tours through West Texas.

Leonard Grenwelge Park in Llano features towers of rocks called cairns lining the shore of the Llano River.

The trail is easy but rocky, and it takes my full attention to keep my ankles true. After more than a mile, I come to a steep vertical descent down slick rock (thank goodness for handrails) to the hidden fairy pools of the travertine falls. Verdant green mosses drip water into clear cascading basins. The temperature here is 10–15 degrees cooler than the bright, open flats above, and I bask in wafts of misty breeze coming off the face of the cliff. A few feet from the falls, the titular bend in the Colorado River provides a place to cool yourself and your dog before heading back up the trail.

Turn north on State Highway 16 toward Llano, a frontier trading center that grew to prominence in the 1880s when iron deposits, granite quarries and brick-making sparked a boom period in anticipation of the town becoming the “Pittsburgh of the West.” Today, the city still is known for granite but also embraces its connection to Highland Lakes tourism.

Llano’s Leonard Grenwelge Park, along the south side of the Llano River, honors the city’s heritage in a new and charming

Now the incline of the trail feels more pronounced. I stop to catch my breath and admire the blooming cactus and try to listen for birdcalls coming from nearby trees. As I head for the parking lot, I pass hikers on their way down, watching their steps, raising their hands against the midday sun and reaching for their water bottles. I smile the secret smile of having seen the hidden splendor, knowing it was worth the struggle.

Learn more about **Julia Robinson** at juliarobinsonphoto.com.

Frontier Texas

Where the West—and the Texas Forts Trail—begins



BY CHARLES LOHRMANN

This herd of eight 1,000-pound steel buffaloes turns in the wind above Abilene's Frontier Texas.

Frontier Texas recreates a historic fort. Architect Larry Good explained that when he and architect Bryce Weigand started on the project, they drew inspiration from the historic sites. “We visited Fort Richardson, Fort Belknap, Fort Phantom Hill, Fort Griffin, Fort Chadbourne and Fort McKavett.

“The sculptural chimneys that lead you up to the front door of Frontier Texas

are based on the chimneys at Fort Phantom Hill,” Good says. “The chimneys are the only things left there.”

Fort Phantom Hill sits about 15 miles north of Frontier Texas, so it can be the first stop on your Forts Trail adventure.

WEB EXTRAS
 ▶ Read this story on our website to see a slideshow of Frontier Texas.

Fort Griffin is about 50 miles northeast of Fort Phantom Hill, and that drive offers the combination of the partially restored fort and a recreation of the historic town of Fort Griffin. This notoriously rough village included the Beehive Saloon, where Pat Garrett once tended bar. One of the holographic “spirit guides” in Frontier Texas plays the part of Garrett and retells the story of the night he shot Billy the Kid. Between the restored fort and the town, you’ll find a historic marker designating the site where Gen. Robert E. Lee met with Comanche leaders.

The historic sites, now mostly in ruins, can create a ghostly sense of the frontier experience. Some personal accounts say that contemporary visitors hear mysterious voices, the sounds of horses’ hooves or the jingle of spurs. Usually, the sounds more closely resemble the whisper of wind in the trees.

Back at Frontier Texas, museum director Jeff Salmon says that most visitors are those traveling from east to west, and the Abilene area is where they first see iconic Texas sights. “We try to remain true to the story and still provide entertainment—make an emotional connection,” he says. “We honor the past as best we can.”

Charles Lohrmann is the *Texas Co-op Power* editor.

Among the most popular Hill Country destinations are towns defined by an ethnic history, such as the German heritage of Fredericksburg, Boerne and other picturesque destinations (see Page 8). Another option for exploring the Hill Country is to embark on a tour at the northern reach of the region, at Abilene’s Frontier Texas, and follow a stretch of the Texas Forts Trail. You don’t need to visit all nine historic sites to gain a sense of the intertwined narratives of 19th century settlers, Native Americans, buffalo hunters and adventurers.

On my own foray to Frontier Texas, the last thing I expected was a herd of flying buffalo. But that is what I found when I stopped at this starting point of the 650-mile heritage trail that wanders through 29 counties. These eight steel bison weigh about 1,000 pounds each (400 pounds fewer than the flesh-and-blood version), run in place at the top of their 35-foot posts and turn so that their noses are always into the wind. “It’s the world’s largest wind vane,” says H.C. Zachry, the Abilene artist and advertising executive who designed the flying creatures, “265 feet from one end to the other.”

He enthusiastically describes the engineering marvels nosing into the wind then explains that a tour of the museum inside features stories delivered by holographic characters developed to capture historic personalities and interconnected narratives. “We focused on the period between 1780 to 1880,” Zachary says, “because after 1880, the railroad came through Abilene, and that changed the frontier completely.”

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Forget about smartphones and GPS, because when it comes to taking on Mother Nature, there's only one tool you really need. Our stunning **Stag Hunter** is the ultimate sidekick for surviving and thriving in the great outdoors. Priced at \$149, the **Stag Hunter** can be yours today for an unbelievable **\$49!** Call now and we'll include a bonus leather sheath!

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Weathering the Storm

Natural disasters leave safety issues in their wake



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FLOODS. WIND. RAIN. WHEN MOTHER NATURE WREAKS HAVOC on the power grid, a host of hazards often follows. That makes safety—always a top priority for Sam Houston Electric Cooperative—a major concern even after a storm blows through.

Creating a culture of safety is incredibly important to electric co-ops because some of our employees face hazardous situations daily. We also want to ensure the safety of those we serve—our members.

Every region of the state deals with specific weather problems. Here's a look at the most common storm situations that create safety issues for East Texans.

Floods

Beyond the hazard that floodwaters pose to drivers, water can turn an already tricky situation into a deadly one if you attempt to work with electrical equipment that's wet or submerged.

Last year, when floods ravaged South Texas, electric co-ops lost precious infrastructure. Lineworkers had to improvise creative solutions to restore power needed by homeowners and

businesses to pump out water and make repairs. Because of the dangers, co-ops urged members to exercise caution and call a licensed electrician before beginning cleanup efforts. Do not use electrical appliances that have been wet until they've been examined by a qualified service repair dealer.

When high winds accompany rains that produce flooding, downed power lines are a real possibility. Stay away from water near power lines.

Tornadoes and High Winds

Tornadoes are common in Texas and can leave wide swaths of destruction behind—snapping utility poles like twigs and reducing transmission towers to heaps of twisted metal. Power outages can result.

Downed power lines pose the greatest electrical risk after a tornado or bout with high winds because you can't tell whether they still are energized. Always assume downed power lines are live. Keep at least 35 feet away from downed lines and anything touching them.

If you find yourself in a situation where you're close to downed lines, shuffle away in small steps, with your feet together, touching the ground at all times to prevent electrocution.

Prolonged power outages can spur increased use of portable generators, which can be deadly if misused. Most people get hurt by generators when they operate the machines too close to or even inside their homes, which allows carbon monoxide to filter throughout living areas. Most generators emit deadly levels of the gas within minutes.

In addition, if you plug your portable generator into a wall socket, it can threaten co-op lineworkers by producing backfeed that unexpectedly re-energizes power lines.

Backfeeding is a deadly serious issue for electric co-op lineworkers. Portable generators should never be plugged into a home's wall outlet, and permanent generators must have a transfer switch installed. Visit Sam Houston EC's website, samhouston.net, for important information if you plan to install an emergency generator.



Capital Credits Improve Grid Before Returning to Your Wallet

SAM HOUSTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE IS CONTINUING ITS LONG-STANDING PRACTICE of returning capital credits to its member-owners. In September, members' electric bills will be lowered by their portion of \$3 million in capital credits.

Over the years, Sam Houston EC has paid more than \$42 million in capital credits to its members.

"Capital credits are another benefit of being a member of an electric cooperative," said Kyle J. Kuntz, Sam Houston EC CEO. "Since the Cooperative is not-for-profit, we assign surplus revenues to each member based on the amount of electricity they purchased. These are called capital credits."

Capital credits funds are used to build, upgrade and operate the Co-op's power distribution system. That means each member owns a part of the lines, poles and substations that deliver electricity to their homes and businesses. This cornerstone of the cooperative business model allows Sam Houston EC to provide members with safe, reliable and cost-effective electricity.

After each fiscal year, and once the determination has been made that the financial condition of the Cooperative is stable and adequate to meet operating costs and debt covenants, the board of directors may elect to return excess capital by retiring capital credits to Co-op members.

Capital credits are allocated based on the dollar value of individual electric use. So, the amount of the credits is directly proportionate to the amount of electricity purchased by a Sam Houston EC member. An allocation is the amount set aside into a separate account to be used as operating capital over a given period of time.

A capital credits retirement is the amount each member will receive back as a capital credits payment. This amount is a percentage of a member's total capital credits balance. The amount to retire is decided upon annually by the board of directors, based on the financial condition of the Cooperative.

"Unlike investor-owned utilities that operate for profit and pay out dividends to shareholders, Sam Houston EC returns unused capital to our member-owners who actually purchase the electricity," Kuntz said. "We work hard to find the best deals on electricity and operate as efficiently as possible in order to save our members money. That's what being a not-for-profit cooperative is all about."

Capital credits help Sam Houston EC remain in good financial standing. This capital is used for improvements, such as to substations, power lines and other electrical system facilities that serve our members.

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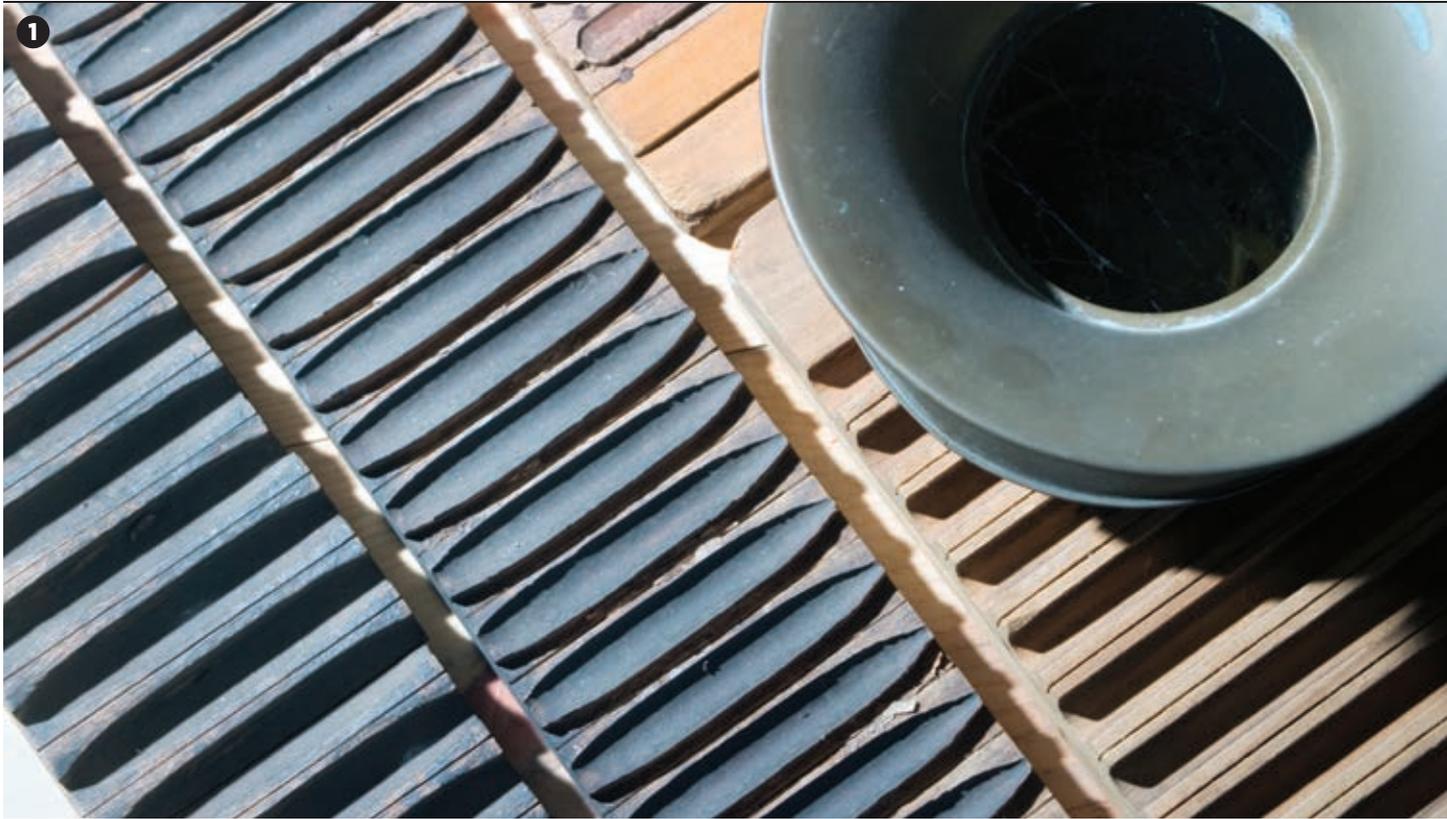
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RANDY MALLORY

King of Cigars

Just over a century ago, Willis led the pack in Texas' fledgling tobacco industry ... until it all went up in smoke

BY RANDY MALLORY

IN MANY WAYS, WILLIS WAS ON A ROLL AT THE TURN OF THE 20th century. The International and Great Northern Railroad had rolled into the new town in the 1870s, allowing local growers to ship their products—especially timber and cotton—to faraway markets for the first time. Willis held several steam-powered saw and grist mills, two cotton gins, a brickyard, a saloon and gambling house, numerous grocery and dry-goods stores, schools and churches for black and white inhabitants, even a college. By 1890, it was home to 700 people—and growing.

The arrival of the railroad also opened up distant markets to another familiar product of the Old South: tobacco. The crop had been a cultural attribute among East Texas Caddoans and other Native American tribes for centuries. Early Anglo arrivals to East Texas brought along tobacco they grew for their own use, using varieties they knew “back home” in states like Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Some Montgomery County planters experimented in the 1870s and discovered that the East Texas soil and climate also could successfully grow premium tobacco. Success even included the esteemed Vuelta Abajo variety grown in Cuba, recognized as one of the world's finest. Adoption of premium

Cuban varieties got a boost when the U.S. imposed high tariffs on tobacco from Cuba, around the time revolution on the island disrupted the international cigar market.

Cuban Quality

With prized Cuban cigars hard to come by, planters around Willis launched the state's first attempt to grow tobacco on a commercial scale. In 1891, local farmer John Blum had a good year growing the Vuelta Abajo variety using seeds brought from Cuba. With support from tobacco leaf packers and dealers in New York City and Florida, other growers hopped on the bandwagon and produced a bumper crop the next year.

Tobacco barns popped up near Willis for drying the harvested bundles, or “hands,” of tobacco leaves. East Coast markets wanted a high-quality, Cuban-style product, so Willis manufacturers hired workers to hand-roll the cured tobacco into fine cigars. (Cigars were made entirely by hand until around 1920, when the first cigar-making machines appeared.) As many as seven cigar factories opened in Willis, transporting boxed top-quality cigars via steam-powered trains to Galveston's busy port, where sailing vessels shipped



1. Cigar molds and a spittoon at Louis Ehlers Cigar Factory in Shiner.

2. An 1896 postcard mailed to the cigar factory of Owen Smith, son and partner of T.W. Smith.

3. Box for Katy Lee cigars, a favorite brand made at Shiner's Louis Ehlers Cigar Factory.

4. Tobacco processing and cigar-making equipment at Shiner's 1895 Louis Ehlers Cigar Factory.



them to U.S. and foreign markets.

For talented entrepreneurs, there was money to be made.

Most well-known among the Willis tobacco kings was Thomas Wesley Smith. The Kentucky native arrived as a boy in 1845, the year of Texas statehood. By age 21, he was elected Montgomery County sheriff, and after service in the Civil War, he settled into the mercantile business in Montgomery. The railroad bypassed his new hometown, however, and instead established a station at Willis. Smith followed the business and relocated to Willis.

When the prospect of tobacco arose, Smith and son Owen went all in. They founded the Willis Cigar Factory, the largest of the town's manufacturers. The imposing brick factory covered a large lot on Bell Street facing the rail line and employed some 100 workers. Cigar smoking was a widely accepted habit in the late 19th century, more widespread than cigarette smoking. So it was natural that Smith proudly displayed a photo of his daughter, Lelia Lois Smith, on boxes containing one of his more popular cigars. The family was somewhat scandalized, however, knowing that her picture would grace the interiors of "saloons and other places of ill repute," said Smith's grandson,

Tom Smith, in a 1980s interview with local historians.

A few other Texas towns joined the cigar-making craze. In Shiner, part of the German-American area of south-central Texas, the Louis Ehlers Cigar Factory produced three popular cigars: the Becky Brown, Katy Lee and Good Company. The factory employed five labor union men who were paid 1 cent for each cigar they rolled. By 1900, Willis remained the mecca of Texas tobacco, cultivating as much as 1,500 acres within 5 miles of town. East Texas producers benefited from proximity to state prisons by contracting for low-cost field hands available through the state's convict leasing system. On the heels of successful contracts with the Willis cigar manufacturers, in fact, the superintendent of Texas penitentiaries proclaimed the birth of a new industry, using inmates to grow Cuban-quality tobacco.

Hope for Prosperity

One grower, William F. Spiller, founded a town called Ada near his cotton and tobacco plantation 7 miles north of Willis. In 1898 or 1899, he changed the name to Esperanza ("hope" in Spanish), in hopes that his town and plantation would prosper. He built a 16-room mansion in the antebellum style of his

1. T.W. Smith, pictured around 1893, came to Montgomery County as a young man and eventually led a brief but spectacular cigar-making industry in Willis.

2. The portrait of a young Leila Lois Smith, daughter of T.W. Smith, graced the box label of one of his finer cigars.

3. T.W. Smith, shown at left with field hands around 1895, was the driving force behind growth of the Willis cigar industry.



Leila Lois Smith, daughter of T. W. Smith, Cigar Factory Owner. Late 1800's in Willis.



EXPLORE TOBACCO LORE

Located in a historic home in Conroe's Candy Cane Park, the Heritage Museum of Montgomery County (1506 I-45 N.; (936) 539-6873; open Wednesday-Saturday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.) has an exhibit on Willis and its tobacco legacy. The refurbished Louis Ehlers Cigar Factory is at 817 N. Ave. E in Shiner, between Houston and San Antonio. The factory features exhibits and serves as the home of the Shiner Chamber of Commerce. For details and hours, call (361) 594-4180.

Virginia birthplace. With 10 fireplaces and a metal roof, Esperanza Plantation was a showplace, says Willis historian Sue Ann Powell, who remembers the mansion from visits as a youngster in the 1950s.

“We took my grandmother to visit Mrs. Spiller,” says Powell, the great-granddaughter of pioneering Willis physician Dr. William P. Powell. “I recall seeing Spanish moss hanging from the trees in front of the fine old plantation home. Tobacco brought a very refined life to Willis.”

There was, indeed, good reason to hope for prosperity at Esperanza and other local plantations. Willis-area tobacco won first prize at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, then again at the Paris World’s Fair in 1900, Powell notes. Cigar magnate Smith stoked more civic pride when he built an opera house in Willis. But changing market conditions fizzled hopes for long-term tobacco riches. The Spanish-American War in 1898 temporarily halted political turmoil in Cuba, and the U.S. government dropped tariffs on Cuban tobacco products. Tobacco acreage in the Willis area dropped from 1,000 acres to just 70 by 1901.

In an attempt to revive Texas tobacco, the U.S. Department

of Agriculture studied the region and estimated that 425,000 acres of East Texas could grow high-quality tobacco. The federal agency helped establish a demonstration tobacco farm in Nacogdoches and experimented with tobacco planting across East Texas. Tobacco packing houses popped up in Palestine and Nacogdoches, which also housed a cigar factory. (An old Nacogdoches warehouse has been restored as an event center, called the Old Tobacco Warehouse, in downtown.)

By the end of World War I, rising cotton prices lured East Texas growers away from tobacco. They also turned to truck farming, transporting locally-grown fruits and vegetables to a growing Gulf Coast market.

The once-explosive Willis tobacco business ended unceremoniously in what now seems like a vaudeville act. In an era of labor unrest, some disgruntled tobacco employees loaded gunpowder into some of the last shipments of Willis cigars, Powell explains. The Willis Cigar Factory building was abandoned by 1910 and burned by vandals in the 1930s.

“Tobacco was so instrumental in the growth of Willis,” Powell says, “that I hope more people will learn to appreciate this interesting part of our past.”



Understanding How Your Appliances Use Energy

IF SOME OF YOUR APPLIANCES ARE GETTING old and will need to be replaced soon, it's time to do some homework. Your appliance choices can have a significant impact on your electric bill.

Your energy use varies month to month, so it can be difficult to see the difference any one appliance makes. Instead, it's best to think about how an appliance uses energy over its lifetime. Think about upfront and lifetime energy costs.

In a *Consumer Reports* test, the most efficient refrigerator used \$68 less in electricity per year than the least efficient model. Compound that difference over a decade or two, and the lifetime energy savings could be greater than the upfront cost. All it takes to get the best appliance for your needs is some research.

Appliances use less energy, on average, than home heating and cooling equipment but still can use several hundred dollars' worth each year. That dollar amount depends on factors like the model, how often it's used, the settings you use and even the time of day it's most used.

Over the past few decades, new appliances have become more energy efficient, driven partly by government standards. These requirements, created by the U.S. Department of Energy, save consumers more than \$60 billion each year by requiring appliances to include an EnergyGuide label that shows estimated energy use and operating costs per year. These estimates help you compare models and calculate initial costs against long-term savings.

Some appliances also will have an Energy Star label. This sticker indicates an appliance is substantially more efficient than the minimum standard. Your greatest energy savings opportunities can come from replacing an old appliance with an Energy Star-rated appliance. Removing a refrigerator that's 20 years old and replacing it with a new Energy Star model can lower its electricity costs by 75 percent.

In some cases, the way an appliance is configured also can make a significant difference. For example, the most efficient refrigerator models have the fridge compartment stacked on top of the freezer. All 36 of the most efficient clothes washers of 2018 were front-load models.

Consider how much you use the appliance, too. The more you use the appliance, the greater your savings from choosing a more efficient model. If you use the appliance less or have a small household, you may get by with a smaller refrigerator or



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freezer, which will save money.

How you operate appliances also can make a difference.

Here are some easy ways to save:

Refrigerator/Freezer

- ▶ Set your refrigerator at 35–38 degrees and your freezer at zero.
- ▶ Make sure there is adequate airflow between your home's wall and the back of the unit.
- ▶ Keep the refrigerator relatively full when possible.
- ▶ Replace the seals around the doors if they appear to be leaking air.

Stove/Oven

- ▶ Use the burner size that best matches the pan size.
- ▶ Use smaller appliances like a microwave or slow cooker instead of the oven when possible.

Dishwasher

- ▶ Use the most energy-efficient and shortest setting that gets your dishes clean.
- ▶ Air dry rather than using the heated dry function.
- ▶ Wait until the dishwasher is full before running it.

Make the most out of your appliance energy use with a little research before buying a new model and a few easy adjustments to the way you use them.

Disasters Don't Plan Ahead, But You Should

BE PREPARED. IT'S A SCOUT'S TIMELESS MOTTO AND SAGE ADVICE FOR ALL OF US. SEP-tember is National Preparedness Month, a good opportunity to stress the importance of planning for the unexpected, particularly harsh storms, while affirming Sam Houston Electric Cooperative's commitment to doing the same in our own backyard.

A critical component of preparedness is having an emergency communication plan for your family. Something as simple as a list of names and phone numbers tucked away in a wallet or purse could make all the difference if the power goes out and your cellphone battery dies.

Even Sam Houston EC has our own detailed communication plans for crises, when staying in touch becomes particularly important and our employees have to be able to reach one another and our members.

While a written contact list is vital, we also use technology to stay updated in the event of a rapidly unfolding situation. Electronic notifications are available

for everything from changes in weather to voice messages from local law enforcement. Check with your county's office of emergency management or sheriff to sign up for alerts for your area. It makes sense to take advantage of all available tools in an emergency.

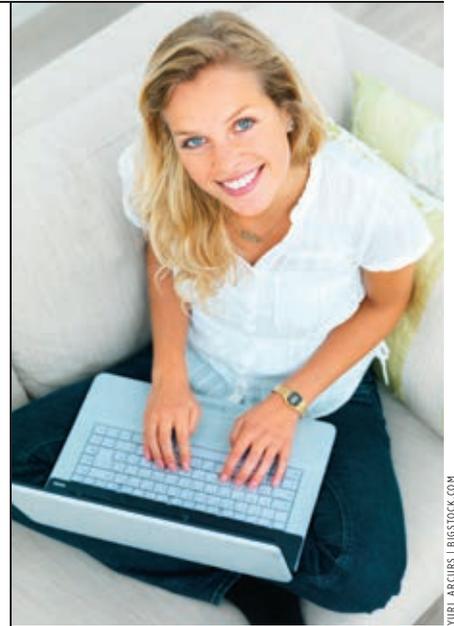
Finally, assemble an emergency supply kit to see you through a few days, with or without electricity. The kit should include essential items such as water, nonperishable food, a battery-powered or hand-cranked radio, flashlight, batteries, a first-aid kit, medications and copies of important personal documents.

Keeping your vehicle's gas tank full and some cash on hand are also prudent steps.

Maps of the area, pet supplies

and activities to keep kids occupied could be important as well. A few moments of rounding up many or all of these things into a bag or container and informing everyone in your home of its location could make a potentially dangerous situation merely unpleasant or, hopefully, just inconvenient.

Just as Sam Houston EC takes steps to be ready for whatever disasters may come our way, we encourage you to prepare now for your safety and that of your family.



Labor Day

SAM HOUSTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

offices will be closed September 3 in observance of Labor Day.

As always, resources will be in place and crews will be on call to respond to any power outages while Sam Houston EC offices are closed.

Our automated phone system and online services are always available 24 hours a day. Your *mySamHouston* account access is now available as a free mobile app for your Apple or Android smartphone. Download it today when you search for "*mySamHouston*" and start enjoying the benefits of *mySamHouston* wherever you go!

Emergency



Power Tip

Look for LED products and fixtures for outdoor use, such as on pathways, steps and porches. Many include features like automatic daylight shut-off and motion sensors.



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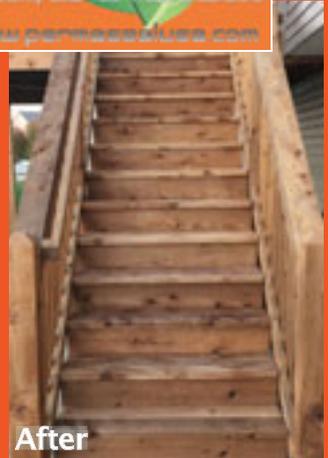
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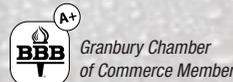


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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

Clogged, Backed—up Septic System... Can anything Restore It?

DEAR DARRYL: My home is about 10 years old, and so is my septic system. I have always taken pride in keeping my home and property in top shape. In fact, my neighbors and I are always kidding each other about who keeps their home and yard nicest. Lately, however, I have had a horrible smell in my yard, and also in one of my bathrooms, coming from the shower drain. My grass is muddy and all the drains in my home are very slow.



Dear
Darryl

My wife is on my back to make the bathroom stop smelling and as you can imagine, my neighbors are having a field day, kidding me about the mud pit and sewage stench in my yard. It's humiliating. I called a plumber buddy of mine, who recommended pumping (and maybe even replacing) my septic system. But at the potential cost of thousands of dollars, I hate to explore that option.

I tried the store bought, so called, Septic treatments out there, and they did Nothing to clear up my problem. Is there anything on the market I can pour or flush into my system that will restore it to normal, and keep it maintained?

Clogged and Smelly – Corpus Christi, TX

DEAR CLOGGED AND SMELLY: As a reader of my column, I am sure you are aware that I have a great deal of experience in this particular field. You will be glad to know that there IS a septic solution that will solve your back-up and effectively restore your entire system from interior piping throughout the septic system and even unplug the drain field as well. **SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs** deliver your system the fast active bacteria and enzymes needed to liquefy solid waste and free the clogs causing your back-up.

This fast-acting bacteria multiplies within minutes of application and is specifically designed to withstand many of today's anti-bacterial cleaners, soaps and detergents. It comes in dissolvable plastic packs, that you just flush down your toilets. It's so cool. Plus, they actually Guarantee that it restores ANY system, no matter how bad the problem is.

SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs are designed to work on any septic system regardless of design or age. From modern day systems to sand mounds, and systems installed generations ago, I have personally seen SeptiCleanse unclog and restore these systems in a matter of weeks. I highly recommend that you try it before spending any money on repairs. SeptiCleanse products are available online at **www.septicleanse.com** or you can order or learn more by calling **toll free at 1-888-899-8345**. If you use the promo code "TXS5", you can get a free shock treatment, added to your order, which normally costs \$169. So, make sure you use that code when you call or buy online.

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Marvels of Horsepower

Blanco's Buggy Barn Museum takes a turn into the 19th century

BY MARTHA DEERING

THE MUFFLED CADENCE OF TROTTING horses drifts in the Hill Country breeze when I arrive at the Buggy Barn Museum to enjoy a version of Old West atmosphere. Proprietor Dennis Moore, in his battered hat and dusty boots, could have stepped straight out of a classic Western. In fact, on the day I visit the museum, Moore had just returned from working on a film set in Austin.

The 10-acre site on the northern edge of Blanco, on U.S. 281, features nary a nod to modern times. The museum's office, just inside the red gates, recalls the 19th century. It occupies a rustic cabin with a wooden porch and an inviting rocking chair. Longhorn cattle contentedly ruminate in the shade of trees near the highway, and a line of buggies and wagons is visible outside the museum's red door.

The 140-plus horse-drawn vehicles in the museum provide a hands-on history of travel from the early 1860s to about 1900. Each buggy, carriage, hearse and wagon embodies its own story, and Moore demonstrates knowledge of every nuance.

Moore's fixation began in childhood when his father bought a pony and cart for him and his brother. Serious collecting over the past 18 years has filled the large museum and expanded onto the surrounding grounds. From a massive Conestoga wagon to a light and classy Studebaker surrey with red fringe on top, the vehicles served the needs of a range of 19th-century travelers.

Moore is a fifth-generation Blanco resident who has encouraged his wife, children and extended family members to take an interest in the collection. His wife's



lifelong love of horses made her easy to convince. "It wouldn't be nearly as much fun without the family involved," Moore says. "My grandchildren, ages 7 and 11, love to give tours."

The Buggy Barn Museum provides an educational opportunity to step back into the days of horse-drawn travel. Expansion of the collection and preservation of the history of horse-drawn transportation are the museum's primary goals. Moore uses the vehicles in parades and re-enactments, but along the way, word spread to film companies that horse-drawn vehicles could be rented from the Buggy Barn along with horses to pull them and drivers to handle the reins. In recent years, the movie business has kept Moore busy. Between 30 and 40 of his vehicles were used in the 2010 remake of *True Grit*.

Along with buggies and wagons, the museum houses a collection of vintage saddles, boots, guns and other memorabilia important for dressing a film set. Many of the museum's artifacts graced the screen in the recent Western series *The Son*. Moore also furnished horses and wagons for *There Will Be Blood*, filmed in Marfa with actor Daniel Day-Lewis.

Trailers with raised ceilings haul the horses, vehicles and equipment to a film's location. Moore has 20 horses, two donkeys and a black German shepherd named Kira who also is a movie star. With his grizzled beard and mustache, Moore looks right at home driving a team in a Western movie. In his most recent movie venture, *Support the Girls* (not a Western), he held the title of transportation coordinator, working all week in Austin and returning to Blanco on weekends.

With his encyclopedic knowledge of the Old West, Moore explains exactly how metal foot warmers burned coal to keep passengers from arriving at their destinations with frozen feet. He can point out the differences between a phaeton and a brougham and show visitors the tube that made it possible for those inside to talk to the driver. This is a man who lives and breathes the Old West—although he has been known to put a set of small wheels under a bright red sleigh and drive Santa in the Blanco Christmas Parade.

Martha Deering, a member of Heart of Texas EC, lives near McGregor. Her recent book, *Elephant Dreams*, is available at Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

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All Hail the Cookie Jar

WHILE I'VE NEVER MET A COOKIE I didn't like, I like oatmeal cookies more than most. The best kinds are a comforting and welcome treat after school or midafternoon, when you need a boost. Whole grains and dried fruit even make them feel somewhat virtuous—no shame in eating one for breakfast, right? A few details give this recipe (slightly adapted from Food 52's website) extraordinary flavor and texture. First, the butter is browned before mixing, which gives the cookies a rich, nutty flavor. Second, the raisins are puréed before they're incorporated into the dough, creating a moist, chewy texture. Rolling the cookies in sugar before baking gives a delightfully crunchy coating.

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

Brown Butter Oatmeal Raisin Cookies

- 2 cups dark raisins
- 2 cups flour, divided use
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 1 cup dark brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1¼ teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon espresso powder
- Sugar or turbinado sugar, for rolling (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.

2. Toss the raisins with ¼ cup flour. Place them in a food processor and pulse 20–30 seconds, until the raisins form a very thick paste and come together in a ball.

3. Heat the butter in a skillet over medium heat, watching it closely. When you see the bottom of the pan

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32

Recipes

All Hail the Cookie Jar



THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

HEATHER BRADFORD | PEDERNALES EC

The fragrant oil of bergamot, a variety of orange grown in Italy and France, gives Earl Grey tea its distinctive aroma. That same flavor (and a generous amount of lemon zest) perfumes these delicate sugar cookies.

To increase the citrus flavor, drizzle the cooled cookies with lemon glaze.

Earl Grey Lemon Cookies

DOUGH

- 4½ cups flour
 - 2 teaspoons baking powder
 - ½ teaspoon kosher salt
 - 2 individual bags Earl Grey tea (or 2 tablespoons loose leaf tea), ground
 - 1 cup sugar
 - Finely grated zest of 2 lemons
 - ¼ cups (2½ sticks) unsalted butter, softened
 - 1 egg
 - 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
 - ½ cup buttermilk, divided use
- Powdered sugar, for rolling dough

LEMON GLAZE

- 2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- ⅓ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

- 1. DOUGH:** Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.
- In a medium bowl, whisk together

the flour, baking powder, salt and loose tea leaves until combined.

3. Combine the sugar and lemon zest in a standing mixer bowl fitted with a paddle attachment. Mix the sugar and zest on low speed until the mixture is very aromatic and resembles wet sand. Add the butter and beat on medium-high speed for 3 minutes or until light and fluffy. Add the egg, vanilla and ¼ cup buttermilk, and mix on low speed until combined.

4. Add 2½ cups of the flour mixture to the bowl and mix slowly, until just combined. Stir in remaining buttermilk, then add the remaining flour mixture and process just until the dry ingredients are absorbed. The dough should be smooth and supple (if too sticky, add an additional ¼ cup flour).

5. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill at least 30 minutes, or up to 2 days in advance (if you chill the dough for an extended time, remove it from the fridge 30 minutes before rolling out the cookies, to soften).

6. Dust a work surface with powdered sugar, then roll out the dough ¼ inch thick. Cut the cookies into rounds (or any shape desired) and use a thin spatula to transfer them to the prepared baking sheet.

7. Bake the cookies 10–12 minutes, until the edges start to turn golden. Transfer cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

8. LEMON GLAZE: Whisk together ingredients until the mixture is smooth. Use a spoon, fork or pastry bag with a small tip to glaze the cookies. Store in an airtight container up to 1 week. ▶ Makes about 3 dozen cookies.

COOK'S TIP To grind the tea, place it in a sealable plastic bag and use a rolling pin to break down the leaves.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

becoming browned, remove from heat and set aside.

4. Combine the sugars, vanilla and browned butter in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and mix on medium speed about 5 minutes. Add the eggs one at a time and continue to mix on medium speed. When the mixture pulls together into an even texture, add the raisin paste and mix until thoroughly combined.

5. In a separate bowl, combine the remaining flour, oats, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and espresso powder. Mix the dry ingredients into the wet mixture in two additions, until there is no flour visible.

6. Using a soup spoon and your hands, roll the dough into rounds about the size of a Ping-Pong ball. Roll the balls of dough in a dish of sugar and place them on the prepared baking sheet, about 2 inches apart. Using the flat part of your palm, flatten each dough ball slightly to allow for even baking.

7. Bake 12–15 minutes, until cookies just begin to turn golden brown and are crinkly on top. Another good way of testing is to lift a corner of the cookie—if it bends slightly and re-forms when let go, they are ready. Allow to cool 5 minutes on the baking sheet before transferring cookies to a wire rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container up to 10 days. ▶ Makes about 40 cookies.

Pecan Thin Crisps

GAYLYN HERRO | BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

These wonderful “make ahead and bake later” cookies have been a treasured family recipe since 1959, when Herro’s parents, Emma Jean and Keith Jaeger, were married. Traditionally, the cookies were prepared and frozen the week after Thanksgiving (pecan season) then baked in mid-December for Christmas gifts for family members, friends and the community. This recipe also can be cut in half to make fewer cookies if preferred.

- 2 cups (4 sticks) butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED,
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\$100 Recipe Contest

February’s recipe contest theme is **Cozy Casseroles**, comforting, one-pan meals that are baked until bubbly and feed the entire family. The deadline is **September 10**.

ENTER ONLINE at TexasCoopPower.com/contests; MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

- 4 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 3 cups finely chopped pecans

1. Place the butter in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with a paddle attachment and beat until smooth. Gradually add the sugars and beat on medium-high speed until the mixture is light and fluffy. Add the eggs and vanilla; mix well.

2. Sift together the flour, baking soda and salt, then gradually add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture, beating well after each addition. Add the pecans and stir until just combined. Do not overmix the dough.

3. Transfer the cookie dough to a work surface and divide into six equal portions then refrigerate them on a plate 5–10 minutes (chilling makes the dough easier to work with). Prepare six 6- to 8-inch rectangles of waxed paper or aluminum foil, then place a chilled dough portion in the center of each wrapper sheet and shape it into a roll approxi-

mately 1¾ inches in diameter, wrapping tightly, then freeze until firm (usually overnight). The cookie rolls will maintain freshness in the freezer for more than 6 months.

4. When you're ready to bake, preheat oven to 375 degrees. Slice the frozen dough with a sharp knife in approximately ¼-inch sections then place on lightly greased baking sheet. Bake 10–12 minutes until lightly browned. Remove cookies to cooling rack. ▶ Makes about 18 dozen cookies.

COOK'S TIP For the best results, slice and bake these cookies when the dough is still frozen. A food processor makes quick work of chopping the pecans. Simply pulse them into a coarse mixture. If you plan on freezing the cookies for longer than a week, wrap them in plastic wrap or waxed paper and an additional layer of aluminum foil.

WEB EXTRAS ▶ Read this story on our website to see a recipe for Mexican Pepper Cookies from a Central Texas EC member.

Bake Better Cookies

LINE BAKING SHEETS with parchment paper or a Silpat baking liner for easier cleanup.

SOFTENED BUTTER should be at room temperature or slightly cool to the touch—but not melted. (That will yield an entirely different texture in the baked cookie.)

CREAMING BUTTER and sugar until “light and fluffy” typically takes 3–5 minutes; it's ready when it no longer feels grainy between your fingertips. The process creates tiny air bubbles that give the dough structure and help the cookies rise in the oven.

USING A HEAVY HAND with flour will create tougher cookies. To measure it accurately, spoon it lightly into a dry measuring cup and then level the cup off with a knife. Resist scooping the cup into the flour or tapping the measuring cup with a knife, this will make the measure too dense and heavy.

NUTS AND DRIED FRUIT are interchangeable; feel free to swap in your favorite flavors. —PD

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Wedding Funnies



CHURCH WEDDIN’S OR SOMETHIN’ A LITTLE LESS FORMAL, Texans love to get hitched. Who would’a thought they were such emotional occasions? Even the cake is in tiers. We’re just hats over heels for these bridal shots. Now, it’s time for the bouquet toss, so all y’all single ladies c’mon up front!

GRACE ARSIAGA

WEB EXTRAS ▶ See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.

▼ **EUNICE BAETHGE**, Central Texas EC: “The middle groomsman, James, was genuinely helping my daughter-in-law, Caroline, with her dress when Ryan, who is always an opportunist, helped James.”

▲ **MELISSA STEELE**, Fayette EC: Houston firefighter Justin Steele weds Houston nurse Courtney with Courtney’s son, Gavin, by their side. “Gavin was all smiles until the kiss!”



◀ **JENNIFER LITTLETON**, Pedernales EC: “I should have seen it coming, but I didn’t! How about a nice bit of chocolate cake to go with your bright white wedding dress and perfect manicure?”

▶ **LISA GLENN**, Pedernales EC: “Jacob and his friends recreated a photo from their senior year in high school at his wedding.”



UPCOMING CONTESTS

JANUARY HARVEST DUE SEPTEMBER 10

FEBRUARY TWO OF A KIND DUE OCTOBER 10

MARCH TREES DUE NOVEMBER 10

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

ONLINE: Submit highest-resolution digital images at TexasCoopPower.com/contests. We do not accept entries via email. **MAIL:** Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.

◀ **TIFFANY STALNAKER**, Bluebonnet EC: As the minister begins, one of the bridesmaids shushes a younger one.



Pick of the Month Founder's Day

McGregor September 14-15

(254) 495-0041, mcgregorfoundersday.com

Founder's Day is a long-standing tradition in McGregor, home of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, featuring live music and entertainment all day Saturday. Festivities kick off with a barbecue cook-off and concert Friday night and continue the next day with a 5K run, parade, cute baby contest, car show, washer tournament, kids zone, food trucks, and local craft and artisan vendors.

September

7

Montalba [7-8] McKenzie Creek Trail Ride and Campout, (832) 427-9584

Stafford [7-8] A Decade in Stitches: Coastal Prairie Quilt Guild Quilt Showcase, (281) 491-5144, cpqgtx.org

8

Harker Heights Food, Wine & Brew Fest, (254) 699-4999, hhfoodandwine.com

San Antonio San Antonio Walk for PKD, (210) 414-6614, walkforpkd.org/sanantonio

San Saba Bellamy Brothers at Pecan Capital Street Dance XIX, (325) 372-5200, visitsansabatexas.com

12

Austin Boys & Girls Clubs of the Austin Area Club Classic at Topgolf, (512) 444-7199, bgcaustin.org/events/golfclassic

Alvarado [12-15] Johnson County Pioneer and Old Settlers Reunion, (817) 614-6574, alvaradopubliclibrary.org

13

Grapevine [13-16] GrapeFest, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com/grapefest

Rockport [13-16] HummerBird Celebration, (361) 729-6445, rockport-fulton.org/hb

14

Sulphur Springs [14-15] Lone Star Heritage Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (903) 994-2570, sulphurspringstxquilts.com



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Houston, We Have a Road Trip

Bay Area Houston offers a glimpse at Mars and a historic battleground

BY MELISSA GASKILL

A CLUSTER OF COMMUNITIES ON THE southeast side of Houston has played a major role in space exploration, from missions to the moon almost 50 years ago to space shuttle flights and research aboard the International Space Station. **Space Center Houston**, the official visitor center of NASA's **Johnson Space Center**, chronicles the out-of-this-world feats in interactive exhibits, full-scale displays, spacecraft and more than 400 artifacts.

My favorites include one of the actual Boeing 747s that ferried space shuttles across Earth and a full-size replica of the shuttle *Independence*, along with the chance to touch Mars and the moon in one morning—a meteorite from the former and one of 840 pounds of rocks brought back from the latter. I also geek out on exhibits on the current weather on Mars (spoiler alert: It's cold!), how astronauts sleep on the space station, and the hole that a speck traveling at 15,200 mph would make in a spaceship.

Two theaters show films, including *Human Destiny*, a history of NASA missions with plenty of archival footage. *Mission Mars* uses interactive exhibits, films, and scale models of spacecraft and rockets to detail the planned journey to this far-away planet. Fridays and Saturdays, visitors with reservations can share lunch with an astronaut and have their pictures taken as souvenirs.

Ninety-minute tram tours include historic mission control facilities for Apollo and the shuttles and working buildings in Johnson Space Center. A five-hour Level 9 guided VIP tour includes even more working buildings, plus lunch in the space center cafeteria where multiple astronauts dine



The Skylab 1-G Trainer at Space Center Houston.

and next-day admission to Space Center Houston. While many cities boast science museums or even space centers, this one can't be beat for history and authenticity.

Folks in these parts take equal pride in their role in events further back in history, so I drive about 30 minutes to the **San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site**. Here, in 1836, a ragtag band of Texians under Sam Houston defeated Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna's Mexican army to win independence for the Republic of Texas. I take in the view from the 570-foot-tall San Jacinto Monument (taller than the Washington Monument, which is 555 feet tall) and browse historic exhibits and a wealth of artifacts in the museum at its base.

Across the 1,800-foot-long reflecting pond, the spot where Houston's men camped along Buffalo Bayou, rests **Battleship Texas State Historic Site** and its namesake vessel. Commissioned in 1914, it fought in both world wars, including the Atlantic and Pacific theaters in World War II. Visitors can wander the 573-foot-long ship, up onto the foremast, around decks and gun turrets

that move, and through living quarters for a crew of 1,600, a maze of kitchens, doctor and dentist offices, and more.

As I leave the venerable old ship, modern-day craft pass on the waters of Buffalo Bayou, also known as the Houston Ship Channel, as do dolphins and birds, including roseate spoonbills and an osprey.

Experience flights of a different kind at **Saloon Door Brewing**, just off the NASA bypass, where a beer flight offers a nice wind-down from a full day's activities.

Friends who work at Johnson Space Center recommend waterside **Boondoggle's Pizzeria & Pub**. Diners sometimes spot astronauts at the next table, they tell me, and if not, there are plenty of them in photos on the walls. Boondoggle's offers more than 50 craft beers on tap, including the aptly named *Rocket Fuel* and *Space Dust*, plus gourmet pizzas from a wood-burning oven, sandwiches, burgers, salads and more.

Houston, our road trip has landed.

Read more about **Melissa Gaskill's** work at melissagaskill.blogspot.com.

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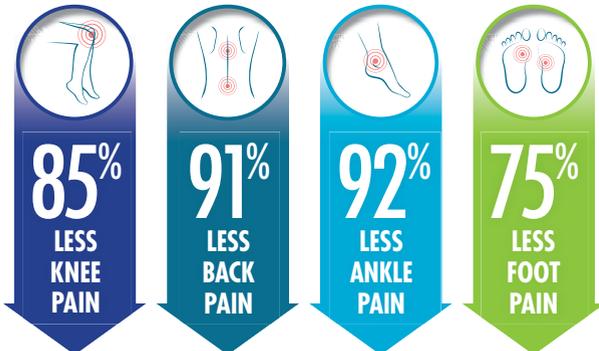
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