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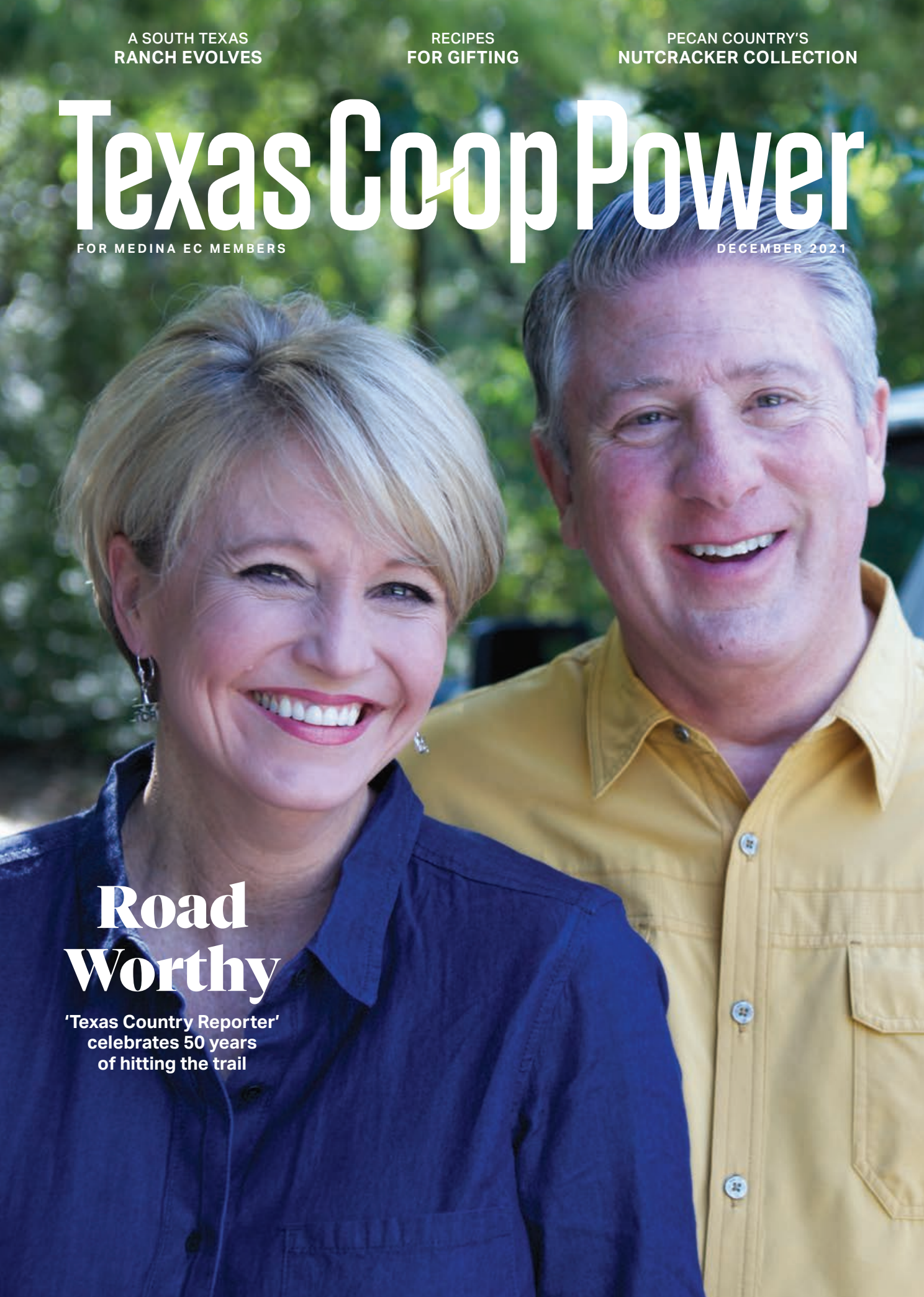
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December 2021



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An Evolving Ranch Reality

Fennessey Ranch turns to conservation and education to diversify its mission.

*By Clayton Maxwell
Photos by Erich Schlegel*

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ON THE COVER

Kelli and Bob Phillips of the *Texas Country Reporter*.

Photo by Dan Stricklin | Phillips Productions

ABOVE

A barred owl on the Fennessey Ranch.

Photo by Erich Schlegel

A Wonderful Flick

THE HOLIDAY CHESTNUT *It's a Wonderful Life* debuted 75 years ago, and it was kind of a flop.

Reviews were frosty after the film's premiere, December 20, 1946, at New York's Globe Theatre, and it bombed at the box office.

But in the 1970s, it landed on cable TV and has been pretty much unavoidable during the holiday season ever since.



“Look, Daddy. Teacher says every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings.”

—ZUZU BAILEY

TRUE TREKKER

As a little girl, Vanessa Wyche watched Nichelle Nichols portray Lt. Nyota Uhura in *Star Trek*. “I got inspiration by seeing someone on a TV screen that looked like me, that made me think that I could do that,” Wyche said in a July interview with *Texas Standard*.

Wyche, below, director of the Johnson Space Center in Houston since June, is the first Black woman to lead a NASA center. The multi-decade veteran of the space agency prioritizes safety and inclusivity in her leadership.

“Part of [leading a team] may be understanding that diversity of thought and personnel is very important for us to bring everything to bear,” she said.



TCP Contests and More

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All Wet

RECOMMENDED READING

Underwater Theater, from December 2011, took readers along with divers off the Texas coast to see a cast of extraordinary coral reef creatures.



Be Enlightened

If every American replaced one incandescent lightbulb with an LED, we would save about \$600 million in annual energy costs and stop 9 billion pounds of greenhouse gas emissions per year, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. That's enough to power 3 million homes and roughly the amount of gas produced by 800,000 cars in a year.

A Red-Letter Day +

CLARA BARTON, founder of the American Red Cross, was born 200 years ago this month.

The Red Cross, started in 1881, was largely devoted to disaster relief for its first 20 years. Barton participated in her last relief mission in September 1900, when, at the age of 78, she distributed financial assistance and supplies to survivors of the deadly hurricane and tidal wave that struck Galveston.

Barton was born December 25, 1821, in Massachusetts.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE THE HARDEST JOB IN THE WORLD HAS TO BE ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our October prompt: **I wish I was there when ...**

Stevie Ray Vaughan played at Antone's.

KIM GROSSMAN
PEDERNALES EC
JONESTOWN

Neil Armstrong famously landed on the moon.

LEANN HOLT
GRAYSON-COLLIN EC
ALLEN

The winning lottery ticket was being passed across the counter.

JULIA BRYANT
SOUTH PLAINS EC
SPUR

To see more responses, read *Currents* online.



KYLIE O'NEAL | WOOD COUNTY EC

Making It Happen

The evening of the big freeze, I drove from my home in Crawford to Marble Falls to visit my disabled brother [Co-ops Shine, October 2021]. My wife was left alone to face the rigors of the freeze, and because of the work of Heart of Texas EC, she had power almost the entire time. I am deeply appreciative of all the work the co-op employees put in to make that happen.

Stan and Jane Jarosz
Heart of Texas EC
Crawford



Our San Patricio EC is excellent [Co-ops Shine, October 2021]. Always great service in the field and at the office. They keep customers informed and repair in a timely manner. We never lost power during the freeze.

SUE SPARKMAN
VIA FACEBOOK



CHANELLE NIBBELINK

Earliest Inconvenience

“So much respect for all our co-op guys. They go wherever they’re needed, whenever they’re needed, and stay as long as they’re needed.”

PEGGY LAGING
VIA FACEBOOK

A Stable Career

We sure need more horse vets [Second to None, September 2021].

Kate Jacobs
Via Facebook

Finding Contentment

I am content with my old house, too [Not About To Fixate, October 2021]. I’ve been through the remodels, and all get old and out of style sooner than later. It’s wonderful to be content with what one has. I’m glad to know that there is someone else out there who feels like I do.

M.C. Watts
Sam Houston EC
Chester

Walking Through History

As a kid my brothers and I scoured this same Hill Country looking for arrowheads and other stuff, even chasing a few goats along the way [Raising the Stakes, September 2021].

John Taliaferro has a way of telling a story that makes you feel like you’re walking along with him and getting a history lesson at the same time. He talks Texan.

Dale Yardley
Cherokee County EC
Jacksonville

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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TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 78, Number 6 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC). Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 75 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power's* website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is \$4.20 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of \$7.50. Individual copies and back issues are available for \$3 each.

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3,000-Year-Old Beauty Secret Revealed

Turquoise — the original fashion icon — comes full circle for an amazing price.

She's been around for thousands of years, but she's never gone out of fashion. We're talking turquoise, one of the world's most ancient gems. Egyptian queens adorned themselves with turquoise jewelry more than 3,000 years ago. And the blue beauty is even more coveted now than she was a millennia ago.

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— The Jewellery Editor, 2021



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BY CLAYTON MAXWELL • PHOTOS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL

AN EVOLVING RANCH REALITY



FENNESSEY RANCH TURNS TO CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION TO DIVERSIFY ITS MISSION

WALKING A WOODLAND TRAIL on the Fennessey Ranch, Sally Crofutt, former manager of this 3,250-acre spread on the Texas coast, stops at a tangle of woody branches. “Here’s a grapevine,” she says, holding a twisted branch in her hands. “We pick our grapes July Fourth ’cause that’s about when they ripen. I make jelly. I got in the Refugio County Fair with it, and I won.”

Crofutt managed this South Texas ranch of wetlands and coastal prairies for 26 years and has proved her ability to make this rough land bear fruit. She has transformed the Fennessey into a poster child among coastal ranches in the art of revenue stream diversification—a step many ranches must pursue now that increasingly complex production cost management means cattle operations alone will not do the trick.

“Over the past 30-plus years, input costs associated with cattle production have risen at a faster rate than cattle prices,” says Clay Mathis, director of the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. “It’s more than just rising commodity prices and is particularly driven by the rise in fixed costs of land ownership. Today many ranches that are profitable have

achieved success by diversifying revenue streams to spread the fixed costs over more income-producing enterprises.”

Crofutt carved out trails with award-winning wildlife photographer Dean Johnstone to build a photography shelter by the Mission River, 7 miles of which run through the ranch. It’s a prime spot that entices photographers to pay for the opportunity to catch a shot of a painted bunting or a hawk soaring over the treetops.

She also leases an observation blind to birders. Located on the Central Flyway, the Fennessey is a birders’ jackpot, with more than 420 species of resident and migratory birds recorded on the ranch. And she brought on beekeepers to coax 160 pounds of honey each year from the endless acres of scrubby huisache trees that greet you as soon as you drive through the ranch gates.

Jim Blackburn, an environmental attorney and professor at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy, says the Fennessey is an excellent case of a ranch generating alternative sources of income. “The Fennessey’s wildlife tours and catering to birdwatchers and photographers makes them a premier example of how to find cash sources well before others,” he says. “My hat is off to them as trail-blazers.”



ABOVE Sally Crofutt, retired manager of the Fennessey Ranch, oversaw the wetlands and coastal prairies there for 26 years. BELOW A Texas rat snake.



OPPOSITE A bald eagle returns to its nest with a squirrel on the Fennessey Ranch. ABOVE A pair of barred owls.





TOP The McGill Lake wetlands and Mission River on the Fennessey Ranch.
ABOVE A painted bunting sings during spring migration.

The Fennessey is at the forefront of what may be the most meaningful way that ranches are diversifying: conservation and education. In his book *A Texan Plan for the Texas Coast*, Blackburn contends that one of the best things coastal ranches like the Fennessey can do to sustain the land, and therefore the Gulf, is simply remain intact. Although there are many critics of Texas' vast private land ownership—about 95% of the state's land is privately owned—some environmentalists believe large private landowners often are the best custodians of their land, as long as they can avoid parceling it off.

“One of the biggest threats to the long-term future of the Texas coast (and perhaps Texas generally) is the potential breakup of large landholding,” Blackburn writes. “The continued presence of these large tracts devoted to cattle ranching and wildlife is a centerpiece of the charm and ecological abundance and variety of the Texas coast. They provide fabulous wildlife habitat, holding ducks and geese on the ponds and short grass and deer in the woodland.”

Mark Steinbach, executive director of Texas Land Conservancy, says unmitigated development changes the landscape in big ways, disturbing ecosystems and negatively impacting the water supply, air quality and light pollution levels.

In 2006 the Fennessey Ranch's owner, Brien O'Connor Dunn, a descendent of one of the oldest ranching families

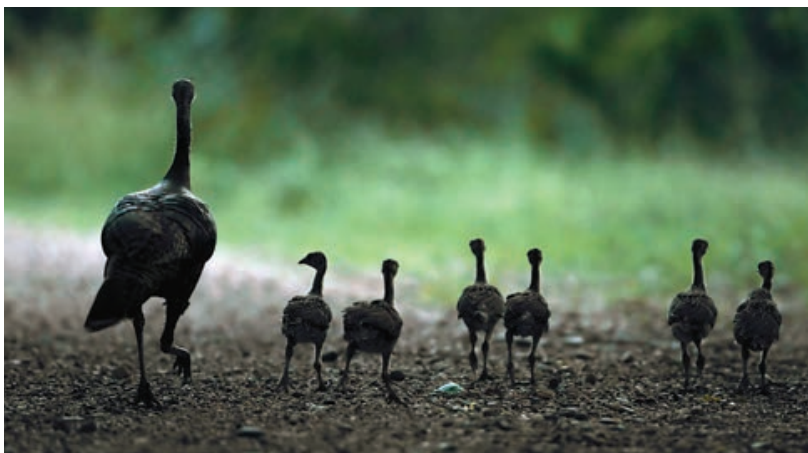
in South Texas, signed an agreement for a conservation easement with the University of Texas Marine Science Institute. Headquartered in Port Aransas, the institute holds the easement in perpetuity and has made the ranch part of the Mission-Aransas National

Estuarine Research Reserve. As Dunn hoped, the ranch's lakes, meadows, prairie, freshwater wetlands and the Mission River are now an expansive classroom for university research and schoolchildren.

Education on the Fennessey hits full throttle during its March Madness program, when more than 100 fifth graders overtake a field edging the ranch's bulrush-filled marshes to tag monarch butterflies migrating to Mexico. Kids jump through hula hoops to mimic the nimble calculations monarchs must perform to avoid smashing into buildings, a reminder of why undeveloped flyways are key to the survival of winged creatures.



LEFT A greater roadrunner.
BELOW Wild turkeys.



RANCHERS AS conservationists is not a new concept: As far back as 1934, U.S. Rep. Richard Kleberg, “the Cowboy Congressman” from the King Ranch, championed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act, requiring that a stamp be purchased by hunters of migratory waterfowl to raise funds for wetland conservation. The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, an offshoot of the King Ranch, has for more than three decades studied the loss of native species in Texas and is now working with the Texas Department of Transportation to reseed 240,000 acres of Texas roadsides to restore native plants and habitat.

Apart from conservation programs, the ranchers and workers who live on the land and can read its rhythms—those who see what a heavy rain can do or where spoonbills land—are often its best stewards. Crofutt understands the Fennessey with an intimacy earned from decades of interaction. She can throw out an impressive sandhill crane call and then point to the bobbing tail of an eastern phoebe, a sight recognizable only to the practiced eye. She knows what the ranch’s many critters, from its lazy cattle to the one roaming mountain lion, are up to: “Bucks are in rut right now.”

Reflecting on her years on the Fennessey, Crofutt says that finding new ways to make money and keep those acres from being fragmented is her proudest accomplishment. Standing amid the tangle of foliage and trees that frame the Mission River, which feeds into Copano Bay and then out

into the Gulf of Mexico, her words show her pride and hard-won knowledge of the land.

Although Crofutt officially retired as manager of the ranch in 2020, she is still intimately involved with the Fennessey, coordinating efforts with the Marine Science Institute. She trains master naturalists and is resuscitating the ranch’s journals, a key way to keep track of changes on the land.

“I always kept a journal of rainfall, bird and wildlife sightings, what is happening day to day on the ranch,” Crofutt says. “After [Hurricane] Harvey, all of that wound up in the bay. So now it’s all there in Sally Crofutt’s brain, which isn’t all that steady. We are journaling again about what’s happening day to day so that we have a baseline. There are always changes, especially after the big freeze.”

It’s good to know that the Fennessey is in good hands, that its river won’t be surrounded by concrete and condos, and that it will continue to be a source of education and awe.

“I’ve been out here where I’ve seen a thousand hawks just lift off,” says Crofutt. “You see, the hawks have to have large trees to roost in. You want tall trees along the river so your migrating hawks will come in. We have a hawk watch every September that’s just amazing. We put guests on a hawk hayride. I can make a hayride out of anything.” ■

TCP WEB EXTRA See a slideshow featuring more wildlife found on the Fennessey Ranch.



Back in 1972, Bob Phillips took on an extra assignment as a news reporter for KDFW-TV in Dallas. He became the host of a new program called *4 Country Reporter*, going out into the Texas countryside to find interesting characters who told him their stories.

In 2002, Phillips even interviewed me and photographer Laurence Parent for our book, *Big Bend National Park*. Naturally, he conducted the interview halfway up the park's Lost Mine Trail.

Nearly 50 years and more than 3 million miles after he first hit the road, Phillips is still traveling around the state as host of *Texas Country Reporter*, talking to folks and sharing their stories. He's a juggernaut now, with a production company and a show that airs on 23 affiliates across Texas as well as the nationwide RFD-TV cable channel; a YouTube channel; *A Texas Tribute*, a touring presentation backed by a live symphony; and the TCR Festival in Waxahachie every October. For the past seven years, partner Kelli Phillips has been riding shotgun. Yes, they are married.

I caught up with Bob and Kelli at their Dallas home during a break in the show's 50th season.

The Domino Effect

Joe Nick Patoski: Real important question: How old were you when you started to drive?

Bob Phillips: I spent a lot of weekends and a lot of summers up on my Aunt Lena's farm in Grayson County. There was an old pickup out there that I could drive on the farm probably starting when I was about 9 years old. I couldn't go out on the road until I got my driver's license when I was 15.

JNP: What was the trigger to get into television?

BP: A guy named Eddie Barker who was both news director and the main anchor on the CBS affiliate in Dallas came to talk to my class—to my journalism class, when I was a first-semester freshman in college. This guy came and started telling stories. He was the first person to announce that John Kennedy had been killed in Dallas. He was five minutes ahead of Walter Cronkite. This was the guy that corralled Marina Oswald and did the first interview with her. He was a legend. I was mesmerized. As he was walking out of my class, I stopped him and asked him for his business card. He gave it to me and said, "What are you going to do with this?"

I said, "I'm going to ask you for a job." He gave me the greatest encouragement because he said, "You do just that." I gave him 30 minutes to get back to the office, and then I called him. He had me come in for an interview the next morning, and he hired me.

How Bob Phillips has spent nearly 50 years bringing regular folks into Texas homes

JNP: When did you get into the idea of driving around looking for characters who tell good stories?

BP: I rode around with my dad a lot when I was a really little kid, and he always had a fishing pole and a set of dominoes. He said, "I never know when I'm going to see a place where I want to drop a line, and I never know when I'm going to meet three other guys who want to sit down and play some 42."

After I had started working, I'm watching the *CBS Evening News With Walter Cronkite*, and there's a guy on there who's making a living doing what my dad did. It was Charles Kuralt, and I thought, "Oh, my gosh, my dad just did this for fun. That guy gets paid to do it." It looked like all Charles Kuralt did was drive around and talk to people who were playing dominoes and fishing and stuff.

I knew I had to put my own spin on it, so I went back to Eddie Barker and said, "OK, look. You know that Charles Kuralt guy that travels all over America? We can do the very same thing except we'll just travel all over Texas." He let me give it a try as a one-time-only deal. I did a few features on the news, and they kind of liked them. I clearly did not know what I was doing, but I cobbled them together. The audience response was good enough that they kept saying, "All right, do another one." Here we are at 50 years, still doing another one.

Kelli and Bob Phillips at Big Top Candy Shop in Austin.



The Texas Country Reporter Festival in Waxahachie celebrated 25 years of bringing arts and music fans together in 2021.

JNP: OK, honestly, the TV reporter going out on the road looking for stories like this was not a new concept. Others had programs like this. You had traction. Why do you think you resonated and the others didn't?

BP: I was talking to people who were just like my dad. In the very beginning, somebody was coaching me along and said, "When you're on camera, picture somebody that you love talking to." Well, that was my dad. To this day, when I look into the barrel of the lens, I'm looking at my dad's face. Every time, I thought about doing something else because you don't make any money in television news. I worked forever for two bucks an hour, but you're having a good time. Every now and then I thought, "Well, as I get older, I got to go find a real job." Then I would think, "But I love this so much." It also helps when people walk up to you almost every day of your life and say, "You must have the greatest job in the world." You start believing it when enough people say it to you.

Kelli Phillips: I also think it has something to do with the fact that when we go on stories, we don't have a preconceived idea of what this story is going to be. We honestly go in there with no questions in advance. We just sit down and talk with these people, and we develop a relationship. You see that transpire on the air.

BP: Yeah, she's right. I've never gone in with a list of questions for people. Frankly, I don't even think much about it ahead of time. We just sit down and have one of those, "Hey, how's it going?" chats and try to take people on a little journey to get them to tell us their life story and to forget there's cameras.

KP: And most of the time, they do.

BP: Yeah, for some reason, that's something we were pretty successful at. If you've got one of those huge crews like some shows do now, they've got a crew of 40 or 50 people on the set shooting these things. I always think, "How do they get anything done?" We go out with two or three or maybe four people, max, and the camera kind of disappears.

JNP: Bob, on that hike up Lost Mine Trail, I remember I'd gotten in hot water with Mike Levy, the publisher at *Texas Monthly*, and that eventually led to my departure from the magazine. But you actually had the most comforting words at the time when you said getting fired from Channel 4 was the best thing that ever happened to you.

BP: Well, yeah, it was because that's what propelled us. That made me. I'd done that show for 14 years. They didn't actually fire me; they just canceled my show. But it was like being fired because I wasn't going to stay there if they weren't going to let me do my show. That made me pull my britches up and say, "OK, you've got to do something about this," and that's when we syndicated the show all over the state and when I started producing it myself instead of through a television station. The show had been popular in Dallas-Fort Worth, but then it ...

KP: Exploded.

BP: Exploded all over the state. That was a good thing. ■

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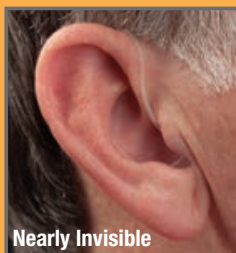
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MESSAGE
FROM CEO

**MARK
ROLLANS**

A New Chapter

THIS IS THE CLOSING OF A CHAPTER FOR ME. This December marks the end of my career in the cooperative industry and my 30 years at Medina EC and begins my next chapter of life, which I am very much looking forward to: retirement.

As I write this, the board of directors is in the process of the search for the new CEO, and I look forward to hearing who they select. Whoever is chosen, I know the cooperative will be in good hands based on the staff in place. Some staff I have worked with the bulk of my career and others are much newer to the team, but there is one common thread: The members are the focus. Our employees recognize the importance of the product we deliver in electrifying homes, and they also recognize the advantages of the cooperative business model. Every decision is made with the cooperative principles and service to our members in mind.

In fact, my favorite part of working here has been working with a group of people I trust who are all working to achieve a common goal and improve service to the members. The co-op exists to serve the members and communities where we operate, not to make a bunch of money and then disappear like many other companies.

In my time here, I have seen plenty of changes in the cooperative, in the utility industry and in the business industry in general. I know those that are still working here will have their fair share of challenges and changes ahead, as change seems to happen at a more rapid pace. But I know they are equipped to handle those challenges and changes and to make this transition seamless for our members.

To all the staff I have worked with: Thank you for your dedication to your jobs and the members. It has truly been an honor to serve alongside of you. To the board of directors: Thank you for all your guidance and service to the cooperative and its members. I have enjoyed working with each of you over the years. To the members: Thank you for your trust and support over the years. And lastly, to my wife and daughters: Thank you for all the sacrifices you made to allow me to have such a long and wonderful career. ■



MARK ROLLANS BEING HELD BY HIS DAD AT HIS FIRST ANNUAL MEETING, WHERE HIS DAD WAS CEO.



ROLLANS' FINAL ANNUAL MEETING SPEECH IN SEPTEMBER.

IN ADDITION TO MARK ROLLANS, there are several other longtime and key staff members that either have retired already or will have their final work days in December. They each answered a few questions to commemorate this important chapter in their lives.



**THERESA AELVOET, 39 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRED JANUARY 2021**

Her favorite part was “The years in the accounting department. Analyzing financials and reports was fascinating work to me.”



**KERRY BAXTER, 37 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRED MAY 2021**

“Medina EC was a great place to work, if you want to work hard!”



**RICKY GARZA, 27 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRED JULY 2021**

He most enjoyed “working with the members and working outages.”



**RICKY FALCON, 42 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRED JULY 2021**

His favorite part of working for Medina was “building new construction, working the power lines, restoring power and helping members.”



**LINDA TATE-SPEED, 21 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRED SEPTEMBER 2021**

Her favorite part of working for Medina EC was “giving back to the community and helping my neighbors.”



**MARK HOWARD, 37 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRING DECEMBER 2021**

“The most rewarding memories were during my years on the line crew building lines for new services and working in all kinds of extreme conditions restoring power to our members.”



**HUGO VILLAREAL, 34 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRING DECEMBER 2021**

“Having the opportunity to work with Medina EC has instilled a positive work ethic and I would like to thank everyone that has made this possible.”



**BOBBY WAID, 8 YEARS OF SERVICE
RETIRING DECEMBER 2021**

His favorite part has been “the diversity of the work. One day working on a building project, next on the emergency operations plan, and then resolving problems with a new large load.”

**Medina Electric
Cooperative**



CONTACT US

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Email Info@MedinaEC.org
Web MedinaEC.org - Chat Feature Available

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Wayne W. Scholtz, (830) 426-1328
Ken Weynand, (830) 426-0762

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Chris Surles, (830) 965-5538
Kenneth White, (830) 232-6541

Voting District 3

Annette Sorrells, (361) 231-0173
J. L. Gonzalez, (956) 286-1863
Rodolfo H. Rodriguez, (210) 846-1092

CEO

Mark Rollans, 1-866-MEC-ELEC, ext. 1045

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Option 3: Pay bill, get account balance
Option 5: Speak to a representative

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Dilley 1718 W. FM 117, Dilley 78017
Hondo 237 Hwy. 173 N., Hondo 78861
Rio Grande City 601 N. FM 3167,
Rio Grande City 78582
Uvalde 2604 Hwy. 90 E., Uvalde 78801
Corporate Office 2308 18th St., Hondo 78861

VISIT US ONLINE

MedinaEC.org



This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Información sobre todos los programas y servicios que ofrece Medina Electric Cooperative están disponibles en Español al llamarnos al 1-866-MEC-ELEC o visitando una de nuestras oficinas.



VALERII HONCHARUK | ISTOCK.COM

Stop High Winter Bills Before They Start

LAST WINTER BROUGHT life-threatening weather extremes to Texas. Much of the state experienced subfreezing temperatures at some point, and many Texans experienced storms that tested our infrastructure and forced outages. All homes were affected by the cold, even when the power remained on, and heating systems were forced to run longer and harder than usual—bringing some unwelcome higher energy bills.

Medina Electric Cooperative recognizes that unusually high bills are concerning. Everyone at your co-op pays a utility bill too, so the need to keep the household budget balanced while keeping your family warm is personal.

Medina EC is guided by the Seven Cooperative Principles, which include Concern for Community. Providing safe and reliable energy for homes and businesses is part of that promise. The co-op is committed to helping you find reasonable solutions for your power dilemmas too. We offer several programs to help members manage their bills and accounts.

But one thing we can't change, no matter how hard we try, is that colder weather means most folks use more electricity to keep their homes warm. What we can do is let you know that the most important way to prevent a higher-than-expected energy bill is to look for ways to decrease the amount of energy you use.

So prepare now and manage your energy use this winter.

Here are some tips that will help you stop high energy bills before they start:

- ▶ Seal any gaps that create drafts in your home, and add to your insulation if needed.
- ▶ Keep an eye on the thermostat and set it as low as comfortably possible. Bundle up with sweaters, socks and slippers while in the house.
- ▶ Keep shades, curtains and blinds closed at night to keep out cold air, but open window coverings during the day to bring in the sun's warming rays.
- ▶ Always turn off lights you don't need, and avoid using energy-burning electric space heaters if possible.
- ▶ Your co-op can set up an audit of your house to identify your home's biggest energy users and sources of inefficiency to help you find additional ways to save.
- ▶ Track your use through SmartHub, the free tool that lets you see your daily use and could help you identify ways to save in your own home.

As your friends and neighbors, your co-op's employees know the importance of working together for the welfare of the community. We want to ensure you're informed and prepared for every season. ■



MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Our offices will close at noon on Thursday, December 23, and all day Friday, December 24, for Christmas and all day on Friday, December 31, for New Year's. As always, crews will be on call.



DECK THE HALLS CONTEST - WIN \$250

Two lucky Medina EC members will get a prize for submitting a photo of their properties decorated in lights, garland, candy canes, wreaths or any other festive decorations.

- ▶ Only Medina EC members are eligible to enter. One entry per membership. Decorations must be done at the property where your Medina EC account is located.
- ▶ Lights may be on your home, Christmas tree, fence line, business, water well or any other creative display on your property.
- ▶ Medina EC encourages energy efficiency—use LED lights and timers to schedule limited lighting use.
- ▶ Entries must include member/account number, account address and mailing address.
- ▶ All photos become property of Medina EC and can be reprinted without payment.

Entries due by December 17. Submit your entry at MedinaEC.org/ChristmasLights or send it through email at MyCoop@MedinaEC.org.



Life-Support Registry

ELECTRICITY IS IMPORTANT to everyone, but for some people it is a medical necessity. If you or someone in your home depends on an electrically operated health aid, Medina EC can place your account on our Life-Support Registry.

Being on the Life-Support Registry will not keep your account from being disconnected for nonpayment. It also does not guarantee uninterrupted electrical service. Outages can occur for reasons outside of the cooperative's control and are unavoidable.

To learn more and be placed on the Life-Support Registry, follow the steps at
MedinaEC.org/Registry.

Ensure Generator Safety

MEMBERS WHO OWN A GENERATOR may be interested in having a GenerLink device installed. This safe and easy solution is \$15 per month. Medina EC crews will visit your home and install the device.

Generators that aren't connected correctly create a safety hazard for people in the home and for Medina EC employees working to restore power. Without GenerLink, operating a generator can require installation of transfer switches and subpanels and rewiring work. By having GenerLink installed, members simply plug their generator in the outlet located at the meter, making it safer for them and for Medina EC crews.

Interested? Call us at 1-866-MEC-ELEC.

To learn more about the GenerLink product visit
MedinaEC.org/Products.

Luck of the Draw Winners

Starting in August, Medina EC encourages our members to participate in our Luck of the Draw program by signing up for 1 of 4 programs for the chance to win a \$100 bill credit, with an additional chance at a \$100 bill credit for those who sign up for all four. Those programs include registering your account on SmartHub, automated payments (autopay), going paperless and joining Operation Round Up.

Learn more at MedinaEC.org/Luck-Draw-2021.

Winners were drawn using a random number generator. The winners in the 2021 Luck of the Draw are:

- ▶ **SmartHub:** Straight Line Construction
- ▶ **Paperless:** James Herrera
- ▶ **Autopay:** Pamela Boyd
- ▶ **ORU:** Martin Bros Ranch LTD
- ▶ **Bonus (All 4):** Cynthia Stein

Sign up for any of these programs, or all four, and be considered for Medina EC's Luck of the Draw next year!



Co-op Connections Corner: Christmas

MEDINA EC KNOWS that our members would like to save money on a variety of purchases they make. Here are a few of our Co-op Connections business partners that would like to help you save a little in Medina EC's service area.

DEVINE ACRES FARM—DEVINE
(830) 665-9730 | DevineAcresFarm.com
One free admission to the fall, Christmas or spring season

LONE STAR KAWASAKI & AG EQUIPMENT—HONDO
(830) 426-3701 | LoneStarKawasaki.com
10% off on parts OR service work

VELA ELECTRIC—PEARSALL
(830) 334-2774
10% discount on meter loops



Learn more about all the benefits of Medina EC's Co-op Connections program at MedinaEC.org/Connections or on the app.

OWN A SMALL BUSINESS? WANT FREE PROMOTION?

Join the Co-op Connections program! Business partners are featured in an issue of *Texas Co-op Power*, listed on the Co-op Connections website, featured on Medina EC's social media pages and more.

Email MyCoop@MedinaEC.org to sign up for the program.

Summer 2022:

- ✓ Unforgettable experiences
- ✓ See national treasures
- ✓ Make new friends
- ✓ Go on the trip of a lifetime

Your teen could enjoy a **FREE** trip to Austin and Washington, D.C., in June 2022 through the Government-in-Action Youth Tour.

APPLY NOW!
Deadline is January 7.
Application and eligibility information: MedinaEC.org/YouthTour.

BONUS: Winners will receive a \$500 college scholarship!



1 in 3 Americans reported falling victim to a phone scam in the first year of the pandemic, handing over an average of \$502 each time to criminals—a total of \$29.8 billion—according to a study by software company Truecaller.



ALEXANDR HARKO | ADOBE STOCK

Don't Fall Victim to Utility Scams

EVERY DAY, millions of Americans are targeted by scammers through phone calls, emails, text messages, websites and in person. Scammers' tactics can change daily, which is why it's important for consumers to stay on top of the latest scam reports.

Electric co-op members have been targeted through a phone scam claiming that power will be shut off unless immediate payment is received. Remember, Medina Electric Cooperative will never call you and demand immediate payment without notice.

We want you to be aware of two other trending scam tactics. One is the overpayment trick, in which a scammer contacts you and claims that you have overpaid your utility bill. The scammer will say they need your personal banking information to deposit the extra funds back into your checking account. Don't fall for this scam! If you make an overpayment to us, Medina EC will automatically apply the credit to your account, which will carry over to the next billing cycle.

Another trending scam is called smishing (short for Short Message Service, or SMS, phishing). Many consumers know to watch out for suspicious emails, but we tend to trust text messages sent to our smartphones. Always question suspicious texts, especially from someone claiming to represent a utility. Medina EC will only send you important updates via text if you've signed up for our text alert service.

Here are a few reminders on how to take control of the situation when you've been targeted by a scammer:

Take your time. Utility scammers try to create a sense of urgency so that you'll act fast and hand over personal information without thinking. Take a moment to evaluate the situation before acting.

Be suspicious. Scammers typically request immediate payment through prepaid debit cards or third-party smartphone apps. Unusual requests like this should raise red flags. Remember, if the request seems strange and out of the ordinary, you're likely being targeted by a scammer.

Confirm before you act. If you're contacted by someone claiming to represent Medina EC or another utility but you're unsure, just hang up the phone and call the utility directly. You can reach us at 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532) to verify the situation.

"Medina EC takes the safety of our members, especially their financial and personal information safety, very seriously and do everything we can to protect that information," stated Medina EC's CEO, Mark Rollans.

Medina EC members can learn more about scams targeted at utilities at MedinaEC.org/Scammers.

LETTER TO SANTA'S ENERGY ELVES



Happy Holidays, Energy Explorers! Santa's Energy Elves are teaming up with our friends at Medina EC to encourage energy-efficiency. We help Santa keep his shop as efficient as possible! That means turning off lights when we leave a room, unplugging tools when we're done and leaving the doors closed. Use this letter to show us how you've been energy-efficient this year.

After you complete the letter, give it to an adult to take a picture and email it to us at mycoop@medinaec.org. You can also fill out our new digital letter online at MedinaEC.org/EnergyElves. Energy Explorers will receive a special Medina EC gift from us.

Dear Energy Elves,

My name is _____ and I am ____ years old.

I live at _____.

Please put your mailing address to receive a special Medina EC ornament.

This year, I have been very good and have tried to be more energy efficient by:

Please tell Santa I would really like _____ for Christmas.

Love,



(sign your name here)

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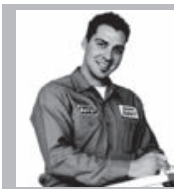
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Clogged, Backed—up Septic System...Can anything Restore It?

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 – Houston, 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 unclog 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.

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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 "TXS14", 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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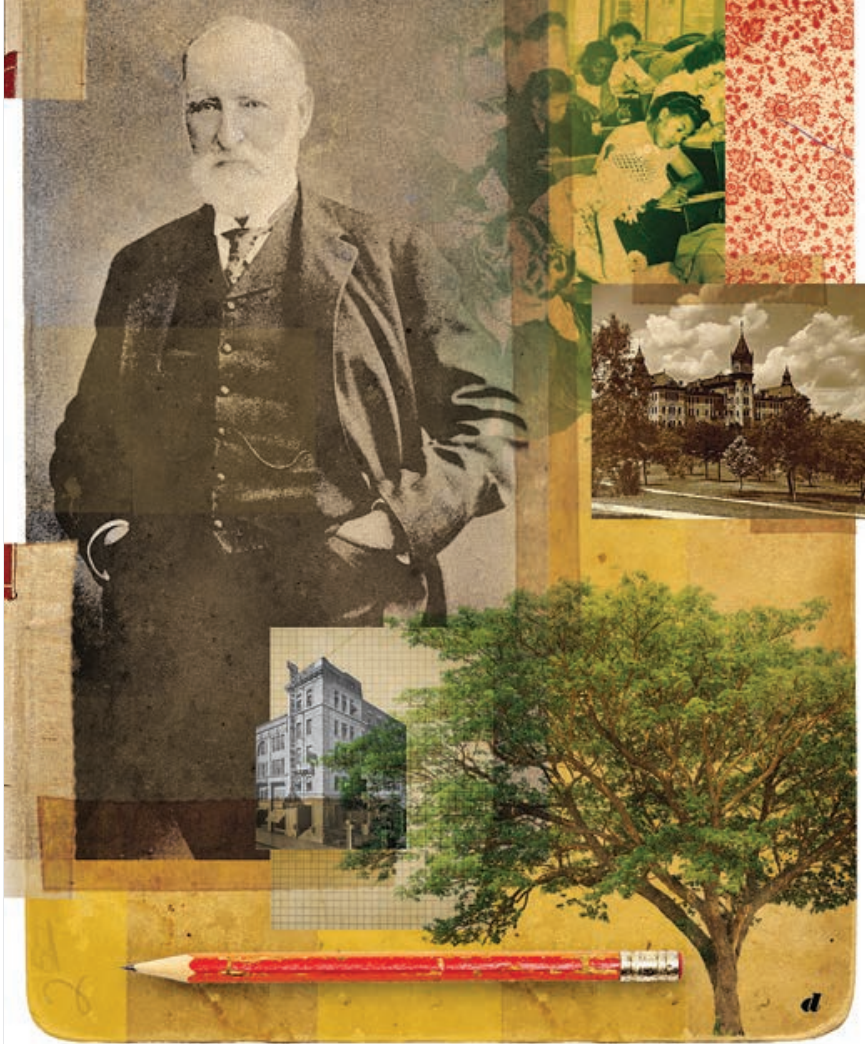
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TCP WEB EXTRA

Listen to W.F. Strong read this story.

The Grand Giver

Brackenridge's goodwill and generosity continue to enhance life for San Antonio parkgoers and students across Texas

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY DAVID VOGIN

GEORGE WASHINGTON BRACKENRIDGE may have given more to Texas than anyone else. He donated 199 acres for his namesake park in San Antonio, which now includes a zoo, museums, a golf course, a Japanese tea garden and other features in an enchanting setting that today encompasses 343 acres.

But Brackenridge Park was not the philanthropist's most impactful gift. That was the oil money that supports the University of Texas and Texas A&M University systems. As the longest-serving University of Texas regent—25 years—Brackenridge insisted that West Texas lands set aside for the university by the Legislature be transferred from the state to university control.

Not long after Brackenridge died in

1920, Santa Rita No. 1 brought in the first oil money and the start of the Permanent University Fund, which provides for construction of university buildings. Brackenridge's influence made sure the money stayed with UT and A&M and was not siphoned off by the Legislature.

Brackenridge was so protective of UT that when Gov. James "Pa" Ferguson threatened to eliminate university funding because he disagreed with the institution's hiring practices, Brackenridge pledged to cover the university's operating costs for the biennium if Ferguson made good on his threat. It didn't come to that.

In addition to his visionary services as a regent, Brackenridge donated 503 acres along the Colorado River in Austin to UT

in 1910. That land today includes a municipal golf course, the Brackenridge Field Lab and student housing.

Brackenridge made the bulk of his fortune as president of San Antonio National Bank and San Antonio Loan and Trust.

He was troubled by the fact that his father had enslaved people, so the younger Brackenridge attempted to create his own reparations plan. He calculated how much money should have been paid to the enslaved people and gave hundreds of thousands of dollars for African American education.

Brackenridge also championed the admittance of women into UT. He insisted on hiring female faculty and demanded complete equality for women. When women couldn't attend the university's medical school in Galveston for a lack of housing, he donated funds to build a dormitory. He supported women's suffrage because he believed women would help build a better society through political influence.

He never married and had no children, and upon his death, at age 88, Brackenridge put the bulk of his wealth into the George W. Brackenridge Foundation—the first of its kind in Texas. The foundation now emphasizes support for charter schools. Brackenridge preferred to invest in people rather than buildings, and he especially loved investing in young people. During his life he loaned untold sums to students for college, and all they had to do was sign a contract that said, "I agree to repay when circumstances permit."

By his own standards, Brackenridge lived a successful life. He said that he wished the world would be a little better place for his having lived in it. ■

Recipes for Gifting

Co-op Country kitchens offer perfect selections for one-stop shopping

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

I've been giving homemade food gifts at the holidays ever since I was a kid, when I'd box up packages of fudge and hot chocolate spoons for my entire family. From hot sauce to homemade bread, edible gifts are economical, personal and, of course, delicious. Granola is one of my go-to gifting recipes because it is endlessly customizable and keeps well in the pantry. Use your favorite dried fruits, nuts and spices to make your own signature blend.

Lemon Blueberry Granola

½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter

½ cup honey

4 cups old-fashioned rolled oats

1 cup sliced almonds or chopped walnuts

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup dried blueberries

Zest of 1 lemon

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees and line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.
2. In a small saucepan over medium-low heat, melt together butter and honey.
3. In a large bowl, combine oats, nuts and salt. Pour butter mixture over the top and stir well to coat.
4. Spread evenly onto baking sheets and bake 30 minutes, stirring halfway through.
5. Immediately after removing from oven, scatter on dried blueberries and lemon zest and pat down gently with a spatula. This will help the ingredients adhere and cluster as the granola cools.
6. Let cool completely, then break into pieces and store in airtight containers or glass jars for gifting.

MAKES 5 CUPS

TCP WEB EXTRA Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Smoked Salt Caramel Corn.





Lacy Farm Apple Pie Jelly

JESSICA LACY
HOUSTON COUNTY EC

Homemade jelly is always a good gift, and this spiced apple version can be used for breakfast or as a glaze on pork chops. Be sure to let jars cool completely before moving them, which will help ensure a proper seal and set.

- 4 cups apple juice
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 box (1.75 ounces) Sure-Jell powdered fruit pectin
- 5 cups sugar

COOK'S TIP If using low-sugar Sure-Jell, reduce sugar to 2.5 cups.

1. Fill a large canning pot with water and heat to boiling. Carefully lower jars into water and heat for 10 minutes to sterilize. Measure sugar into a bowl and set aside.
2. In a heavy saucepan or Dutch oven, combine apple juice, maple syrup, cinnamon, nutmeg and Sure-Jell and bring to a rolling boil that can't be stirred down.
3. Add sugar all at once, stir to dissolve and bring back to a rolling boil. Boil for 1 minute. Remove from heat.
4. Remove jars from canner and ladle jelly into jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe rims with a wet cloth and apply lids and bands, then lower carefully into boiling water bath. (If you have a partially filled jar, let it cool on the counter.) Place cover on canning pot and process 10 minutes. Turn off heat, remove cover and carefully remove jars.

CONTINUED >



\$500 WINNER

Mom's Knock-Out Cake

NAOMI RAWLE
WISE EC



Rawle, 94, remembers getting electricity for the first time more than 70 years ago, with one outlet for the whole house. Her fruit and nut cake is terrifically moist and bakes in mini loaf pans, making it ideal for gifting.

MAKES 5 LOAVES

- 2 cups sugar
- 4 eggs
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 apple, cored and chopped
- 1 banana, mashed
- 1 cup golden raisins
- 3 cups flour, divided use
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Coat 5 mini loaf pans (5¾-by-3¼-inch) with cooking spray and lightly flour. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, whisk together sugar, eggs, oil and vanilla until blended. Stir in apple, banana and raisins. Let soak while preparing remaining ingredients.
3. In another bowl, sift together 2 cups flour, salt and baking soda. Stir into wet ingredients until no dry bits remain. In the same dry bowl, mix together remaining 1 cup flour, walnuts and cinnamon. Stir into batter until blended.
4. Divide batter among prepared loaf pans and place onto a baking sheet. Bake 35–40 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center of each pan comes out clean.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

PICKLES AND JAMS DUE DECEMBER 10
One of the great rewards of home gardening is home preserving. What is the pride of your pantry? Enter your best pickles and jams recipe at TexasCoopPower.com/contests by December 10 for a chance to win \$500.



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RECIPES CONTINUED

5. Let jars cool overnight. Once cooled, check to make sure lids have popped. Any jars that have not properly sealed should be stored in the refrigerator. Store sealed jars in a cool, dark area until ready to serve or gift. Refrigerate after opening.

MAKES ABOUT FIVE 8-OUNCE JARS



Potato Soup Mix

SANDY WELLBROCK
BLUEBONNET EC

Soup is an excellent gift in the wintertime, and this mix turns instant mashed potatoes into a creamy, warming meal. Add cheese powder for a cheesy soup.

- 2 cups instant mashed potatoes**
- 2 cups instant nonfat dry milk**
- 2 tablespoons chicken bouillon granules**
- 2 teaspoons dried chopped onion**
- 1 teaspoon dried parsley**
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt**
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground white pepper**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground turmeric**
- ½ cup cheese powder (optional)**

1. In a large bowl, mix together all ingredients and package into jars. Or divide ingredients evenly and layer into jars for an attractive presentation.

2. For gifting, prepare a label or tag with preparation instructions: "To prepare 1 serving of soup, add ½ cup soup mix to 1 cup boiling water. Let stand 2 minutes for water to be absorbed, then stir well and add toppings as desired, such as bacon bits, sliced green onion and shredded cheese."

MAKES 8 SERVINGS



Susie's Victorian Toffee

CANDICE HUNT
COSERV

A crowd favorite, homemade toffee is easier to make than you might think. Use your favorite chocolates or nuts or other toppings, such as crushed pretzels.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter**
- 1 cup sugar**
- 1 tablespoon water**
- 4 ounces chocolate, broken into pieces**
- 1 cup pecan halves, chopped**

1. Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and set aside.
2. In a nonstick skillet over medium heat, melt butter, sugar and water together. Stir constantly in figure eights with a rubber spatula until mixture is bubbly and golden, about 10 minutes.
3. Carefully pour mixture onto prepared baking sheet and let cool 3–5 minutes, then scatter chocolate across the top. Using a rubber spatula, gently spread chocolate across the top as it melts, reaching all the edges. Scatter nuts over the chocolate.
4. Let cool overnight. If your kitchen is warm, the process can be sped up in the refrigerator or freezer. Once toffee is solid, break into pieces and store in an airtight container for up to two weeks.

MAKES 1 POUND TOFFEE

TCP WEB EXTRA Find other recipes suitable for gift giving at TexasCoopPower.com/food, where you can search through nearly 1,000 recipes.



holiday GIFT GUIDE

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

A Jaw-Dropping Collection

A Seguin museum's nutcracker compendium honors the pecan

BY CHET GARNER

I REMEMBER THE CHILDHOOD pain caused by suffering through performances of *The Nutcracker* and always associated it with the scolding I got for trying to use my family's decorative nutcracker to actually crack a nut. The heirloom's broken jaw never recovered despite hot glue treatments.

After that experience, I never liked nutcrackers. But a trip to see one of the world's largest nutcracker collections, in a Seguin museum, helped me realize I had more to learn about one of the world's oldest tools.

Seguin's known pecan history includes Native Americans who lived in the Guadalupe River valley and 16th-century Spanish explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, who survived by eating the river's native nuts. Seguin now lays claim to three of the world's largest pecans, including the 10-foot fiberglass pecan sitting outside the Pape Pecan House. But the real treasure of Pape Pecan sits inside its retail store: a museum of more than 8,000 nutcrackers of every shape and size.

I had seen different nutcrackers before, most depicting a bearded soldier wearing a fancy uniform. At Pape Pecan House, you'll find nutcrackers in an astounding array of shapes, sizes and designs, including dozens of Santas as well as President Lyndon B. Johnson and Darth Vader. Some of these nutcrackers were carved and painted by hand more than 100 years ago.

Each character is distinctive, but each can be identified by its hinged jaw.

Kenneth Pape began collecting nutcrackers in the 1950s as an extension of his successful pecan business. His first nutcracker was a 6-foot-tall cowboy that now stands guard by the gift shop's cash register. A bonus to visiting the museum is leaving with some of Pape Pecan's locally grown nuts.

I prefer to let them crack the shells for me. After all, they are the experts. ■

ABOVE Chet cozies up to a life-size nutcracker at Pape Pecan House.

TCP WEB EXTRA If Chet's take on Texas cracks you up, you'll want to see all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

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

DECEMBER

07

Nederland Lighted Christmas Parade, (409) 722-0279, nederlandtx.com

09

Sugar Land *The Elf on the Shelf: The Christmas Musical*, (281) 207-6278, smartfinancialcentre.net

Victoria [9-12] Victoria Ballet Theatre: *The Nutcracker*, (361) 575-2313, victoriaballet.org

10

Grand Prairie Michael Martin Murphey's Cowboy Christmas, (972) 854-5050, texastrustcutheatre.com

Lake Jackson Tracy Byrd, (979) 230-3658, brazosport.edu/clarion

Cuero [10-11] Christmas in Downtown, (361) 485-8008, cueromainstreet.com

Fredericksburg [10-11] A Christmas Journey, (830) 997-2069, bethanyfredericksburg.com

Grapevine [10-11] *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

Ingram [10-12] A Christmas Carol, (830) 367-5121, hcaf.com

Montalba [10-12] A Walk Through Bethlehem, (903) 764-8048, visitpalestine.com

Tomball [10-12] German Fest Christmas Market, (281) 350-5484, tomballgermanfest.org

11

Chappell Hill Chappell Hill Garden Club Christmas Homes Tour, (713) 562-6191, chappellhillgardencub.com

Corsicana *The Nutcracker*, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

Frankston Frankston Garden Club Christmas Tour of Homes, (817) 913-1982, frankstontexas.com/events

Grapevine Farmstead Christmas Celebration at Nash Farm, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com/nash-farm

Howe Christmas Parade, (903) 532-6080, howechamber.com

Huntsville Houston Family Christmas, (936) 294-1832, samhoustonmemorialmuseum.com

Mesquite Christmas on the Corridor, (972) 204-4927, visitmestquitetx.com

Palestine Dogwood Jamboree: *Just in Time for Christmas*, (903) 729-7080, dogwoodjamboree.com

Port Arthur Holiday Downtown Celebration, (409) 983-8105, portarthurtx.gov

Surfside Beach Nighttime Kites, (979) 233-1531, surfsidetx.org

Seguin Mid-Texas Symphony: Home for the Holidays, (830) 463-5353, mtsymphony.org

MORE EVENTS >

12

TCP Submit Your Event

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your event online for February by December 10, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

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AT THE 1895

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 11

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Event Calendar

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Pick of the Month

Winter Wonderland

Muenster, December 11
(940) 759-5299
heritageparkmuenstertx.com

Heritage Park in this North Texas town features a synthetic ice skating rink, ornament making, cookie decorating, bounce houses, dance and music performances, and an obstacle course. Oh, and Santa will be there, too.

DECEMBER EVENTS CONTINUED

16

Palestine Christmas Carol Sing Along, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

Grapevine [16-17] Frank Sinatra & Dean Martin Christmas Tribute, (817) 410-3100, grapevinetexasusa.com

Anson [16-18] Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball, (325) 696-9040, texasccb.com

17

Wharton Snow on the Square, (979) 532-1862, whartonchamber.com

Abilene [17-23] Abilene Zoo Christmas Celebration, (325) 676-6085, abilenezoo.org

18

Big Spring Big Spring Symphony: Holiday Spectacular, (432) 816-5196, bigspringssymphony.org

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

19

Stonewall LBJ Tree Lighting, (830) 644-2252, tpwd.texas.gov/calendar

31

Fredericksburg New Year's Eve Countdown to 2022, (830) 997-6523, visitfredericksburgtx.com

Spring The Four Freshmen, (281) 440-4850, cypresscreekface.org

JANUARY

07

Galveston Mavis Staples, (409) 765-1894, thegrand.com

Bridges

On deck this month are bridges from readers spanning the Lone Star State. These tower over the others we received.

BY GRACE FULTZ

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT

JIM BLAKE
COLEMAN COUNTY EC
The Waldrip Bridge at night.

RICHARD REEVES
JASPER-NEWTON EC
Part of a Neches River bridge between Evadale and Silsbee. "I remember riding over it as a child."

PAIGE KILLIAN
UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES
The Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge over the Trinity River in Dallas.

BUDDY PARK
PEDERNALES EC
Bluebonnets along a rail line in Llano County.



Upcoming Contests

- DUE DEC 10** All Wet
- DUE JAN 10** Feathered Friends
- DUE FEB 10** Industrial

Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://www.texascooppower.com/contests).

TCP WEB EXTRA See Focus on Texas on our website for more Bridges photos from readers.



Carpe Diem, Mom

Impromptu, simple celebrations set an entertaining standard

BY BABS RODRIGUEZ
ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA GODEASSI

MY MOTHER, WHOM I firmly believe invented staycations to save herself the extended stress and unique exhaustion of traveling with five children (and a rooster, a chipmunk and two dogs), had the ability to make the everyday feel magical. Part and parcel of that superpower was her skill for impromptu entertaining.

I think Mom's way with last-minute meals and celebratory mood changers was honed while constantly responding to the needs of her squad of kids and a husband whom the U.S. Air Force had on call. Any day that work and school and flight schedules allowed all seven of us to be at the table, she'd whip up a loaves-and-fishes miracle from whatever she had on hand. Candles were always lighted just because. And even backyard picnics were graced with flowers in Mason jars, decades before that sort of practical elegance was trendy.

Her can-do spirit focused on honoring our family's together time whenever possible with whatever was on hand.

Holiday events were executed with equal ease. Christmas Eve dinner might be waffles and eggnog. On New Year's Eve we'd dance in the backyard under the stars. A maraschino cherry in anything from ginger ale to iced tea heralded a toast.

Mom's recipe for pig pie, a foraged blackberry cobbler topped with shortbread in the shapes of piglets, welcomed summer into our house. And her compulsive seasonal collections of seashells, pine cones and dried flowers worked their way into the decor that celebrated holidays and birthday bashes.

There was a do-it-yourself eccentricity to my mother's carpe diem spirit, and I see pale imitations of it now in trends from factory chic to urban farmhouse.

I am thinking the world is filled with similarly celebratory traditions conceived by mothers. Moms, grandmothers and aunties who casually influence a family's style of entertaining only to witness their rituals and recipes take root in the next generation. Which isn't to say fathers, granddads and uncles never set a mood—or a table—but, in my circle, the male influences were more pragmatic than emotional.

When I write stories about people's homes, how they live in them, what they collect, I sometimes find that they own furniture made by a family patriarch. But the mismatched heirloom platters of food that parade across that table or buffet most often showcase the collections and tastes of a mom or a sister.

So, I'd just like to give my mother a shoutout for teaching me to celebrate any and every event. More importantly, she taught me that rather than merely holding onto things I find meaningful, I should pass them along and make the sharing the special occasion. ■



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