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# August 2021



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Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research.

*By Melissa Gaskill  
Photos by Julia Robinson*

## Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through life transitions.

*By Chris Burrows  
Photos by Eric Pohl*

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Diane Wilson shows nurdles—plastic pellets—she has collected at the Texas coast.  
*Photo by Julia Robinson*

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One of the thousands of bags Hunter Beaton has prepared for foster youths.  
*Photo courtesy NRECA*

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# Chess Royalty

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS** Rio Grande Valley chess team won its third consecutive national championship, defeating Webster University in April for the President's Cup.

Our June 2012 story *The Kings and Queens of Brownsville* told how young students made all the right moves to turn the U.S.'s southernmost border town into a chess powerhouse.



## TCP Contests and More

[ON TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM](http://ONTEXASCOOPPOWER.COM)

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Soups and Stews

### FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS

Bridges

### POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

Know anybody as inspired and exceptional as Hunter Beaton, featured on Page 12? Let us know so we can shine the spotlight on them.

## August 22 National Tooth Fairy Day

The tooth fairy forks over an average of \$4.70 per visit in the U.S., a recent poll shows. That's a far cry from the nickel recommended more than a century ago.

The *Chicago Tribune* carried the first published mention of the tooth fairy—in 1908. Writer Lillian Brown advised that parents might have an easier time persuading children to have loose teeth pulled if a "tooth fairy" left a small gift of 5 cents under youngsters' pillows for each tooth lost.



Members of the UTRGV chess team often mentor K-12 students in Brownsville schools.







## SCORE ONE FOR THE CO-OP

When Hereford Sports & Wellness took delivery of two digital scoreboards for its soccer field in the Panhandle town, the non-profit community center realized it didn't have the means to install them.

Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative did. The co-op sent a bucket truck outfitted with an auger and a crew of linemen, who drilled a half-dozen 6-foot-deep holes to securely mount the new displays.



## Cool Coat

**ENGINEERS HAVE CREATED** the whitest paint ever—a paint so white that building surfaces coated in it are 8 degrees cooler than the air on a sunny day. The innovation could reduce air conditioning demands and mitigate the effects of climate change, Vice reports.

The new paint, developed by a team at Purdue University, reflects 98.1% of sunlight. Researchers used barium sulfate, a powder that's reflective across all wavelengths of sunlight, to pigment the new paint—unlike most white paints, which tend to use titanium dioxide as pigment.



“Books are a uniquely portable magic.”

—STEPHEN KING

## FINISH THIS SENTENCE IT'S SO HOT ...

**TCP** Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to [letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com) or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town. Here are some of the responses to our June prompt: **I always laugh when my dad ...**

Says rain sounds like a cow peeing on a flat rock.

**SUE BIGAY**  
**SAM HOUSTON EC**  
**LIVINGSTON**

Read the comics to me—in different voices to match the character.

**BETTY BILLINGSLEY**  
**VIA FACEBOOK**

Couldn't pronounce a word, so he made up a new one that sounded similar.

**CRAIG MASSOUH**  
**PEDERNALES EC**  
**SATTTLER**

To see more responses, read Currents online.



COURTESY PEDERNALES ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

### 'That's What Co-ops Are For'

"We are blessed to have co-op employees who persevere in all types of weather to restore electricity and risk their lives to do so."

JANE PATTERSON  
BOWIE-CASS EC  
TEXARKANA

### Wheel Fact

*Texas Talk Man* [June 2021] describes a trip that some of the cast of the movie *Giant* took to the state fairgrounds in Dallas in 1955, mentioning they "boarded the soaring Texas Star" Ferris wheel. That particular wheel was shipped over from Europe and set up in Dallas in 1985.

William F. Culver III  
Farmers EC  
Collin County

Jessica Ridge wrote a great story. Also, the photo by Wyatt McSpadden of Hinkle leaning on the tree branch with the horse in the background was perfect.

Larry Reese  
Bluebonnet EC  
Brenham



The most glorious sight in Aransas County after Hurricane Harvey hit was the arrival of the line-men from all over [*'That's What Co-ops Are For,'* June 2021]. Heroes all.

KAREN BEVERLY  
VIA FACEBOOK

### Fruitful Adventure

Armed with our April issue, we went in search of Alphonse and Martha Dotson on a recent trip to the Hill Country [*The Seed Flourishes*, April 2021]. What we thought would be a short wine tasting turned into an afternoon of great memories. We left with extraordinary stories, exquisite wine, an auto-graphed cover, new friends and a promise to return.

Traveling is really about the people you encounter along the way.

Patti and Larry Terrell  
Bowie-Cass EC  
Red Lick

### Fleeing Thought

I never realized that while the armies of Texians and Mexicans fought, many civilians found it necessary to abandon everything they owned and relocate in a hurry [*The Runaway Scrape*, April 2021]. This makes me wonder what I would do if that situation arose in my lifetime.

B. Jason Epps  
Trinity Valley EC  
Heartland



COURTESY PATTI TERRELL

**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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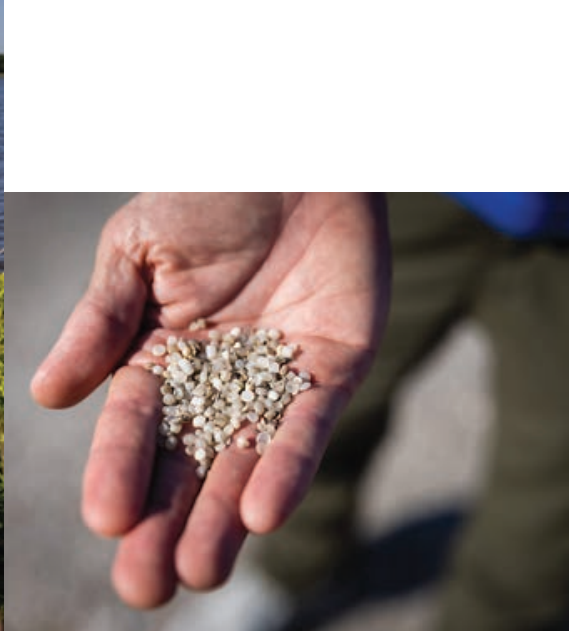
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# Channel Your



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT Diane Wilson has gathered millions of nurdles—like the handful shown—in her decades as a citizen scientist. Jace Tunnell collects nurdles near a Port Lavaca estuary. Tania Homayoun, an urban conservation biologist, uploads a picture of a turtle using the iNaturalist app.





BY MELISSA GASKILL  
PHOTOS BY JULIA ROBINSON

# Inner Scientist

Opportunities abound for Texans to augment impactful research

Victoria resident and shrimp boat captain Diane Wilson often walks along the shoreline. She keeps a sharp eye out, not for seashells but for small pellets of plastic. Called nurdles, these lentil-sized bits are raw material used for manufacturing plastics. She has found as many as 21,000 nurdles at one time.

“They’re like little peas, or lentils, with different shapes,” says Wilson, who reports her finds to Nurdle Patrol at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas. This work makes her a citizen scientist—one of thousands of people who lend their eyes, ears, hands and time to professional scientists conducting all kinds of research around the world.

“To date, we’ve had more than 2,000 volunteers remove more than 1.5 million nurdles from beaches spanning from Brazil to Canada,” says Jace Tunnell, director of the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve at the institute, which runs Nurdle Patrol. After a spill left nurdles all over coastlines around Corpus Christi in September 2018, Tunnell started a Facebook group for people to report the pellets. Within a few weeks, posts had poured in from every U.S. state along the Gulf of Mexico; a university in Veracruz, Mexico; and a nonprofit on the Yucatán Peninsula. That led him to create the full-blown citizen science project.

“If this was just a university project, three or four of us going out and trying to figure out where nurdles are com-

ing from, we would never be able to do it,” Tunnell says.

“It is really the citizen scientists who are making this project a success.”

Early Nurdle Patrol volunteers reported high concentrations of pellets in bay systems along the Texas coast, where many plastic manufacturers are located. A map created from these reports uses warmer colors to depict higher concentrations of pellets. “Texas and Louisiana are purple, indicating more than 1,000 pellets found in 10 minutes,” Tunnell says, adding that the project hopes to stop plastic from entering the environment and to give volunteers the opportunity to be involved in impactful work.

“You just collect a sample and estimate the count from what you can pick up in 10 minutes,” Wilson explains. “You don’t remove all the pellets or you’d go nuts. It’s very easy and is a way to protect your own health as well as the bays and wildlife.”

Nurdle Patrol, like most citizen science projects, requires no special skill or knowledge. Some citizen science even can be done sitting on your couch with a computer or smartphone. The FISHstory project asks people to identify and count fish in historical fishing photos, helping to estimate what kinds of and how many fish people caught in the South Atlantic during the 1940s through the 1970s. That information supports current management of those waters. Other couch-bound projects include transcribing historical



documents, playing video games to show how people solve problems and completing a survey about your dog.

Other tasks can be done just outside your door. For Globe at Night, a worldwide map of artificial light pollution, simply go outside after dark, use a night sky phone app to find a designated constellation and then use a star chart to identify the faintest star you can see nearby.

Still other projects provide the perfect excuse to go exploring. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's dozen Texas Nature Trackers projects ask people to report sightings anywhere in Texas of specific plants and animals using the iNaturalist app. The information helps the department understand the distribution and seasonality of species and how they change over time.

"Every county in Texas has one assigned wildlife biologist, and it's impossible for one individual in any given county to keep track of all the flora and fauna," says the program's Craig Hensley. "Through citizen science, we gain information that leads to better conservation decisions." The projects focus on species with the greatest conservation need, such as the Texas horned lizard, whooping cranes, monarch butterflies and milkweed, and freshwater mussels, which are threatened by invasive species.

Lee County resident and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member Linda Jo Conn, a Texas master naturalist, participates in Nature Trackers projects on milkweed and mammals. "I call myself an iNaturalist addict," Conn says. "I learn a lot. That's one of the reasons I'm involved. I go places just to see what I can find and am known to stop on highways. My friends know that if I'm not waving my arms, I'm OK."

Elaine Cowley, a Guadalupe Valley EC member who lives in Luling, helps Nature Trackers refine data on mammals in Texas, specifically the swamp rabbit. "I was already using iNaturalist for some other projects, so I said yes to this curation project," she says. "There is so much data out there,

LEFT TO RIGHT Biologist Craig Hensley examines a wing banding to find the age of a loggerhead shrike. Hensley helps train citizen scientists to monitor target species all over the state. He and Homayoun attach leg bands to a loggerhead.

**TCP WEB EXTRA** See what links we have to help you contribute to citizen science projects.

but unless it is in the right category, TPWD can't use it.

"There are so many ways to get involved in citizen science that don't take a lot of time," she adds. "It's enjoyable at the same time. You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize."

Weather watchers can turn their interest into citizen science as well. For six years Chris Keating of Mason has collected data for the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network, known as CoCoRaHS. At the most basic level, volunteers report the amount of rain in their gauges daily. Keating also submits a weekly report summarizing conditions in his Hill Country town, the number of thunderclaps when there is a storm and extreme weather details when something unusual happens, such as hail.

"I have read scientific papers that refer to CoCoRaHS, so it is a productive project, with the data put to scientific use," Keating says. "You can do it on a phone app or a computer. It's designed for the layperson. You just have to be able to read a rain gauge."

A related project, the Global Learning and Observations





'You're outside, looking for things. It's an opportunity to understand what's out there and what we need to do to protect it or what we're already doing but maybe didn't realize.'



to Benefit the Environment Observer Program, asks citizen scientists to submit photographs of cloud cover.

People who live near or visit the Texas coast can use the iSeaTurtle app to report sightings of these endangered reptiles. The data helps scientists at Texas A&M University map and understand their distribution.

**A**t the Nature Conservancy's Texas City Prairie Preserve, outside Houston, volunteers can photograph and report plants and animals observed on its 2,300 acres using iNaturalist. Aaron Tjelmeland, preserve manager, has tallied almost 600 species of moths there. The project grew from his participation in the 2019 City Nature Challenge, an annual international event that mobilizes citizen scientists to record urban biodiversity on iNaturalist.

"That interested me in the depth and breadth of biodiversity here at the preserve, things other than the more obvious birds and reptiles," Tjelmeland says. "From moths, it grew into the broader insect community—anything I could take a picture of, basically."

People come into the project in different ways. "Some are


photographers and eventually want to know what they're taking pictures of," Tjelmeland says. "Others are more like me and want to know what's in their backyard or favorite natural area. You can just grab a camera and start snapping pictures, even without knowing a lot initially."

Insects can seem overwhelming in terms of sheer numbers of species and the difficulty of identifying them. Tjelmeland advises starting with things you are interested in, perhaps moths or grasshoppers, and expanding from there. On the plus side, you do not have to go far to find insects.

Volunteers at the preserve have tallied almost 2,000 species of plants and animals, including insects. "Almost anywhere you go, biodiversity is weighted toward those smaller things that are often overlooked but really important in terms of ecology," he says.

Citizen scientists contribute information needed by scientists and project managers, providing much more than those professionals could obtain on their own. These contributions are equally if not more important in rural communities, Hensley says, especially when information is collected on private land. He notes that iNaturalist allows users to protect the location of their reports, sharing it only with the project and not the public.

"The more we know, the better we can be at managing things," Hensley says. "An animal may be more common than we know it to be because there is good habitat on private land holdings but no one is sharing the information. As a result, we may be making decisions without all the facts. Citizen science is vital to conservation efforts going forward." ■



POWER OF OUR PEOPLE

# Easing Life's Baggage

Flush with bags, a college student finds new ways to support foster youths through difficult transitions

Hunter Beaton has delivered some 45,000 bags since he started his project in 2016.



BY CHRIS BURROWS • PHOTOS BY ERIC POHL

**T**he police cruiser barely registered with Tim Allen when it moved past the porch where he was meeting with a child in the foster care system.

But the 11-year-old girl from rural Houston County noticed. “She just started shaking,” said Allen, a volunteer for Court Appointed Special Advocates, which assists children in the foster care system. “And I realized that the only context she’s ever had for a police officer was when her mother was pulled over with her in the car, for a drug violation.”

Stirred by the young girl’s response, Allen wanted to do something to help other children in her position, who may be entering the foster care system after a traumatic police encounter.

He knew who could bring his idea to life.

Hunter Beaton started Day 1 Bags in 2016, after his own foster siblings arrived at the Beaton house in Boerne with their belongings in trash bags. “How awful is that?” Beaton told *Texas Co-op Power* in July 2018. “No kid deserves this.”

In the five years since, what started as an Eagle Scout project with \$10,000 in community donations for 15-year-old Beaton has become a full-fledged independent nonprofit that has delivered some 45,000 locally made duffel bags to children in foster care in 22 states. The premise is simple: Give those kids a reason to smile and something to call their own. Beaton, 20, now serves as CEO of the organization while he studies at the University of Texas at Austin, even spending his spring break meeting with police agencies and donors, looking over the finances, and crafting social media strategy.

“We are continuing to do our main mission: providing backpacks and luggage for foster children and at-risk youth who are moving from home to home,” Beaton said. “So many youth have been moved around so much—so to have something they can keep, that is really nice and to put any belongings inside really means so much to them.”

But now Day 1 Bags is expanding its reach, partnering with advocates like Allen to help more children and shine a light on lesser-known issues faced by youths in the foster system.

“I never envisioned it taking off like it did,” said Paula Beaton, Hunter’s mom and a member of Bandera Electric Cooperative. “And it’s overwhelming at times. I mean, we’ll have boxes arrive, and my husband’s like, ‘Ugh, another set of boxes’—and we never intended for our house to be a warehouse.

“But honestly, every quarter I ask Hunter, ‘Do you want to keep doing this?’ And he says, ‘Absolutely.’”

## Serenity Packs

**W**ith bags supplied by Hunter Beaton and donations from Houston County businesses, Allen created packs of snacks, activities and other items designed to comfort children caught up in police incidents—especially in rural areas, where family members or Child Protective Services may be miles away.

“It could be 30, 40 minutes, and they don’t know what’s going on; there’s lights flashing, and the officer has to take care of an accident scene or an arrest,” said Allen, who is president of the Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards, in which capacity he met Beaton in 2017, and a member of Houston County EC.

To equip police vehicles with bags for children, Allen worked with nearby departments, who were enthusiastic about the A Serenity Activity Packs, or ASAP bags, as he called them. Beaton was too, and his bags, sourced from Boerne-based Flying Circle Gear, were a perfect match.

“It seems odd maybe to have a bag full of toys and trinkets in a patrol car, but from what I’ve heard, the police officers love it,” Beaton said. “It’s something that can build a little bit of trust.”

Since January, ASAP bags have spread from Houston County to more than 30 police agencies in Texas—a total of 2,500 bags.

“It just kind of took off,” Allen said. “One county after the next—about every week or two we’ll hear about a new county implementing it.”

## Adopt a Senior

**A**llie Grace Graves knows how life can be different for foster children because she was one before she was adopted as a 6-year-old.

“I had to grow up a lot faster than the average child,” said the native of Lone Star, in northeast Texas. “I was doing the dishes, getting on the church bus, roaming around town by myself before I was 4 years old.”

That was on Graves’ mind in 2020 as she was set to graduate from high school. She had her family to celebrate with but knew that more than 500 graduating high school students still in foster care in Texas would not.

She wanted to help and reached out to someone she knew could bring her idea to life: Hunter Beaton.

“Most high school students have someone to celebrate their graduation with,” Graves said. “We want that to be the case for every foster youth in Texas.”

Graves and Beaton teamed up to send duffel bags full of goodies, including personalized letters, to each graduate still in foster care. Donors “adopt” a senior through the program.

About 1,200 foster youths in Texas turn 18 each year without being reunited with their birth family or adopted. More than a quarter of them exit the system without a high school diploma or stable housing, and nearly half are unemployed, according to Texas CASA.

“When I first started, I was so focused on the younger side of



LEFT Comal County sheriff's deputies carry ASAP bags in their cruisers. BELOW Beaton loads boxes from Flying Circle Gear, the Boerne company that makes the bags, into his family's van for delivery.

**TCP HOW TO HELP** Visit [day1bags.org/donate](http://day1bags.org/donate) to help Hunter Beaton further his mission.

the board. The Beatons' Hill Country neighbors also have kept up their support.

"People think it's the corporate donors who do all the heavy lifting, but it's really all the \$10, \$20, \$50 donations here and there that really build it up," Beaton said. "People are just so generous."

He said he plans to continue his nonprofit work after college, where he's studying communications and leadership. And while he accomplished more than most on spring break this year, Beaton still made time for the former

foster children in his life—his own siblings, who started it all.

They played board games, basketball and tennis. "It's fun to come back home and be around kids," he said. "They aren't so serious and make you laugh a lot." ■



**TCP POWER OF OUR PEOPLE**  
To nominate a co-op member who makes a difference in your community, email details to [people@texascooppower.com](mailto:people@texascooppower.com).

things, toddlers and children, that I completely overlooked high school," Beaton said. "So now we're doing our best to help."

Beaton expanded the program this year, outfitting all 562 graduates in the class of 2021 with a vital documents bag, gift cards, reusable water bottles and other items.

"Just so they have something to celebrate their graduation with," he said.

## Riding to the Challenge

A few years ago, when Beaton was preparing to get his driver's license, he didn't want to drive a vehicle with an automatic transmission. That would be too easy.

"I wanted to test in a stick shift," he said. "So I practiced a lot, burned out my dad's clutch but ended up being able to pass the driver's test. I like big challenges like that."

That same ethic is visible in Beaton's commitment to foster children. Being named the Texas Veterans of Foreign Wars Scout of the Year and winning a Congressional Gold Medal for his work was just the start.

"There's always going to be a need," Beaton said. "I want to continue to grow and do new things and make Day 1 Bags incredibly influential for these youth."

It's still a family effort behind him with Paula (his "top pusher and supporter," he said) as treasurer; his sister Hailey as social media guru; and his dad, Kevin, serving on





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<sup>1</sup>Offer not available in all areas. Discount applied by retailer representative at time of contract execution and **applies to purchase of 3 or more windows and/or patio doors**. Cannot be combined with other offers. Initial contact for a free Window and Door Diagnosis must be made and documented on or before 8/31/21, with the appointment then occurring no more than 10 days after the initial contact. No payments and deferred interest for 12 months available to well qualified buyers on approved credit only. Not all customers may qualify. No Finance Charges will be assessed if promo balance is paid in full in 12 months. Renewal by Andersen retailers are independently owned and operated retailers, and are neither brokers nor lenders. Any finance terms advertised are estimates only, and all financing is provided by third-party lenders unaffiliated with Renewal by Andersen retailers, under terms and conditions arranged directly between the customer and such lender. Central Texas Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Austin and San Antonio. North Texas Windows & Doors LLC, d/b/a Renewal by Andersen of Dallas/Fort Worth and West Texas. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are marks of Andersen Corporation. ©2021 Andersen Corporation. All rights reserved. ©2021 Lead Surge LLC. All rights reserved. \*National Replacement Window Month is not a Congressionally-approved designation. \*\*See limited warranty for details at <https://www.renewalbyandersen.com/homeowner-help/warranty>. **All sales, marketing and installation of windows is conducted by Renewal by Andersen of Austin and San Antonio, and by Renewal by Andersen of Dallas/Fort Worth and West Texas. All are independently owned and operated affiliates operating in TX.**

**Just  
Released!**



Actual size  
is 40.6 mm

# The Biggest Event In Silver Dollar History!

**T**he American Silver Eagle has been the most popular silver coin *on the planet* since its introduction in 1986. Its beautiful, iconic design inspires collectors, and investors love it because it's struck in one full ounce of 99.9% fine silver, and guaranteed for weight and fineness by the U.S. Government. Now in 2021, for the first time ever, the coin's design is changing.

## The Most Important Coins in the Modern Era

When President Ronald Reagan signed the Liberty Coin Act into law, he didn't know American Eagles would have the impact they've had, year after year. The coins were so popular that between 1986 and 2020, over 535 million were struck. That's more than **HALF A BILLION** coins, easily making Silver Eagles the most bought coins in the world. Hugely popular now, Silver Eagles may soon become even more popular!

## Collectors Crave Firsts

Collectors covet coins with Key Dates. Key Dates mark significance in a coin's history...firsts, lasts, lowest mintage,

new finishes and new designs. Now, for the first time in over three-and-a-half decades, the Silver Eagle is getting a new design, leading to a historic "first" unlike anything we've seen. The iconic Heraldic Eagle reverse is being replaced by a beautiful new "Eagle Landing" design. This is arguably a bigger deal than even the actual introduction of the coin because there's so much more interest now than in 1986, with investors and collectors!

## If You Knew Then What You Know Now...

If you'd had a crystal ball in 1986, you undoubtedly would have grabbed every Silver Eagle you could get. Those coins in uncirculated condition continue to be sought-after. Now you're getting another chance to land a big Silver Eagle first, a Key Date. Additionally, since these newly designed Silver Eagles are only being released during the second half of 2021, it's quite possible this will be one of the lowest mintages we've seen. That's significant because it could make 2021 a **DOUBLE** Key Date, with both a new design and a low mintage. Demand for these coins is already sky-high, but if that

happens, watch out! No one can predict the future value of silver, but many Americans are rushing to stock up, for themselves, and their loved ones.

## Don't Wait, Order Now! Buy More and Save!

Don't wait another 35 years! Get your 2021 new design Silver Eagles in Brilliant Uncirculated (BU) condition by calling 1-888-201-7639 right now, and using the offer code below. Buy more, save more!

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**Only \$299<sup>99</sup>**  
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### How can a rechargeable hearing aid that costs only \$299<sup>99</sup>

be every bit as good as one that sells for \$2,400 or more?

**The answer:** Although tremendous strides have been made in Advanced Digital Hearing Aid Technology, those cost reductions have not been passed on to you. Until now...

**The MDHearingAid® VOLT+** uses the same kind of Advanced Digital **RECHARGEABLE** Hearing Aid Technology incorporated into hearing aids that cost thousands more at a small fraction of the price.

Over 600,000 satisfied MDHearingAid customers agree: High-quality, digital, FDA-registered **rechargeable** hearing aids don't have to cost a fortune. The fact is, you don't need to spend thousands for a hearing aid. MDHearingAid is a medical-grade, digital, rechargeable hearing aid offering sophistication and high performance, and works right out of the box with no time-consuming "adjustment" appointments. You can contact a licensed hearing specialist conveniently online or by phone — even after your purchase at no cost. No other company provides such extensive support. Now that you know...why pay more?

*"I was amazed! Sounds I hadn't heard in years came back to me!"*

— Don W., Sherman, TX

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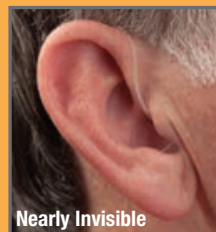
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## Ask Us How To Save



MESSAGE  
FROM CEO

MARK  
ROLLANS

**OUR MEMBER SERVICE PROFESSIONALS** here at Medina Electric Cooperative often get questions about how to save money on electric bills, especially during the warm summer months. Because we are a nonprofit electricity provider owned by the members we serve, we're happy to provide some pointers.

The best techniques for saving energy are often the simplest ones.

For instance, if every American replaced one

fans don't cool the air; they only cool people by moving warm air across skin. The motor on the fan actually adds heat to the room, which is another reason to turn it off when you leave.

**Close your drapes or lower your window shades during the day.** Keeping sunlight out during the heat of the day keeps a house cooler. You can also consider hanging bright curtains. Red, orange and yellow tend to deflect heat, so for curtains, those colors are energy efficient. Or install

solar screens or a window tint to let in the light but keep out the heat.

**Wash your clothes in cold water.** Much of the energy used to wash your clothes goes to heating the water. Cold water is just as effective for getting clothes clean with today's high-efficiency washers and cold-water detergents.

**Wrap or cover foods and drinks in the refrigerator.** Did you know that when foods release moisture, they make the compressor work harder to keep the appliance cold? So put those leftovers in a reusable container with a lid or cover them with plastic.

**Always use the cold water faucet unless you really want hot water.**

Turning on the hot water requires energy to heat the

water, even if it doesn't reach the faucet before you turn it off. So use cold water, especially for cooking.

These are just a few simple ideas to help you save. You can get more tips for summer savings at [MedinaEC.org/Hot](http://MedinaEC.org/Hot) and you can always turn to Medina EC professionals for more information about electrical conservation and safety. ■

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 gases produced by 800,000 cars in a year.

Small steps add up! Here are five more easy ways to save energy—and money—in your home.

**Turn off the fan when you leave a room.** Ceiling fans with blades that turn counterclockwise pull heat up out of the room and send a soft breeze down into it, so anybody nearby will feel cooler. However,



TOUCHSTONE ENERGY



# Linemen train to climb utility poles **NOT BULLETIN BOARDS**

## Help us keep our linemen safe.

**Utility poles** are there to support the equipment and lines that bring electricity to communities. They aren't there to advertise what is happening in the community or to serve as a community hot spot. Yard sale signs, basketball hoops, deer stands, satellite dishes, lights and birdhouses are all no-nos.

**These obstructions** are dangerous for our crews. Unwelcome clutter on utility poles compromises our linemen's safety equipment, leaving them vulnerable to electrocution or injuries.

**Anyone posting** items on utility poles is also at risk of exposure to thousands of volts of electricity pulsing overhead. Always stay at least 10 feet away from utility lines.

**Think before you post that sign!**



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

**Always practice safety.**

**Medina Electric  
Cooperative**



## CONTACT US

**Toll-Free** 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532)

**Email** [Info@MedinaEC.org](mailto:Info@MedinaEC.org)

**Web** [MedinaEC.org](http://MedinaEC.org) - Chat Feature Available

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Voting District 1

Larry Huesser, (830) 363-7651

Wayne W. Scholtz, (830) 426-1328

Ken Weynand, (830) 426-0762

### Voting District 2

Jimmie Raines, (830) 591-8437

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

## Outage? Call us.

### TOLL-FREE

1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532)

Option 2: Report an outage

Option 3: Pay bill, get account balance

Option 5: Speak to a representative

## OFFICE LOCATIONS

**Bruni** 1300 FM 2050 N., Bruni 78344

**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](http://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.

# Luck of the Draw

You have FIVE chances to win a \$100 credit on your electric bill.



## **Chance 1: Register your account on SmartHub.**

Sign up at [MedinaEC.SmartHub.coop](https://MedinaEC.SmartHub.coop), or download the app and register your account there. SmartHub allows you to report outages with one click, view past electric use and see your use before you get your monthly bill.



## **Chance 2: Sign up for automated payments.**

Have your bill automatically charged to your credit or debit card or bank account each month. Set it up online through SmartHub or by calling 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532).



## **Chance 3: Choose paperless billing.**

Opt out of receiving a paper bill every month and have your bill emailed to you instead. Change your account settings in SmartHub, or call us at 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532) and staff will change it for you.



## **Chance 4: Join Operation Round Up.**

Sign up your account for Operation Round Up and have your monthly electric bill rounded up to the next whole dollar. That spare change is used to make donations to community members and families in need. Sign up at [MedinaEC.org/ORU](https://MedinaEC.org/ORU) or by calling 1-866-MEC-ELEC (632-3532).



## **Chance 5: BONUS drawing for all four programs!**

If you are signed up for all four programs, you will be entered into an additional drawing for a \$100 bill credit.

All members signed up for each of the programs above as of 5 p.m. on November 1 will be entered. This includes members who are already signed up for these options and any new sign-ups between now and November 1.

There will be five separate drawings, and five \$100 bill credits will be awarded and automatically issued as bill credits.

Winners in each category will be randomly selected and announced in the December issue of *Texas Co-op Power*.



# ERCOT Text Notifications

THE ELECTRIC RELIABILITY COUNCIL OF TEXAS oversees 90% of the state's power grid, including Medina EC's service area. As in the past, ERCOT will issue alerts and declare energy emergencies if needed. These alerts let consumers know that conservation is needed. If the grid conditions continue to worsen, it can eventually lead to forced outages across the state, which occurred in February 2021.

As always, Medina EC will monitor ERCOT grid conditions and conservation requests, comply as required, and notify our members as quickly as humanly possible. These notifications include emails to accounts with email addresses, social media posts, the news section of Medina EC's website and now text messages. Conditions on the grid can change incredibly quickly, in seconds, and it is possible that ERCOT could call for and implement forced outages before notifications are sent.

Sign up to be on our emergency text notifications list for ERCOT events by texting **ERCOT** to **1-855-429-1119**. Learn more at **MedinaEC.org/ERCOT**.

# We Want Your Feedback

STARTING THE WEEK OF AUGUST 2, 350 members will be randomly selected to get a call or email to answer some survey questions about Medina Electric. Your answers will help the cooperative to see how we can improve service to and better communicate with our members.

The survey, email or phone call should take less than five minutes. This feedback is important to the cooperative, and we appreciate members taking time out of their busy schedules to provide it to us.

The surveys are being done by National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Phone calls will either come from an 844 or 507 area code. Emails will show Medina Electric in the "From" line.

The cooperative has been having these surveys quarterly throughout



the year, so the last survey in 2021 will take place in November.

If you do not get a phone call or email to do a survey but would like to share feedback or an idea with the cooperative, email us at [MyCoop@MedinaEC.org](mailto:MyCoop@MedinaEC.org). ■



My Co-op Is  
**Cool**

Each month, you have a chance to win a custom Medina EC Coleman cooler as a thank-you for your membership!

[MedinaEC.org/Cooler](https://MedinaEC.org/Cooler)



*We hope to see you at our*

**82nd**

## **Annual Membership Meeting**

**Saturday, September 25 | Meeting begins at 10 a.m.**  
**Willie de Leon Civic Center | Uvalde**

### *Join Us In Person To:*

- Have a chance to win \$1,000
- Win door prizes
- Get updates on your cooperative
- Meet with Medina EC staff
- Mingle with other members
- Enjoy breakfast on us

*Can't make it in person? There will be  
an option for you to join online!*

More details will be available in the September Texas  
Co-op Power or visit [MedinaEC.org/AnnualMeeting2021](https://MedinaEC.org/AnnualMeeting2021).







## Co-op Connections Corner: Back to School

**AUGUST MEANS** it is time to head back to school. These local business partners offer discounts in Medina EC's service area on supplies for students and teachers.

### Cross Connections Radio Shack—Hondo

(830) 426-2662 | [CrossConnectionsHondo.com](http://CrossConnectionsHondo.com)

Buy one four-pack of AA or AAA batteries and get one free;  
buy one two-pack of C or D batteries and get one free; buy one  
9-volt battery and get one free

### The Pointless Pencil—Cotulla

(830) 879-4179 | [ThePointlessPencil.com](http://ThePointlessPencil.com)

\$5 off any purchase of \$25 or more (excluding school supply  
bags)



Learn more about Medina EC's Co-op Connections program and all the benefits at [MedinaEC.org/Connections](http://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.

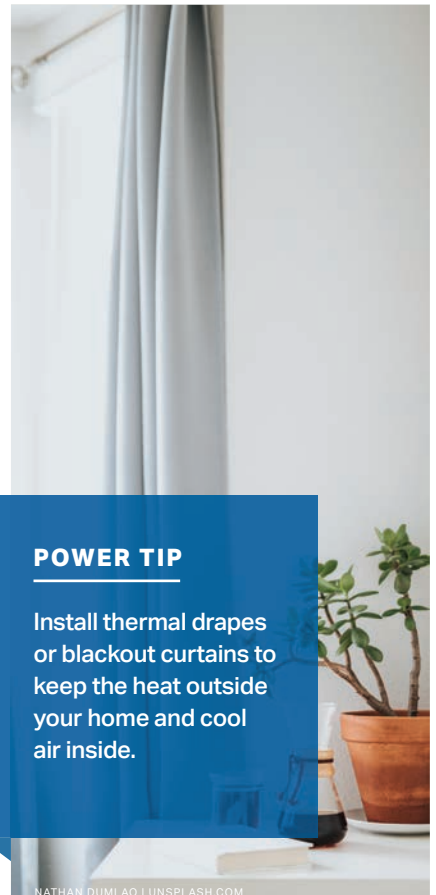
To sign up for the program, email  
[MyCoop@MedinaEC.org](mailto:MyCoop@MedinaEC.org).



### DID YOU KNOW?

A refrigerator manufactured 30 years ago uses four times as much electricity as a modern one.

NEW AFRICA | ADOBE STOCK



### POWER TIP

Install thermal drapes or blackout curtains to keep the heat outside your home and cool air inside.

NATHAN DUMLAO | UNSPLASH.COM



TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: BEATRIZ GARCIA, ROSE AND CRYSTAL CHAVEZ, AND YOLANDA RIVERA. BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT: MARY OLS-TAD, ESTELLA MEJIA, AND CECILY GUERRA.

## Operation Round Up Donates \$10,500

**MEDINA EC'S OPERATION ROUND UP** program has been making a difference in the lives of community members since 2006. The ORU committee, made up of nine cooperative members, meets quarterly to review applications and carefully make donation decisions. They met in early June to look over applications submitted by May 7.

The committee decided to provide each of the following families with \$900. These families suffered catastrophic property damage as a result of the tornado and hailstorm that hit Medina County on April 28.

- ▶ **Alexander and Luisa Rivera** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Beatriz Garcia** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Cecily Guerra** (D'Hanis)
- ▶ **Darlene and Kyle Freehauf** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Elizabeth Campos** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Erlinda Robles** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Estella Mejia** (D'Hanis)
- ▶ **Mary Olsstad** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Melisa Sepulveda** (Hondo)
- ▶ **Yolanda and Baldemar Rivera** (Hondo)

The ORU committee also assisted the following who were seeking assistance with medical bills after extended hospital stays.

- ▶ **Rose and Jose Chavez (Yancey)** - \$500
- ▶ **Jose and Denise Musquez (Uvalde)** - \$1,000

Operation Round Up is funded by Medina EC members who choose to have their monthly electric bill rounded up to the next whole dollar. The spare change is then added to the ORU fund to help community members in need. ORU has helped families pay medical bills, attend therapies, repair homes after fires and more.

If you or someone you know needs financial help, apply for a donation from Operation Round Up. Applicants do not need to be Medina EC members, but must live in one of the 17 counties served by the cooperative.

**The next deadline is August 6. Learn more and apply at [MedinaEC.org/ORU](https://MedinaEC.org/ORU).**



# Community Empowerment Grants: \$5,500 Awarded to Area Organizations

In June, Medina EC awarded \$5,500 in grants to area organizations through the Community Empowerment Program to encourage community and economic development throughout the 17 counties served by the cooperative.

The program focuses on projects that encourage economic diversity, contribute to community health and development, and improve the quality or quantity of services essential for the development of viable communities.

The CEP committee decided on the following awards:

## Alexander Memorial Library (Cotulla) – \$500

The grant will be used to purchase new furniture for the public to use, including computer tables on the main floor and a bookcase for the growing children's section.

## Camp Wood Public Library – \$800

The grant will be used to help the library fund interior security cameras to help monitor activities in the library and safeguard the library's assets.

## Charlotte Public Library – \$1,000

The library will use the grant to purchase DEAR Little Free Libraries, or book-sharing boxes, to be strategically placed around Charlotte to provide free reading material and to promote reading to all ages.

## Devine Food Pantry – \$500

The grant will assist in the purchase and installation of security cameras inside and outside of the food pantry.

## Literacy Volunteers of Laredo – \$1,200

The grant will fund an innovative printer and accessories to print resources for the program's digital literacy courses. It will also allow the program to pilot other courses in the future.

## Nuevos Horizontes de Starr County (Rio Grande City) – \$500

The grant will help the organization purchase new outdoor seating to create an outdoor classroom and recreation area for students.

## South Texas Empowerment of Women Center (Rio Grande City) – \$500

The grant will be used to purchase and install outdoor lighting for the facility.

## Texas Ramp Project (Medina County) – \$500

The grant will be used to purchase lumber and materials for two average-length wheelchair ramps that will be built in Medina EC's service area.

Medina EC's CEO Mark Rollans said, "Beyond providing safe, reliable electricity, it's important as a cooperative to make a difference in our service area. These organizations play a vital role in the communities we serve so that they grow and prosper."

Medina EC is proud to include these organizations in the more than \$67,500 in grants awarded to different non-profits and local governments since the CEP program was started in 2015.

**For more information visit [MedinaEC.org/Grant](https://MedinaEC.org/Grant).**



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Sure you could wear a \$6,000 bracelet, and cry for days when it goes missing after a particularly festive mamba line at the resort swimming pool. Or, you could wear something equally as stunning that puts a lot less pressure on you to stay on your toes.

The **Stress-Free Glamour Bracelet Collection** features dressed up sterling silver tennis bracelets that sparkle with all the beauty

of emeralds, rubies and sapphires, but without the steep price. The Ultimate Diamond Alternative™, DiamondAura® has all the fire, clarity and glamour of the world's best mined gemstones. In fact, because these stones are created in pristine conditions, you have the scientific advantage of achieving near perfection.

An 11 carat emerald and diamond bracelet that looks this good would set you back over \$6,000. The **Stress-Free Glamour Bracelet** has a much more relaxing price of \$79.

So, whether you're celebrating on the road or in your home town, arm yourself with over eleven carats of worry-free elegance and live life to its fullest without emptying your wallet.

**Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.** Enjoy the incomparable sparkle of the **Stress-Free Glamour Bracelet Collection** for 30 days. If you aren't perfectly happy, send it back for a full refund of the item price.

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C. Sapphire Blue Bracelet (11 ¾ ctw) ~~\$399~~ \$79† + S&P Save \$320

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**Final Issue**

**Common obverse shown actual size**

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1	Uncirculated Lincoln "Shield" Cent	<b>FREE!</b>	
	Shipping	<b>FREE!</b>	
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Nelson Algren  
circa 1949.

# Stolen Words

While in Texas, author Nelson Algren was a man with a thieving arm

BY CHRISTOPHER ADAMS

**THE AWARD-WINNING** author who would go on to write the classic novel *The Man With the Golden Arm* entered a building at Sul Ross State Teachers College in Alpine in early 1934 and made off with one of the institution's typewriters. The next morning, the thief hopped a train out of town.

Nelson Algren won the National Book Award in 1950 for the aforementioned novel and earned three O. Henry Awards for his short stories, but the "poet of the Chicago slums" found trouble in Texas before achieving national literary acclaim.

Algren couldn't find work in his hometown of Chicago or anywhere else in the greater Midwest during the Great Depression and eventually traveled to Texas to pack black-eyed peas and run a Sinclair gas station between Rio Hondo

and Harlingen. But neither venture provided Algren satisfactory income, and he sought other opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.

"He crossed the border to Matamoros and came back again, ate in missions, slept in hobo jungles, lost in crap games, rode in cattle or refrigerated boxcars," wrote author Bettina Drew in the introduction to the book *The Texas Stories of Nelson Algren*.

An exhausted Algren returned to Chicago at the end of 1932 and, having written a well-received short story, decided that creative writing was his path to fulfillment. He persuaded a New York publisher to give him an advance for a novel that was to be about the illusion of the American dream and based on

his experiences in Texas.

"He saw a lot of poverty and contradictions, such as poor whites who were oppressed by the rich but took out their anger on Mexicans and Blacks who were even poorer and more oppressed," Mary Wisniewski, author of a 2016 Algren biography called *Algren: A Life*, explained in an email.

Algren returned to Texas in September 1933 and made his way to Alpine to create his crucial work. He convinced the president of Sul Ross State Teachers College (now Sul Ross State University) that he was "a big-time New York writer," granting him access to the college's typewriters to draft his novel. However, his advance hadn't amounted to much, and by January 1934, he was broke, with an unfinished manuscript. He had no choice but to return home, where accessing a typewriter would be a real challenge. So he stole one from Sul Ross.

"I think he just figured he needed the typewriter more than the college did, so he had a right to it," Wisniewski said.

Algren fled Alpine on a freight train but was subsequently caught and locked up in the Brewster County jail. It proved to be a temporary setback. He returned to Chicago after his release and completed his first novel, *Somebody in Boots*, about his experiences living in Texas.

And the typewriter? Algren left it at an Alpine freight depot where it was to be shipped to Chicago.

"The typewriter was not sent to Chicago," Wisniewski said. Its whereabouts seem to be unknown. "Algren had used it to write *Somebody in Boots* while he was working at Alpine—but didn't finish it on that typewriter. He had to finish it back in Chicago on another machine." ■



# Kids Cooking

Youngsters in the kitchen help make family meals truly rewarding

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

I've encouraged my children to join me in the kitchen ever since they were little. Cooking with kids requires extra patience but reaps rewards down the line. Small children can practice mixing and measuring ingredients and kneading dough, and older kids can learn how to chop and take charge of the stove. Encouraging their efforts makes all the difference in kids' kitchen success. My son adores meatballs, and this baked version keeps it simple. Serve with your favorite pasta or just scoop onto slices of garlic bread.

## Cheesy Baked Meatballs

**1 pound ground beef**  
**½ pound pork sausage**  
**1 egg**  
**¼ cup breadcrumbs**  
**1 tablespoon tomato paste**  
**1 tablespoon chopped parsley**  
**1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**  
**1 teaspoon onion powder**  
**1 teaspoon garlic powder**  
**1 teaspoon salt**  
**¼ teaspoon pepper**  
**1 jar (24 ounces) marinara sauce**  
**8 ounces fresh mozzarella slices**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large bowl, crumble together beef and sausage. Mix in egg, breadcrumbs, tomato paste, parsley, Worcestershire sauce, onion powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper.
2. Scoop out about 2 tablespoons of the mixture and roll it into a ball with your hands. Place in a 9-by-13-inch baking dish and repeat until all of the mixture has been used.
3. Bake 18–20 minutes, until cooked through. Remove dish from oven and pour marinara sauce into the pan over the meatballs. Arrange mozzarella slices between meatballs, breaking into smaller pieces if needed.
4. Return to oven and bake an additional 10 minutes, until cheese is melted and sauce is bubbly.

**SERVES 6**

**TCP WEB EXTRA** Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at [stetted.com](http://stetted.com), where she features a recipe for BBQ Pulled Pork Pizza.







## Guacamole

IVAN REMLEY  
BLUEBONNET EC

Adults can take care of the chopping while little hands do the mashing and mixing of this fresh guacamole. Don't limit yourself to eating it with just chips or tacos—Ivan, 14, recommends serving with fresh veggies such as sliced radishes, carrots and cucumbers or even kale chips.

**½ onion, diced**

**2 Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced**

**½ jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced**

**1 clove garlic, minced**

**Juice of 1–2 limes, divided use**

**½ teaspoon salt, plus more to taste**

**3 avocados, divided use**

1. In a large bowl, stir together the onion, tomatoes, jalapeño, garlic, 1 tablespoon lime juice and salt.

2. Slice two avocados in half lengthwise, making one long cut around the pit. Separate the halves and remove the pits. With a spoon, scoop out the flesh and add to the mixture in the bowl.

3. Mash and stir everything together, until the ingredients are well combined.

4. Slice the third avocado lengthwise, separate the halves and remove the pit. With a small knife, cut the flesh into small cubes. Scoop out the cubes and add them to the bowl with the avocado mixture. Add 1 tablespoon of lime juice and fold the avocado cubes in just enough for a slightly chunky texture.

5. Taste and adjust seasoning with lime juice and salt as needed.

**MAKES ABOUT 2 CUPS**

[MORE RECIPES >](#)



**\$500 WINNER**

## Cooper's Bacon Cheddar Chicken Pasta

COOPER JOHNSON  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES



This family-friendly pasta recipe is a great way to teach older kids a variety of skills, such as sautéing and creating a simple cheese sauce. Cooper, 12, recommends adding chopped green onions to serve along with the extra bacon.

**SERVES 6–8**

**1 pound pasta, any type**

**6 strips bacon, diced; divided use**

**1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts; cut into 1-inch chunks**

**Salt and pepper, to taste**

**1 tablespoon butter**

**2 tablespoons flour**

**1 packet ranch dip mix**

**2 cups milk**

**1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese**

1. Cook pasta according to package directions, drain and keep warm.

2. While pasta is cooking, cook bacon in a large, deep-sided skillet over medium heat until crisp, then remove and drain on a paper towel. Drain all but one tablespoon of bacon drippings from pan.

3. Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Add butter to the skillet with the bacon drippings, stirring to melt, then add chicken. Cook until tender and no longer pink, 8–10 minutes.

4. Mix together flour and ranch dip mix, then sprinkle evenly over the chicken and stir to coat. Stir in the milk and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened and bubbly.

5. Stir in cheddar and half of the reserved bacon, stirring to melt the cheese completely. Add the pasta and stir to mix well. Serve with remaining bacon sprinkled on top.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**SOUPS AND STEWS** DUE AUGUST 10

Winter is the ideal time to cozy up to a warm bowl, so we want your best soup and stew recipes.

The best reader recipe wins \$500. Enter at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests) by August 10.



## Texas-Style Chorizo Frittata

MATTHEW PEÑA  
PEDERNALES EC

Breakfast for dinner is always a great way to get kids involved in the kitchen. Matthew, 16, came up with this recipe to help out his parents on a busy day using ingredients they already had in the fridge.

**1 tablespoon olive oil**  
**½ onion, chopped**

**1½ cups chopped bell pepper**  
**2 cloves garlic, minced**  
**1 pound Mexican chorizo**  
**9 eggs**  
**1 cup shredded cheddar cheese**  
**¼ cup chopped parsley**  
**½ teaspoon salt**  
**½ teaspoon pepper**  
**8 ounces Oaxaca cheese, sliced**

### OPTIONAL GARNISHES

**Chopped parsley**  
**Sour cream or Mexican crema**  
**Sliced avocado**  
**Pico de gallo**

**COOK'S TIP** For a spicier frittata, add sliced jalapeños or hot sauce to the egg mixture before baking.

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Heat a 10-inch ovenproof skillet over medium heat and add olive oil. Stir in onion and bell pepper and sauté until tender. Add garlic and cook an additional 3 minutes, stirring often to prevent garlic from burning. Remove vegetables to a bowl and set aside.

3. Crumble the chorizo into the skillet and sauté until fully cooked, breaking up any large chunks. Remove from heat and drain excess oil if needed.

4. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, cheddar, parsley, salt and pepper. Add egg mixture and sautéed vegetables to the cooked chorizo in the skillet. Stir to combine and distribute ingredients evenly. Add Oaxaca cheese evenly on top of frittata.

5. Place skillet in oven and bake 20 minutes, making sure the frittata has fully set. Garnish with parsley, sour cream or Mexican crema, sliced avocado, and pico de gallo.

**SERVES 6**

**TCP WEB EXTRA** We have more than 900 searchable recipes at TexasCoopPower.com. You're sure to find others with which children can lend a helping hand.

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## Head Honcho

The barbacoa at Vera's in Brownsville rises to the occasion

BY CHET GARNER

**TO MANY TEXANS**, Cabeza de Vaca was a Spanish explorer who shipwrecked near Galveston Island centuries ago. For folks in Brownsville, *cabeza de vaca* (head of the cow) has a much tastier meaning. And you won't find a more authentic version of real-deal cow head *barbacoa* than at Vera's Backyard Bar-B-Que.

Before lunch, I asked owner Armando Vera for a look at his pit because you can learn a lot about pit bosses by seeing the tools they use. Vera's pit was unlike anything I've seen. It's literally a pit in the ground, about 4 feet deep and full of blazing logs. It looked like a gateway to Hades.

Vera explained that an open pit is the traditional way to cook Mexican-style barbacoa. An entire cow head is wrapped in foil, placed in a hole and covered with burning logs for 10–12 hours. Vera's is the only place in Texas that still cooks barbacoa underground, the traditional way that Vera's father used when he started the business in 1955.

Even though I found the sight of the head to be less than appetizing, I decided to judge the barbacoa with my mouth instead of my eyes. The menu included almost every part of the head: *lengua* (tongue), *ojos* (eyes), *jeta* (jaw) and *cachete* (cheek). I ordered a bit of everything, along with homemade tortillas and salsa.

With each bite, the image of the full head faded, replaced by savory flavors of perfectly smoked meat, tangy salsa and pillowy tortillas. The barbacoa offers flavor, smoke and texture that you can't get cooking it in an oven or over a stove. The experience at Vera's prompted me to do something I never expected to do in my lifetime: I ordered a second helping of *lengua*. ■

ABOVE Chet isn't sure he sees eye to eye with the cow head in front of him.

**TCP WEB EXTRA** Chet finds that barbacoa, much like his musings, is tongue in cheek in his latest video. See all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

## Know Before You Go

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

## AUGUST

04

**South Padre Island [4–7]**  
**U.S. Lifesaving Association National Championship**, (956) 761-3000, [sopadre.com](http://sopadre.com)

05

**Levelland [5–8] SPOTC Dog Agility Trials**, (806) 894-4161, [malletteventcenter.com](http://malletteventcenter.com)

**Palestine [5, 7, 19–21, 26–28] Palestine Diesel Roundtrip**, 1-855-632-7729, [texasstaterailroad.net](http://texasstaterailroad.net)

06

**South Padre Island [6–8] Ladies Kingfish Tournament**, (956) 761-4412, [sopadre.com](http://sopadre.com)

07

**Bellville Farmers Market**, (979) 865-3407, [discoverbellville.com](http://discoverbellville.com)

**Corpus Christi Summer PolkaFest**, (361) 215-9163, [facebook.com/chssouthtexas](http://facebook.com/chssouthtexas)

**Frankston Neches River Wilderness Race**, (903) 245-9490, [necheswildernessrace.com](http://necheswildernessrace.com)

**Graham Cars & Stars Car Show**, (940) 550-8468, [grahamcarsandstars.org](http://grahamcarsandstars.org)

**McKinney Sips of Summer**, (318) 527-9221, [mckinneysipandstroll.com](http://mckinneysipandstroll.com)

**Palestine Dogwood Jamboree: If That Ain't Country**, (903) 723-6291, [dogwoodjamboree.com](http://dogwoodjamboree.com)

**Temple Dig It Family Day**, (254) 298-5378, [downtowntemple.com](http://downtowntemple.com)

**Bandera [7, 14, 21, 28] Cowboys On Main**, (830) 796-3045, [banderacowboycapital.com](http://banderacowboycapital.com)



**Allen [7, 21, Sept. 4] Radha Krishna Temple Chess Club Tournaments,** (860) 605-3683, radhakrishnatemple.net/chess-tournament

**Palestine [7, 14, 21, 28, Sept. 4] Market Day,** (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

**Palestine [7, Sept. 4] Saturdays on Main,** (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

**Palestine [9, 16, 23, 30, Sept. 6] Trivia Night at the Pint,** (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

**Palestine [12-14] Palestine Steam Roundtrip,** 1-855-632-7729, texasstaterailroad.net

**Addison [12, 26] Vitruvian Nights Live,** (972) 590-8866, udr.com/vitruvian-park

**San Antonio Iliza Shlesinger,** (210) 223-8624, tobincenr.org

**South Padre Island [13-14] Shallow Sport Owners Tournament,** (956) 761-3000, shallowstournament.com

**Fredericksburg [13-15, 20-22] Always ... Patsy Cline,** 1-888-669-7114, fredericksburgtheater.org

**Lake Jackson Farmers Market,** (281) 924-0596, lakejacksonfarmersmarket.com

**Leming Battle of Medina Symposium,** (830) 480-2741, facebook.com/atascosahistory

MORE EVENTS >

## TCP Submit Your Event

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

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### Event Calendar

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### AUGUST EVENTS CONTINUED

14

**Temple Farmers Market**, (254) 298-5378, [downtowntemple.com](http://downtowntemple.com)

**New Braunfels [14-15] Hill Country Comicon**, (830) 221-4011, [hillcountrycomicon.com](http://hillcountrycomicon.com)

**McKinney [14, 22] Zip Line Day**, (972) 562-5566, [heardmuseum.org/ropescourse](http://heardmuseum.org/ropescourse)

**Boerne [14, 28] Bluegrass Jam**, (210) 445-1080, [theagricultural.org/bluegrass-jams](http://theagricultural.org/bluegrass-jams)

20

**Crockett Exile**, (936) 544-4276, [pwfaa.org](http://pwfaa.org)

**Fredericksburg [20-22] Trade Days**, (210) 846-4094, [fbgtradedays.com](http://fbgtradedays.com)

**Ingram [20-22, 27-29; Sept. 3-4] Nobody's Perfect**, (830) 367-5121, [hcaf.com](http://hcaf.com)

21

**Arlington Chris Stapleton's All-American Road Show**, (817) 533-1972, [arlington.org](http://arlington.org)

**Boerne Moondance Outdoor Concerts: Big Cedar Fever**, (830) 249-4616, [cibolo.org](http://cibolo.org)

**Palestine Summer Concert Series: Carson Jeffrey**, (903) 724-4385, [visitpalestine.com](http://visitpalestine.com)

**Castroville [21-22] St. Louis Day**, (830) 931-2826, [saintlouisday.com](http://saintlouisday.com)

26

**Kerrville Symphony of the Hills: Homecoming**, (830) 792-7469, [symphonyofthehills.org](http://symphonyofthehills.org)

**Fredericksburg [26-29] Gillespie County Fair**, (830) 997-2359, [gillespiefair.com](http://gillespiefair.com)

27

**Stonewall Commemoration of Lyndon Johnson's Birthday**, (830) 868-7128, [nps.gov/lyjo](http://nps.gov/lyjo)

**Tyler [27-29] Texas Rose Breed Horse Show**, (903) 882-8696, [texasrosehorsepark.com](http://texasrosehorsepark.com)

28

**Austin Bat Fest**, (512) 441-9015, [roadwayevents.com/event/bat-fest](http://roadwayevents.com/event/bat-fest)

**Brenham Lee Greenwood**, (979) 337-7240, [thebarnhillcenter.com/events](http://thebarnhillcenter.com/events)

**Bryan BCS Library Friends Book Sale for Young Readers**, (979) 209-5600, [friendsbcs.org](http://friendsbcs.org)

**Columbus Country Market**, (979) 732-8385, [columbusfmtx.org](http://columbusfmtx.org)

**Lakehills Last Saturday Market**, (254) 979-1073, [lakehillssaturdaymarket.com](http://lakehillssaturdaymarket.com)

**Waco Karem Classics Car Show**, (254) 855-3722, [karemshriners.com](http://karemshriners.com)

## SEPTEMBER

02

**La Grange Fayette County Fair**, (979) 968-3911, [fayettecountyfair.org](http://fayettecountyfair.org)

04

**Driftwood Sip & Stroll**, (713) 299-1728, [sunrisebeachvfd.org](http://sunrisebeachvfd.org)

**Bulverde [4, 11, 18, 25, Oct. 2] Saturday Night Rodeo**, (830) 980-2226, [tejasrodeo.com](http://tejasrodeo.com)

05

**New Berlin Sausage Festival**, (210) 343-9570, [facebook.com/nbtksausagefest](http://facebook.com/nbtksausagefest)



# Portraits

Deep lines and wrinkles tell a person's story, but a twinkle of the eye or sly smile makes us wonder what more there is to tell. Whether carefully posed or caught spontaneously, these Texans have great heads on their shoulders.

BY GRACE FULTZ



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

PAUL HOLLAND  
PEDERNALES EC

James Hinkley, an artist and longtime resident of the Panhandle who now lives in Leander.

PATSI TINDEL  
LAMAR ELECTRIC

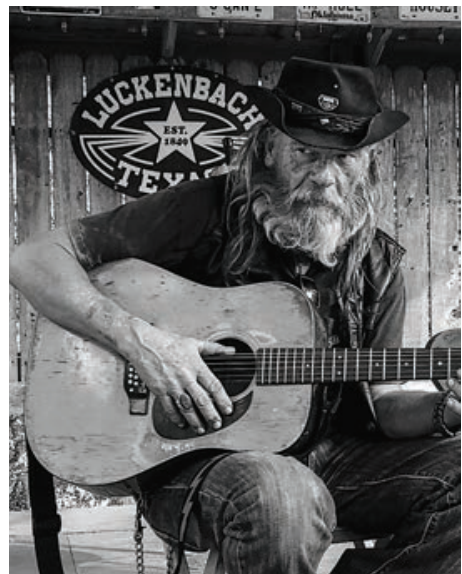
"This gentle giant is known for his outstanding barbecue."

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





## Pools in the Pasture

Summers on a ranch promise swimming in stock tanks

BY BRENDA KISSKO

**WHEN YOU GROW UP** on a ranch in West Texas, you learn early about the finer things in life. You eat oysters (of the mountain variety), you hire a full-time lawn service to maintain every acre of your spread (some call it grazing cattle), and you even get your own pair of jeans with free designer rips. And of course, *dahling*, we always had a pool.

Granted, the cows thought those live-stock tanks were for them, but I believed my dad put those tanks all over the ranch just so us girls could take our pick of swimming locations for the day. The water was always ice cold and as pure as it comes, straight from the ground. If we were thirsty, we'd just stick our tongue under the fill pipe for a gulp of goodness straight from God to our mouths. I swear it was better than Fiji Water or Topo Chico.

That's how we spent our summers, my mom, sister and I—with the pickup backed up to a stock tank, pulp fiction in hand, George Strait serenading us from the stereo speakers. No sunscreen allowed because cows don't really like drinking oxybenzone. Any time we had a slumber party, swimming was on the agenda, followed by rolling in a huge pile of cottonseed.

If the tank hadn't been cleaned out in a while, we'd just grab chunks of the moss (picture the Grinch's snot) and throw it to the ground below. Totally cool. But not if you tried to do a handstand and came up with it all over your face. Gross.

My favorite tank—I mean pool—was at my grandparents' ranch. My aunt freed her pet goldfish in it before going off to college at Texas Tech, and—no kidding—those suckers grew to be a foot long and multiplied like rabbits. All us grandkids loved learning to swim there, racing from side to side and seeing who could catch the most fish with our hands. I'm sure their great-great-great-grand-fishes are still swimming around in the tank today.

I think Kevin Bacon did his part to bring tank swimming back in style. In *I Love Dick*, an Amazon series set in Marfa (another one of my favorite places), he ends the pilot episode with a skinny-dip in a tank with a gorgeous view of the mountains. That's some good living right there.

As I'm writing this, I'm trying to remember the last time I swam in a live-stock tank. Sure, I've done rooftop pools, lazy rivers and hot tubs right off the ski slope, but it's been far too long since that good old-fashioned, back-to-my-roots dunk in a redneck infinity pool. Good thing summer's not quite over. ■



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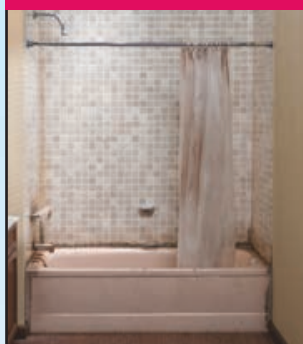


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