

# TEXAS CO-OP POWER

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## FEATURES

### 6 With Cooperatives, You've Got a Friend

By Sheryl Smith-Rodgers

Photos by Wyatt McSpadden

*Let us count the ways electric cooperatives do more than merely provide electricity—they contribute to community events, promote energy efficiency, support local charities, encourage economic development, provide educational opportunities and assist other co-ops in times of need.*

### 12 Sweethearts of the Gridiron

By Clay Coppedge

Photos by O. Rufus Lovett

*The high-kicking Kilgore Rangerettes were the world's first women's dance-drill team.*

## FAVORITES

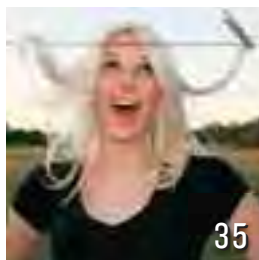
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## TEXAS CO-OP POWER

*Texas Co-op Power* is published by your electric cooperative to enhance the quality of life of its member-customers in an educational and entertaining format.

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# letters

## TSD STORY ON TARGET

On behalf of the Texas Association of the Deaf, I would like to compliment you for publishing "Texas School for the Deaf: Building Bridges" in the October 2008 issue. What makes the write-up very unique, though not surprising, is the fact that Nick Wilhite found his cultural identity in less than two years while he struggled most of his educational life. His self-esteem shot through the roof while he made a name for himself at TSD.

Unlike most articles I have read in the past, your writer, Camille Wheeler, did her homework. Not least, Will van Overbeek did an excellent job of complementing the feature with dramatic photos while doing justice to deaf culture.

**STEVE C. BALDWIN**, *President*  
*Texas Association of the Deaf*

## HEARTENING COOPERATION ON CADDO LAKE

Thank you so much for your November 2008 article on Caddo Lake and the efforts being made there and elsewhere to eradicate invasive giant salvinia. I found it most informative and appreciate you making us all aware of the problem. I also found it heartening that neighbors and communities are working together.

**NANCY CORLEY**  
*Parker*

**Editor's note:** Photographs for "A Healing Journey" in the December 2008 issue should have been credited to John Scheiber.

We want to hear from our readers. Send letters to: Editor, *Texas Co-op Power*, 1122 Colorado, 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, or e-mail us at [letters@texas-ec.org](mailto:letters@texas-ec.org). Please include the name of your town and electric co-op. Letters may be edited for clarity and length and will be printed as space allows. Read additional letters at [www.texascoopower.com](http://www.texascoopower.com).

# POWER TALK

## BROKEN CFL? DON'T CALL 911

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are selling like hotcakes, but not all users are comfortable with them yet. According to the *Austin-American Statesman*, some are calling 911 for cleanup help from the fire department if they break a bulb. The message from fire authorities and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to take care but don't call for outside help.



Better to leave the fire department for responding to emergencies.

CFL bulbs contain 1.4 to 4 milligrams of mercury, about the amount that would cover the tip of a ballpoint pen. It would take 125 CFLs to equal the amount of mercury manufacturers used in old thermometers. To put this in community perspective, CFLs—which consume 75 percent less energy than a

conventional bulb—actually prevent mercury pollution overall. The electricity used by one CFL is responsible for 2.5 milligrams of mercury emissions from a coal-burning generation plant over five years of use. Powering a conventional bulb over that span releases 10 milligrams of mercury, according to the EPA. In addition, a CFL lasts up to six times longer than a conventional bulb and adds less waste heat to your home.

The Austin Fire Department says:

- If a bulb is broken, air out the room where the break occurred for about 15 minutes and then place the broken pieces in a jar with a metal lid or in a plastic bag that can be sealed. Burned-out or broken bulbs can be returned to The Home Depot or other agencies and businesses with disposal facilities.
- Don't vacuum the broken pieces.
- Clothes that come in contact with bulb fragments should be thrown away.



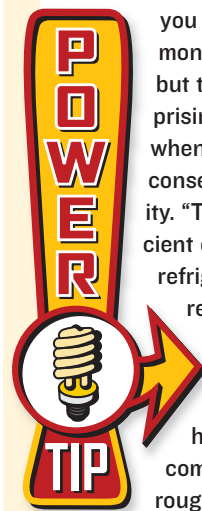
## Little Fridge, Big Bill

Size doesn't always matter when it comes to saving electricity. Those mini-refrigerators of about 2 cubic feet are perfect for your office or dorm room and may save

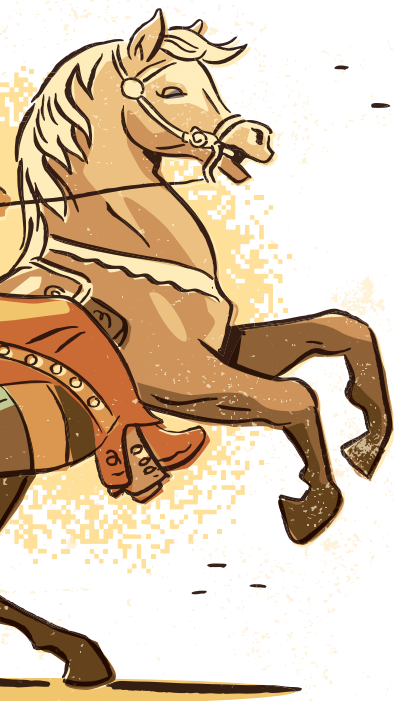
you space and money up-front, but they're surprisingly inefficient when it comes to conserving electricity. "The most efficient compact refrigerator we

recently tested consumes about 280 kilowatt-hours per year, compared with roughly 390 kilo-

watt-hours for an energy-efficient 18-cubic-foot top-freezer refrigerator. That means the mini-fridge offers only about one-tenth of the storage space but uses almost 72 percent of the energy the full-size model consumes," says *Consumer Reports* magazine.







## H A P P E N I N G S

Unleash your inner cowboy during the 72nd annual **CHARRO DAYS FIESTA**, an eight-day festival that celebrates the U.S. and Mexican cultures of Brownsville and its sister city Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

The fiesta, first held in 1938, is set to run February 22 through March 1 in the border town of Brownsville, Texas' southernmost city. The celebration is named in honor of the *charro*, which means dashing Mexican gentleman cowboy or dashing Mexican horseman.

Organizers expect more than 200,000 people to soak up a plethora of sights and sounds, including street dances, mariachi music, ballet folklórico performances by elementary students and three parades. The Grand International Parade, scheduled for February 28, starts in Brownsville and ends in Matamoros.

Hear the traditional Mexican *grito*, a celebratory cry, ring out in the streets and fill your eyes with the dazzling colors of traditional costumes from Mexican states.

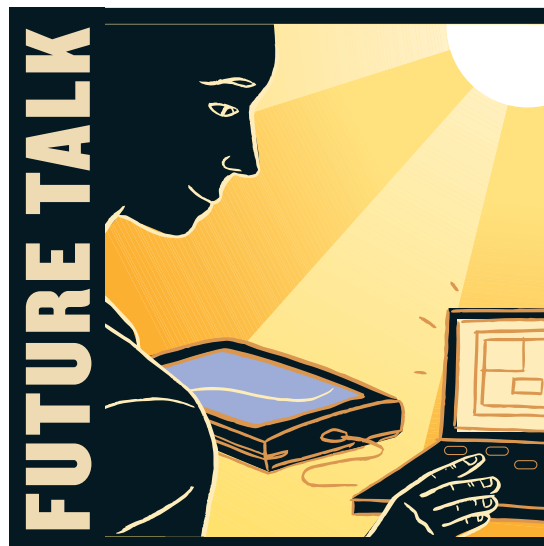
For more information, call (956) 542-4245 or go to [www.charrodaysfiesta.com](http://www.charrodaysfiesta.com).

### SMACK-DAB IN THE MIDDLE OF HISTORY

Staying at **Comfort Common** on High Street puts visitors at the center of Comfort's historic district, which has almost 100 structures built before 1900. The original two-story hotel, built in 1880, no longer houses guests. The bottom floor has a gift shop. But there are six places to stay on the landscaped grounds behind the hotel. Two guest rooms are in the 1894 building that once served as the carriage house. The other units are historic cabins and cottages moved to the property.

Comfort was founded by freethinking German immigrants. Peter Joseph Ingenhuett built not only the picturesque hotel, which has 20-inch-thick walls, but also an opera house, livery, saloon and mercantile business. The town is definitely worth a visit. Call (830) 995-3030.

—From *Historic Hotels of Texas: A Traveler's Guide*, Texas A&M University Press, first edition, 2007



You laptop-toting travelers who know the frustrations of finding a power outlet on the road might be interested in a gadget by Voltaic Systems. The Voltaic Generator Bag not only protects your laptop, but it can also charge it using just the sun. The integrated solar panels on the bag, which runs \$599 on the company's website, [www.voltaicsystems.com](http://www.voltaicsystems.com), provide up to 17 watts of generating power, charging up the onboard battery with enough juice to run your computer for about 2 hours.

## WHO KNEW?



© JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION/CORBIS


Born in New York City to vaudevillian parents, **Joan Blondell** had acting in her blood. The winsome blue-eyed blonde was discovered in Hollywood by Al Jolson and went on to star in Depression-era film classics like "The Public Enemy" and "Gold Diggers of 1933." However, Blondell's career was actually launched in Texas, where she moved as a teen. In 1926, at age 20, she won the Miss Dallas pageant. Big D-eal!

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 **Texas Electric Cooperatives**  
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Sarah Dross shows off the blue ribbon she received at SpiritHorse Therapeutic Center. The CoServ Charitable Foundation contributes to SpiritHorse.

With cooperatives, you've got a  
**friend.**

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS • PHOTOS BY WYATT McSPADDEN

**'People helping people—that's been the cooperative way from the start.'**

**RAY BEAVERS**  
*board chairman of Texas Electric Cooperatives  
CEO/general manager of United Cooperative Services*



As soon as their car pulls up at SpiritHorse Therapeutic Center in Corinth, Sarah Dross throws open the door and runs all the way to the stable. “She doesn’t even wait for me,” says her mother, Maite Brown. For most 6-year-olds, such exuberance spills out daily. In Sarah’s case, it’s a miracle.

Diagnosed with mild to moderate autism, Sarah spoke little as a toddler and showed next to no emotion. Then three years ago, Brown enrolled her in classes at SpiritHorse, which provides free therapeutic horseback riding services to more than 450 children and adults in North Texas.

“When Sarah said, ‘Walk on’ for the first time to her horse, that made us all so happy!” Brown recalls. “Because of SpiritHorse, my daughter has grown more confident in her abilities to accomplish tasks, and her vocabulary has grown, too.”

She adds, “The horses are so transforming for all the children. I’m so glad they’re there!”

Private contributions and public grants—such as three totaling \$25,925 given by the **COSERV CHARITABLE FOUNDATION**—enable kids like Sarah to learn, have fun and experience miracles at SpiritHorse. CoServ, a Corinth-based cooperative, “is an exemplary organization,” says SpiritHorse program founder Charles Fletcher. “They set an example to all corporations in giving back to the communities they serve.”

“People helping people—that’s been the cooperative way from the start,” says Ray Beavers, board chairman of Texas Electric Cooperatives and CEO/general manager of **UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES** in Cleburne. Thanks to the first electric co-ops, power lines finally reached rural areas in the 1930s, dramatically improving lives. Today, 64 Texas electric co-ops—ranging in size from 3,400 meters to more than 218,000 meters—do much more than provide at-cost electricity to members. “As integral members of their communities, co-ops and their employees reach out to others and make a difference in countless ways,” Beavers says.

There’s no way to cover all the ways electric cooperatives are involved in their local communities. But the following stories show how co-ops touch the lives of the people they serve.

### **SAVING LIVES, STOPPING CRIMES**

CO-OP EMPLOYEES BECOME THE EYES AND EARS OF THEIR COMMUNITY. Linemen who travel highways and back roads to reach work sites often are the first to render aid at accident scenes and assist stranded motorists. Familiar with their service areas, they’re quick to sense when something’s not right at a remote house. For instance, in March 2008, an alert equipment operator with **PEDERNALES ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**—part of the Rural Crime Watch Program—helped authorities identify suspects who were later charged with robbing an elderly man in his Buda home. The co-op employee had noticed three young men walking toward the house and notified authorities.

That same month, volunteer firefighters and linemen with **DEEP EAST TEXAS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** used a co-op bucket truck to safely lift a couple from atop their car, which had been swept off the road by raging floodwaters. “I thank God they were there and that they came to our rescue,” says Charles Sharpton of San Augustine.

In early January 2008, a 3-year-old boy wandered away from his yard in Collingsworth County. Two linemen with **GREENBELT ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** joined the search and

found the child, surrounded by his three protective dogs, in a pasture a quarter of a mile away from his home. “Co-op employees carry keys, so we were able to open a gate and get to the area,” says Sheriff Joe Stewart.

### **UP WITH LOCAL ECONOMIES**

OFTEN AMONG THE LARGEST EMPLOYERS IN THEIR COMMUNITY, co-ops inject millions of dollars into local economies through their payrolls. Many, though, don’t stop there. For example, **COSERV** and **PEDERNALES ELECTRIC** assist nonprofit and governmental groups with grant-writing services. CoServ also staffs a dedicated “business line” to make it easy for potential new employers and developers to request electric services. Such special services are frequently a factor in attracting industry.

To this day, cotton producers around El Campo still save on freight costs, thanks to **WHARTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**. In 1992, the Coastal Plains AgriBusiness Incubator, founded by the electric co-op, loaned \$100,000 to the Farmers Cooperative of El Campo so members could upgrade an existing cotton warehouse they’d bought. Having their own meant they didn’t have to ship cotton to Corpus Christi for temporary storage before final shipment to Houston. “It was great when they offered to help us,” says Jim Roppolo, general manager of the farmers’ co-op.

### **YOUTH MATTERS**

TEXAS ELECTRIC CO-OPS ENTHUSIASTICALLY SUPPORT PROGRAMS that promote and educate youths of all ages. Most notably, co-ops collectively give thousands of dollars worth of scholarships every year to high school seniors and college students.

Since 1965, young Texans have gotten firsthand looks at the nation’s capital, thanks to the annual Government-in-



Paul Phillips, Wharton County Electric Cooperative member services manager, and Theresa Strack, cotton warehouse manager at Farmers Cooperative in El Campo, visit at the warehouse. An agribusiness incubator founded by the electric cooperative loaned Farmers Co-op \$100,000 for warehouse improvements.



Children get up close to a calf under the supervision of David Lehmann, president of the board of directors of Fayette Electric Cooperative and chair of the Ag in the Classroom program.

Action Youth Tour. Sponsored by their co-ops, students spend a week in Washington, D.C., visiting historical and governmental sites. For many, the visit leaves a lasting impact.

“The trip exposed me to Congress and what all they do,” recalls Bill Sarpalius, a 1968 Youth Tour participant hosted by **DEAF SMITH ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**. “It was a very patriotic and moving trip for me.” Sarpalius went on to become a Texas state senator and U.S. congressman. Today, he owns a legislative consulting firm in Washington, D.C.

**COMANCHE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** is one of dozens of Texas co-ops that participate in the Shepperd System of Service program, targeted at high school students. The one-day forums teach leadership, ethics, problem solving, community involvement and other skills. “The courses help our students learn how to plan and follow through,” says Ronnie Clifton, a teacher at Comanche High School. “It gives them an awareness of what it takes to be a good leader, which we need more of.”

In East Texas, nine electric co-ops (**BOWIE-CASS, CHEROKEE COUNTY, DEEP EAST TEXAS, HOUSTON COUNTY, JASPER-NEWTON, PANOLA-HARRISON, RUSK COUNTY, UPSHUR-RURAL** and **WOOD COUNTY**) have sponsored their own high school program since 1988. Held at Lon Morris College in Jacksonville, the weeklong East Texas Rural Electric Youth Seminar hosts 125 sophomores and juniors who participate in leadership workshops and compete for scholarships.

Other co-ops reach out to kids in their own ways. Every year at Livingston High School, a line technician with **SAM HOUSTON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** helps a physics teacher test Galileo’s gravity experiment from 60 feet high in a bucket truck. Students watch while the teacher and the lineman drop objects—such as baseballs, stuffed animals and modeling clay—to study what hits the ground first. “It gives us the

opportunity to do something we’d never be able to do ourselves,” says teacher Paul McLendon. “Without their bucket truck, we’d just have to talk about it.”

Every year, fourth-graders in Fayette County learn how seeds germinate, where milk comes from, and other farming basics when they attend Ag in the Classroom, put on by the Fayette County Farm Bureau. For more than a decade, David Lehmann, board president with **FAYETTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**, has spearheaded the project. The co-op also contributes funds and small prizes, and the students get hands-on experience with animals such as armadillos and longhorns, thank to volunteer Ralph Fisher of Ralph Fisher’s Photo Animals.

## TIME OUT FOR CIVICS

OUTSIDE THEIR JOBS, CO-OP EMPLOYEES WORK JUST AS HARD IN their communities. They volunteer as Sunday school teachers, Little League coaches, student mentors and firefighters. Many serve on boards that direct school districts, chambers of commerce, economic development agencies, child advocacy centers and food banks.

Take, for example, **HILCO ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**. At this single cooperative, Matt Fehnel, director of information services and technology, leads the Itasca City Council as mayor. Bob Wilson, director of special services, is a board member with the city’s chamber of commerce. Both Fehnel and Wilson, along with HILCO General Manager Debra Cole, serve on the Itasca Board of Revitalization, which coordinates citywide cleanups and recruits new businesses.

What’s more, HILCO’s Assistant General Manager Lea Sanders serves as president of the Hillsboro Lions Club. Among its many charitable projects last fall, the club donated six wheelchairs to the Hillsboro school district. “I’ve been very blessed in my life, and I truly believe in the philosophy of ‘pay it forward,’” Sanders says simply.

“Multiply this sense of service by 64 Texas electric cooperatives, and one gets an idea of the energy cooperative employees pour into their communities,” says Darren Schauer, TEC board vice chair and general manager/CEO of **GUADALUPE VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**.

## REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

IT’S IMPOSSIBLE TO LIST THE HUNDREDS OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS supported by Texas co-ops. Every year, employee contributions fund such entities as libraries, fire departments, chambers of commerce, senior citizens and youth groups and emergency medical services. After hours, many co-ops participate in Relay for Life, a major fundraiser for the American Cancer Society. They also sponsor blood drives, holiday toy drives and coat collections.

Some co-ops and their members give through Operation Round Up®, a tax-deductible program that rounds up electric bills to the nearest dollar and donates the money to local charities. For example, the Brazos Valley Food Bank in Bryan received \$12,000 from **MID-SOUTH SYNERGY**. The Operation Round Up gift largely supported the agency’s Backpack program, which discreetly returns backpacks (all refilled with healthy foods) to 325 hungry kids every Friday.

“Many of our children lack adequate nutrition, and the only actual meal they receive is the one they get at school,” says Druessa Collins, dropout prevention specialist with the



Navasota school district. “This program helps wedge the gap during that time away from school on the weekend.”

Last summer, needy folks in Seguin, Gonzales and La Vernia received brand-new clothing, compliments of **GUADALUPE VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** (GVEC). Local ministerial alliances coordinated the distributions, aided by GVEC employees and community volunteers. In all, nearly 2,500 people received slacks, jeans and shirts as well as toiletries and shoes. Two events also included free lunches; the other featured cookies, pastries and bottled water.

In June 2007, thieves in Frisco made off with a trailer loaded with camping gear. At first, that meant no summer camp for more than 60 Boy Scouts. That is, until the **COSERV CHARITABLE FOUNDATION** issued an emergency grant of \$8,000 to Troop 216.

“The Scouts had worked very hard for months, earning the money to purchase the trailer and equipment,” recalls Joe Koester, the troop’s committee chairman. “In one afternoon, everything was gone. But CoServ helped us out tremendously, and we were able to replace the trailer and most of the equipment.”

### **UNIQUE AND SPECIAL**

AT A LOCAL LIBRARY, SOMEONE WANTS AN EVENT BANNER stretched across a busy street. Across town, VFW members need help putting up a new flagpole, and parents with the Little League have new lights ready to be installed at their field. No problem. Texas electric co-ops gladly make time for local “to-do” lists.

Some efforts, however, go beyond the call of duty. For instance, a lineman with **HOUSTON COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** borrowed a bucket truck one Saturday and volunteered his time to help a congregation power wash its

church steeple.

Last August in northeast Texas, crews with **LAMAR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE** erected an artificial eagle’s nest on the Graff Ranch in Red River County. First, they set two utility poles and firmly attached a wooden cross arm between them. Then they lifted the 5-foot-wide nest—actually a metal basket intertwined with tree branches—onto the board.

“We couldn’t have accomplished it without them because we don’t have that kind of equipment,” says ranch manager Jeff Pennington.

### **BEYOND CO-OP LINES ...**

WHEN NEEDED, CO-OPS HELP FELLOW CO-OPS, NO MATTER THE distance. The recovery efforts that follow a hurricane best illustrate a long-held co-op principle, “Cooperation among cooperatives.” Before a storm even makes landfall, many Texas electric co-ops stand ready to deploy crews and equipment to hard-hit areas as quickly as they can. After Hurricane Katrina devastated Louisiana in 2005, personnel from Texas co-ops slept in tents on-site as they worked around the clock to restore power.

Reaching far beyond state lines, one co-op has sent volunteers overseas. Two foremen with **WOOD COUNTY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**—a participant in the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s International Programs—last August visited an electric co-op in the Philippines, where they delivered donated equipment, inspected fleet vehicles and helped plan for future electrification projects.

“People helping people—that will always be the cooperative way,” Beavers says.

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*Sheryl Smith-Rodgers, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative, is a frequent contributor to Texas Co-op Power.*

**Matt Fehnel, mayor of Itasca and director of information services and technology for HILCO Electric Cooperative, stands in front of the 1890s house he and the City Council saved from demolition.**



# Passive exercise can help...

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|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
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  - one for relaxation
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- This gentle swinging motion cycles up through the whole body, creating an exercise movement without stress or impact on the joints.

*Don't be fooled by cheap imitations*



# What people are saying about the Exerciser 2000 Elite™

I have had pain in both of my knees since I had them replaced in 2000, 6 months apart. My husband purchased one of your Exerciser 2000 Elite™ machines. I use it when I first get up in the morning and the last thing at night before I go to bed. I put two pillows under my knees for support and use the lowest speed for a few minutes. After a couple of days I worked up to a full 16 minute session. What a blessing! I have no pain, can walk better, keep my balance better and am so grateful, at 77, to lead a normal life again. I thank you so much. —Gwen S.

I want to tell you and everyone how much I like the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. I had such lower back pain that I could not stand it. I saw your ad in the American Legion magazine two years ago. At that time, I thought it wouldn't help. But, I ordered one anyway. Up to the time I received the Exerciser 2000 Elite™, I still had doubts if it would work. I was wrong. I have used it for four months now. Now I have very little back pain, am more regular, and I sleep much better thanks to the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. I would not ever part with it. It is the greatest thing I ever bought. —Clifford C.

I had been spending my days just waiting when I saw your ad in Guideposts for the Exerciser 2000 Elite™. I had edema of my left foot and leg, two bad falls and a fear of falling which made me inactive. I'm 97 years old. Could it really help me? My daughter encouraged me to try it. I did. It's working! I feel alive again and have a new zest for life, thanks to you. —Grace R. P.S. My daughter loves it too!

This is just a note to thank you for the rebate check. I am more grateful to you than ever – and I was already grateful because I am getting so much good out of my Exerciser 2000 Elite™, far more than I expected. I am 76 years old, heavy, stiff with arthritis and a leukemic for the past nine years. Using your machine twice a day has made me feel ten years younger. I am far less stiff and my thinking is clearer. I also have a great deal more energy. When you say that your company is in the business of “helping people feel better”, it is no fib! —Kate B.

Little did I know when I ordered the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ that it would prove valuable to my wife of 62 years. I got it for the stiffness in my legs and it works perfectly to get me loosened up after playing tennis in the morning. When I come home I immediately get on the Exerciser 2000 Elite™ for ten minutes and I feel great! My wife suffers from restless leg syndrome at night. Instead of walking the floor for a long period of time, she just gets on the Exerciser for ten minutes and the syndrome subsides. After wrestling with restless legs for a long time she is all smiles in the morning. Happy days are here again! Just thought you would like to know. —Dick P.



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A Rangerette lieutenant leads her sisters in a kneeling 'V' formation.

# SWEETHEARTS *of the* GRIDIRON

BY CLAY COPPEDGE    PHOTOS BY O. RUFUS LOVETT

**B**EFORE KILGORE HAD GUSSIE NELL Davis and her Rangerettes, the small East Texas town had Daisy Bradford No. 3, the famous oil well that opened up the legendary East Texas oil field in 1930.

The boom didn't last long, however. The wider world might not have ever heard of Kilgore again except for the fact that Davis showed up in Kilgore about the same time that the oil boom played itself out. Kilgore College President B.E. Masters hired her to form an on-campus organization that

would bring more women to the college while at the same time keeping the men in their seats at halftime of football games, instead of sneaking off to take a nip under the bleachers. By forming the first group of Kilgore Rangerettes (named to coincide with the football team's Ranger mascot), Davis created the world's first women's dance-drill team and also managed to strike a lasting blow for Saturday sobriety in East Texas.

Since their debut at that first halftime show on September 12, 1940, the

Kilgore Rangerettes have performed at halftime of dozens of college football bowl games and at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. They have toured Venezuela, Romania and France and performed in Hong Kong, Singapore and Dublin. They were at the presidential inaugurations of Dwight Eisenhower and George W. Bush and have graced dozens of magazine covers. The Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston spotlighted the Rangerettes as a "living art form" in 1977. Pro Football Hall of Fame member and sportscaster



Red Grange dubbed them “sweethearts of the nation’s gridirons.”

**M**OST RECENTLY, THE RANGERETTES are the subject of a book of photographs from the University of Texas Press titled simply *Kilgore Rangerettes*. The photographs are by O. Rufus Lovett, a fine arts photographer who has taught at Kilgore College for more than 30 years. He began photographing the ’Rettes in 1989, eventually compiling this collection to capture the unique artistry of the group, along with the small-town life lived by the 65 or so mostly teenage girls who make up the team each year at the two-year community college.

What comes through in these photographs is that the Rangerettes have changed little, if at all, in the past 69 years. They still have the same costume: a blouse, arm gauntlets, belt and a short circular skirt done up in red, white and blue along with white, Western-style hats and white boots. They still perform their trademark

“high kick” where they raise a leg high enough to touch the brim of their hats. Photographer Annie Leibovitz, who features the Rangerettes in her book *Women*, said later that after the team had performed the kick, the drill team captain told the Rangerettes to “wipe the lipstick off your legs.”

We can be sure that Gussie Nell Davis—“Miss Davis” to generations of Rangerettes and anybody else who knew her—probably gave the same instructions during her 39 years as the group’s director. She was a no-nonsense kind of woman, as demanding in her own way as the saltiest football coach. “By the time I was through with (my girls), they were scared to death to act like heathens,” she once said.

Just as college football programs produce professional athletes, the program at Kilgore College has produced some Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders. Alice Lon, known to a generation of television viewers as the Champagne Lady on “The Lawrence Welk Show,” was a Rangerette. But turning out

celebrities was never Miss Davis’ goal.

“By the time a girl leaves here after two years of long bus rides, hard work and performances, she’s usually got show business out of her system,” she told *Sports Illustrated* in 1974. “She’s ready to settle down. She’s dependable, because anybody who’s not dependable will not be in our line. She has good habits. She knows she can be courteous and a lady and still be herself. She has what some people call old-fashioned values. But she’s not worried about who she is.”

Davis enrolled in what is now Texas Woman’s University with thoughts of becoming a concert pianist but changed her major to physical education, graduating in 1927. At Greenville High School in 1928, she drew on her combined love of music, dance and athletics to create the “Flaming Flashes,” the first “dance and twirl” group. The Flaming Flashes used wooden batons from a local furniture maker along with various props, drums and bugles to create dances and marches. The Flaming Flashes were

Usually it’s the horses that do the high jumps, but here, a toy horse stands by as two drill team members practice their vaults in 1989.





The Rangerettes are best known for their high kick, which they perform here on a cold day in 1989 outside Macy's Department Store in New York City.

modeled after the first pep squads, which featured girls in abbreviated military attire and the occasional baton twirler.

**I**N KILGORE, MISS DAVIS PUT TOGETHER something else altogether. The uniforms set them apart from the old pep squads, and the high kick caught everybody's eye. This was something different, and people took notice. The Rangerettes kicked off a drill team phenomenon that has seen tens of thousands of high school and college students join drill teams across the state and nationally.

That includes the Apache Belles, who hail from Tyler Junior College, also in East Texas, and who have developed a rivalry with the Rangerettes that is the drill team equivalent of the University of Texas and Texas A&M University football teams' rivalry. You can start a lively discussion in either East Texas town by saying that one drill team is better than the other.

As might be expected with a group that has changed hardly at all in seven

decades, there has been some criticism. A 1971 documentary film by Elliott Erwitt titled "Beauty Knows No Pain" (from the Rangerettes' motto) gained wide distribution, including a 1973 broadcast on the CBS news program "60 Minutes." Women's rights advocates were quick to criticize Miss Davis and the Rangerettes as a troupe of sexist, mindless "Barbie dolls" whose routines were entirely inappropriate for a college curriculum.

Miss Davis would have none of it. She countered that the Rangerettes were confident, disciplined, poised and athletic and drew the kind of attention usually reserved for male athletes. Over time, the criticism has softened. Leibovitz's book was meant as a collection of photographs featuring strong women, and she clearly thought that any woman who can touch the brim of her hat with her boot has to have some kind of physical strength (not to mention some serious flexibility) going for her. For a lot of us, the high kick the Rangerettes perform is akin in diffi-

culty to slam dunking a basketball; both are things that most of us will never be able to do.

Erwitt, in the foreword to Lovett's *Kilgore Rangerettes*, makes no mention of any social issues that might or might not be taken from his film. His loyalties are clearly with the unique subculture that is the Rangerettes.

"I suspect that modernity or fashion has not now changed, nor will it ever change, the way of life of the Rangerettes," he writes. "Some Rangerette graduates have had daughters, and perhaps by now even granddaughters and great-granddaughters follow in their high-stepping footsteps. The tradition will continue. When a tradition is deeply rooted and special, it endures, and no one dares mess with it."

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Kilgore Rangerettes *can be ordered from University of Texas Press through [www.utexas.edu/utpress](http://www.utexas.edu/utpress) or purchased at many bookstores in Texas.*

*Clay Coppedge frequently writes his- tory pieces for Texas Co-op Power.*



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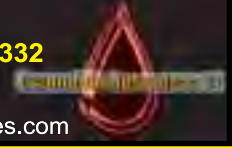
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TEXAS' LARGEST RURAL LENDER





# Providing You the Power To Be Informed



BY MARK ROSE  
Bluebonnet General Manager/CEO

## Second Article in a Series

The vast majority of electricity in the United States is generated at power plants that use a traditional fossil fuels, such as coal or natural gas, or by nuclear power. The remaining electricity is generated by hydro power or renewable resources such as wind or solar energy, which have been used to provide power for generations.

Coal, natural gas and nuclear power plants use essentially the same processes as their early models, but technological improvements have made newer models more efficient, cleaner-burning and safer.

Solar energy is now harnessed by high-tech photovoltaic cells integrated into building materials such as shingles, sky lights and even paint. The venerable windmills that dotted the American countryside for centuries have been replaced by enormous wind turbines with three-blade, variable-pitch rotors that can each generate enough electricity to power hundreds of homes.

The way in which electricity is delivered has changed very little in Bluebonnet's 70 years. However, the way that utilities generally, and Bluebonnet specifically, manage their electric delivery systems has significantly improved.

After being generated, electricity is sent through transmission lines and along distribution lines to your homes, schools, businesses and churches. Bluebonnet serves nearly 80,000 meters over more than 11,000 miles of distribution lines, all managed through one of the most sophisticated, technologically capable control centers of any utility in Texas.

Six years ago, we made a commitment to upgrade every aspect of Bluebonnet's electric delivery system. We started with new control center technology and SAP business software that would enable us to fully integrate a host of capabilities, improving our system's reliability, enabling us to read meters automatically, reducing the duration of power outages, and cutting the time it takes to build new power lines.

Today, all our meters are read automatically and more importantly, have full two-way communication between our control center and the meter at your home, farm or business.

So, with a the click of a mouse and a few key-strokes on a computer the system operators in our

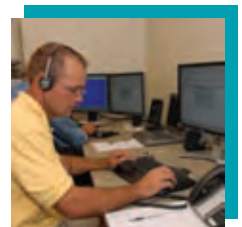
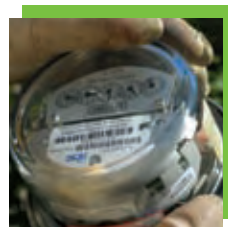
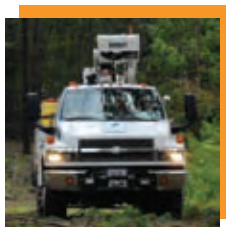
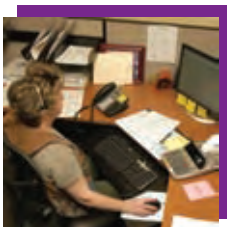
control center can communicate with any meter on our system to help determine the location of an outage; locate our service vehicles, know who is on that crew, what equipment they have, and the status of their current job; and efficiently dispatch the crew that is best equipped to restore power for any given outage. Where we once had to call crews on the radio and have them drive the line, literally with flashlights, we now know specifically which meters are without power.

Those are just a few of the examples of how information and technology has changed and improved how we manage Bluebonnet's electric delivery system. But the changes and improvements in our industry have just begun. The technological improvements just over the horizon will increase the amount of information available and push it from the meter into our members' homes and businesses.

Believe it or not, very few utilities in Texas have full two-way communication with their meters and a full integration of meter and business information. Our focus now is on using this technology to further improve our service and to bring the technological revolution into your home. While technology has vastly improved from your meter back to the power plant, very little has changed from the meter to inside your home or business.

Think of it this way, we can check our bank balances online and see exactly who we called, or who called our cell phones, and when and how long we talked to them. But our utility bills are still one of the biggest surprises we get each month.

Our industry can do better. We should all strive to provide more timely and accurate information. Bluebonnet is on that trail. We are looking at the technology that would provide you that information. In the coming months we will talk more about where our industry is headed, the direction it should go, and what role we should play.





Ervin B. "Ben" Flencher - Vice Chairman

# MEET YOUR BOARD

By Jocelyn Sexton

## Enhancing Economic Development

Flencher carefully watches the region's financial climate and economic outlook, in part because of his role at the bank and also his position as the president of the Burleson County Industrial Foundation, which works to enhance and expand the local economy. Flencher says despite the instability in the global economy and national banking industry, Texas continues to thrive, and people want to live in this region because of the climate and opportunities for jobs.

Overall, Flencher enjoys working with organizations involved in solid business practices and substantial growth, which is why he began serving as a cooperative director in 1987.

"Bluebonnet has always had a great reputation of friendly people, dependable service and fair rates, and the more I learned about the co-op, the more I wanted to know," Flencher said. "An added benefit was working with quality people and learning from Bluebonnet about how to better run our banking business."

Professionally, Flencher knows you must seek growth with due diligence.

"There are still opportunities for community banks, but we have to remain friendly, keep up with technology and grow in the right way for our staff and communities," he said. "The same challenges exist for the co-op."

## Building on Experience

Developments around Highway 130 and in pockets of changing, urban demographics force the co-op to examine growth and its impact on all members.

"We have to set goals and stay true to our core values, but if you're not diverse enough and

don't offer the right kinds of technology, you can't serve all ends of the spectrum," Flencher said. "The two extremes must meet in the middle. You can't be everything to everybody, but you must provide service to meet your consumers' and members' wants."

Having watched the parallel successes of the bank and the co-op, Flencher has benefitted from observing past and current managers run the organizations.

"You meet good people in co-ops," he said. "We're making a difference, and in both businesses, we're bringing in industries to benefit residential customers. We have some unique and exciting opportunities ahead."

Bluebonnet Vice Chairman Ben Flencher belongs to a community banking legacy initiated by his father, who worked at Somerville's Citizens State Bank for 60 years. Ervin Flencher, Sr. began his financial career as a janitor and bought stock in the company.

"When my dad started learning the ropes as a loan officer, the bank's senior loan officer would listen in on his conversations with clients and spit in a spittoon as a sign that he should go ahead and loan the money," Flencher said.

Eventually, Ervin rose to president and CEO. His name-sake, Ben, who would go to the bank every day after school as a child to roll coins and file checks, officially began working for the bank in 8th grade.

## Creating Relationships

"All I ever knew was banking," Flencher said. "I guess there never really was any doubt that this is what I was going to do."

Flencher continued to work at the bank through college. He married his high school sweetheart 35 years ago, and by the time he graduated from Texas A&M University in 1974, with a degree in finance, the small bank had a balance sheet of \$7 million. He became bank president in 1981, and increased the business's footprint in the right areas.

"We had a good run in part because we're a relationship bank, and we don't try to be something we're not," Flencher said. "We cater to our customers and try to meet all their banking needs. When we grow, we try to make it a better place for the local community."

Through the bank, Flencher enjoys giving back to the community almost as much as he takes pleasure in spoiling his granddaughters or spending time hunting, fishing and all things sports related. And the family banking tradition continues with Flencher's sister and two of his four sons, who work as a manager and a senior loan officer.

The bank now has nearly \$270 million in assets and operates six branches in small, local communities.





# myCOOPERATIVE

[www.bluebonnetelectric.coop](http://www.bluebonnetelectric.coop)

By Mycha Harris

In October, the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Web site took on a fresh new look. Along with the style redesign came modifications to the Web site, which included a more user-friendly application.

The first step taken by Bluebonnet's Web Redesign Committee was to select a third-party contractor to help create the new look and feel of the Web site. With the contractor's help, the committee was able to choose useful elements from the current site and import them into the new site; also streamlining and cutting outdated content. The new design allows members easier access to information on their own instead of having to call Bluebonnet.

Several options to look forward to in coming months are "add-on" features that were specifically designed to educate members and their families and help them save energy and money. Additional features include modules, such as Kid's Corner, and the Home Energy Suite, to name just two.

Kid's Corner is an important addition to the Bluebonnet Web site

because it is imperative to teach future generations the importance of conserving energy and being safe around electricity, as well as learning that there are new ways of generating electricity that could very well be among the tasks they will meet in their lifetimes. It is never too early to put a child's mind to work on his future.

Home Energy Suite offers an energy bill calculator, which allows members to estimate their yearly electric bill. Interactive House, another facet of the Home Energy Suite helps identify energy-hogging appliances or electronics and can help members compare different models to get the best energy and money savings when shopping for new appliances. Interactive House also offers safety tips and information to help members keep their homes and families safe.

Each month, Bluebonnet is provided with a detailed report that allows evaluation of the Web site to determine which portions of the site members are utilizing, and which areas may still need improvement. This tool will help Bluebonnet

achieve the goals of educating and informing members and providing them with member service options at their fingertips, 24/7, when it is most convenient for them.

Some of the aesthetic changes to the Web site are also new features that make the site more user friendly. Members have easier access to information because there are more choices right on the home page. There are now Residential and Commercial sections linked to questions and options specific to each type of service. Questions are now easily researched with the help of a search engine, also located on the home page. While the look of the Web site has changed, members' billing information is still being handled in the same safe and confidential manner.

The majority of the Bluebonnet Web site redesign is complete, however, the cooperative will continue to evaluate the content of the Web site, make updates, and work to add even more tools to allow easier and more efficient access and use for Bluebonnet members and the community.



# All About Co-Ops: It's All About You

Cooperatives come in many shapes and sizes, but always put people first.

By Kristen Card, I&O Communications

The next time you flip on a light switch, think of Benjamin Franklin—not because of his investigations into electricity, but because without Franklin, Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative might not exist as it does today. Not only did innovator Franklin invent the first lightning rod through his well-known kite-flying-in-an-electrical-storm experiment, but he also organized the first successful co-op in the United States: the Philadelphia Contributionship for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire, our country's oldest continuing cooperative.

A cooperative, by definition, is a private, locally operated business organization—owned by the people who use its products, services or supplies, and governed by a board of directors democratically elected by its member-consumers.

“What makes electric cooperatives so good at what they do is their focus. Co-ops work only for the benefit of their consumers, who also happen to be their owners,” said Mike Williams, Texas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. President and Chief Executive Officer. “Unlike investor-owned utilities, co-ops are not distracted by what Wall Street thinks, because their only concern is Main Street.

“A co-op is based on public input. The board and membership steer the organization in the direction they want it to go. I think it's one of the best ways to run a utility.”

“That means that cooperatives can concentrate on reliable service and the best price instead of making a profit for stockholders,” continued Williams. “And the icing on the cake is that if a co-op does happen to make a profit, then they typically just give it back to the folks who used the service and own the system. It's

a great business model that always puts the customer first.” All cooperatives share their overall purpose and their principles. All are created to meet the specific objectives of their members and are structured to adapt to their members' changing needs. This is the big difference between cooperatives and other companies: co-ops have consumers, not capital, at their core.



**Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is overseen by a ten-member board of directors, while a general manager/CEO leads the cooperative's day-to-day operations.**

“The main advantage is the co-op's public ownership,” says Burtleson County Judge Mike Sutherland. Bluebonnet has been Sutherland's electric provider for about the past 20 years at the judge's lake house at Lake Woodrow. But his primary residence is in Caldwell, where the city-owned utility buys its power from Entergy.

“A co-op is based on public input,” Sutherland says. “The board and membership steer the organization in the direction they want it to go. I think it's one of the best ways to run a utility.”



Indeed, all cooperatives agree to follow seven guiding principles:

- **Voluntary and open membership** – Co-ops are voluntary organizations, open to all who are able to use their services and willing to accept membership responsibilities, without discrimination;
- **Democratic member control** – Co-ops are democratic organizations, controlled by members who elect the organization's leadership and vote to decide key issues;
- **Members' economic participation** – Co-op members contribute equitably to and democratically control the organization's capital;
- **Autonomy and independence** – Co-ops are autonomous organizations controlled by members;
- **Education, training and information** – Co-ops educate and train members, elected leadership, managers and employees, as well as inform the general public, in order to promote the organization's development;
- **Cooperation among cooperatives** – Co-ops work together through local, state, national, regional and international structure; and
- **Concern for community** – Co-ops work to help improve the quality of life for their communities.

Cooperatives operate in a wide range of industries—from business cooperatives to arts and crafts co-ops, from child-care and preschool co-ops to food or housing cooperatives. Some types of co-ops common to Central Texas include:

**Agricultural cooperatives** – Agricultural supply co-ops, like the Burleson County Co-op Store and those making up the Producers Cooperative Association in Bryan, buy large-scale products such as seed, feed and fertilizers, in order to save members money.

**Credit unions** – Credit unions and other financial cooperatives, such as Farm Credit Bank of Texas, Austin Telco Federal Credit Union and Greater Texas Federal Credit Union, encourage savings and offer loans to members at the lowest possible cost.

**Utility cooperatives** – Utility co-ops, like Bluebonnet and the Central Texas Telephone Cooperative, provide utility services such as electricity, telephone, water or cable television with member costs and benefits as the top priority.

Three types of electric utilities exist within the power industry: investor-owned utilities (IOUs), or private power companies; city-owned or municipally owned utilities (MOUs), or public power companies; and electric cooperatives. The defining differences between the three lie in their ownership, their purpose for operation and their leadership. An IOU is owned privately by stockholders and operated for profit, and its board of directors is selected by the investor-owners. An MOU is owned by a city, operated as a not-for-profit public service for its residents, and is governed by city council or a special policy board. Electric co-ops are owned and operated as not-for-profit by their member-customers, who also elect their boards of directors.

Electric cooperatives have been around for more than 70 years, and today's co-ops are models of consumer-centered, cost-effective, stable businesses. Nationally, 930 electric cooperatives serve 34 million people—more than 10 percent of the U.S. population, employ almost 60,000 people, and contribute more than \$700 million a year in state and local taxes.

*Continued on page 22*



**At top:** Bluebonnet helps with the construction of a pier at Lake Somerville. Bluebonnet provides grants to groups such as the New Ulm VFD. The cooperative also supports educational programs such as the solar project at Manor ISD. Supporting the community is one of Bluebonnet's core Foundation Values, donating to groups such as the Brenham Little League reaches more than just the children.



*Continued from page 21*

Electric co-ops work to improve members' quality of life, first and foremost by providing stellar electric service. Organizations like Bluebonnet offer exceptional reliability, line repair and power restoration records, and continuously work to improve their service technology.

"The upgrades Bluebonnet has taken on, especially under [General Manager/CEO] Mark Rose, have greatly improved service without dramatically affecting cost," notes Judge Sutherland. "Bluebonnet can now pinpoint power issues literally within minutes, and they've strategically placed their people within the region, so that whenever there are issues, they're resolved quickly."

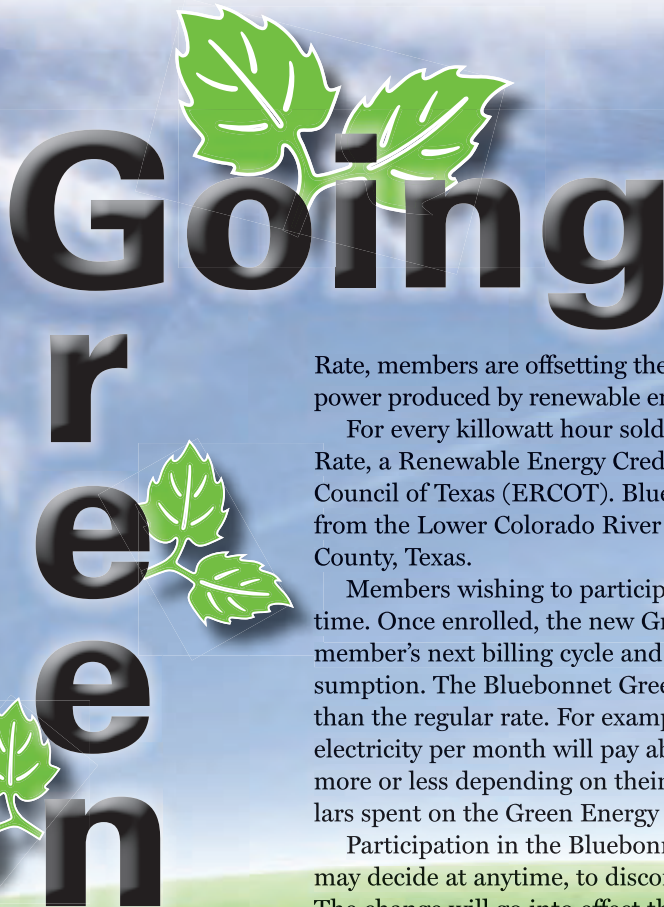
Because electric cooperatives are locally owned and operated, they're also deeply invested in their communities. Bluebonnet, for example, strongly supports local organizations like schools, sports teams and fire departments, funds scholarships for area students, and actively assists economic development endeavors.

"Bluebonnet has always been involved in helping us through its community development grants," notes Judge

Sutherland. "But now, they're helping us with a serious effort to develop around Lake Somerville, which is almost 50 years old and has just never really developed. Bluebonnet understands how we want to maintain the natural beauty of the lake, yet develop it to make it much more attractive, stimulating economic opportunities for all three counties—Burleson, Lee and Washington—bordering the lake."

Helping advance the Lake Somerville Economic Development Corporation is just one way Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is working to fulfill its responsibilities as a cooperative. By ensuring competitive rates, secure reliability, democratic control and active involvement in communities throughout its service area, Bluebonnet continues to place members at the heart of its business.

For more information about electric cooperatives, please visit the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association at [www.nreca.org](http://www.nreca.org), Texas Electric Cooperatives at [www.texas-ec.org](http://www.texas-ec.org), or Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative at [www.bluebonnetelectric.coop](http://www.bluebonnetelectric.coop).



# Going r e e n

**T**his past summer, Bluebonnet began offering members a Green Energy Rate. The Bluebonnet Green Energy Rate enables members agreeing to participate in the program, to demonstrate their commitment to using renewable energy through their own financial support. By enrolling in the Green Energy

Rate, members are offsetting the use of power produced by fossil fuel sources, replacing it with power produced by renewable energy sources.

For every kilowatt hour sold to Bluebonnet members participating in the Green Energy Rate, a Renewable Energy Credit (REC) is voluntarily retired through the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT). Bluebonnet earns RECs based on wind generation purchased from the Lower Colorado River Authority's (LCRA) Indian Mesa Wind Farm located in Pecos County, Texas.

Members wishing to participate in Bluebonnet's Green Energy Rate may sign up at any time. Once enrolled, the new Green Energy Rate will go into effect at the beginning of the member's next billing cycle and will be applied to the entire monthly kilowatt hour consumption. The Bluebonnet Green Energy Rate is a half-cent more per kilowatt hour (\$.005) than the regular rate. For example, a Bluebonnet member who uses 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity per month will pay about \$5 more for Green Energy. Each member's bill may be more or less depending on their energy usage. Members earn capital credits on the extra dollars spent on the Green Energy Rate.

Participation in the Bluebonnet Green Energy Rate is completely voluntary, and members may decide at anytime, to discontinue participation and return to their regular electric rate. The change will go into effect the date of the request. There are no activation or termination fees associated with the Green Energy Rate.

For more information or to sign up for the Bluebonnet Green Energy Rate, members may contact a Member Service Representative at any Bluebonnet Member Service Center, by phone at (800)842-7708, by email at [memberservices@bluebonnetelectric.coop](mailto:memberservices@bluebonnetelectric.coop), or online at [www.bluebonnetelectric.coop](http://www.bluebonnetelectric.coop).



# It's Valentine's... Are You Feeling Green?

Move over, red. **Green** is the new color of Valentine's Day.

Saving energy and the environment is newly romantic, and retailers are set to help you prove it this February 14. Stores are stocking up with earth-friendly gifts. Still, it's not about what you give, but how you celebrate, that can make your Valentine's Day energy efficient.

Here are some tips for an energy-conscious lovefest:

- ♥ Save on gasoline and reduce emissions by staying home and cooking a meal for your sweetie on Valentine's Day.
- ♥ To save electricity and time, prepare your romantic dinner in a Crock-Pot. A slow-cooked meal makes a warm and delicious Valentine's treat, and the smaller appliance uses less energy than an oven.
- ♥ Experiment with dishes you can cook in the microwave or toaster oven.
- ♥ If you opt to use the stovetop, choose pans to fit the burners, keep the lids on and turn the burners off shortly before the food is finished cooking.
- ♥ Dim the lights and eat by candlelight. A light that's dimmed by 75 percent will use about 20 percent less energy than one burning at full brightness. And it will last about four times longer.
- ♥ Give sustainable gifts, such as greeting cards printed on recycled paper or long-lasting potted plants rather than fresh-cut flowers. Also consider giving organic gifts.



## In 1939...

**D**uring the first four decades of the twentieth century, rural residents of central Texas suffered from not having electricity. Private electric companies saw no profit from supplying this sparsely populated region. In the midst of the Great Depression, however, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal brought hope. With federal aid, the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) built hydroelectric dams and created the Highland Lakes. Congressman Lyndon Johnson and others had a great passion for using LCRA's electricity to ease the burdens of rural residents in his district. He worked with LCRA, the Rural Electrification Administration, and local enthusiasts to create two electric cooperatives surrounding Austin. On August 2, 1939, Bluebonnet (then, Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative) received a state charter to provide electricity to residents east of Austin in Washington, Fayette, Austin, Lee, Bastrop, Travis, Williamson, Caldwell, Hayes, and Guadalupe counties. The incorporators were H.B. Armstrong (Travis Co.), Robert Bowers (Caldwell Co.), M.N. Ehlert (Washington Co.), D.F. Kauffman (Bastrop Co.), C.A. McEarchern (Travis Co.), C.C. Perry (Lee Co.), J.P. Rochelle (Caldwell Co.), W.C. Schwarze (Washington Co.), and August F. Spacek (Lee Co.).



## AREA EVENTS

**INDUSTRY KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS** Annual Fried Chicken Fundraiser, February 8, at the Fireman's Hall in Industry. Serving hand-breaded fried chicken, buttered noodles, with trimmings beginning at 11 am, with a free-will donation accepted for the meal. To-go plates available. There will be a cake/grocery walk, silent auction, live auction at 12:30 pm and raffle drawing after the auction.

**"LUCKY 7TH" ANNUAL CASINO NIGHT** held February 27, at the American Legion Hall in Giddings. Sponsored by Combined Community Action, Inc. and the Giddings Evening Lions Club. This event will raise money for programs, scholarships and children's camp. Doors open at 6 pm for a fish fry dinner, door prizes, gaming tables, silent auction and a grand prize drawing. Tickets are \$25 per person including the meal and drink. Must be 21 or older to purchase. Call (979)540-2980 for more information.

**KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS COUNCIL 6366** of Caldwell Homecoming Festival, March 1. We invite all to join us at the SPJST Hall on Highway 36 South, for our Annual Homecoming Festival. BBQ brisket dinners, \$7; live auction at 12:30 pm. Raffle, silent auction and games for the whole family.

**FISH FRY FRIDAYS.** Knights of Columbus Council 6366 of Caldwell, will be serving fried fish dinners on the five Fridays of Lent: March 6, 13, 20, 27, and April 3. It's drive-thru only, 4:30-6:30 pm at St. Mary's gym, 500 OSR. Watch for the sign on Highway 21 W at Harvey Street. Cost is \$7 per dinner, includes trimmings. Proceeds will benefit the scholarship fund.

**HEAD FOR THE HILLS BICYCLE RIDE,** in Chappell Hill. The Rotary Club of Washington County will be holding it's 5th annual bike ride on March 28. It will be a fully supported ride with refreshments, restrooms, traffic control and support vehicles. Routes and lots of hills for all riders, 26, 43 and 62 miles. Go to [www.wcotaryclub.org](http://www.wcotaryclub.org) to sign up online or print a mail-in form.

**LABAHIA ANTIQUE SHOW AND SALE.** March 28 through April 4, at 8 am at the LaBahia Hall, Burton. Hwy 237 (off 290). Free admission and parking.



### ENERGY TIP

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### BUILDING GOOD CITIZENS FOR TEXAS

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## Save the Date May 12th

Each year, the Bluebonnet Annual Meeting allows cooperative members to get to know other members, ask questions, offer comments and the opportunity to vote for the directors they believe will lead Bluebonnet in the right direction.

This year, the 2009 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 12, 2009, at the Sons of Hermann Hall in Giddings.

Those members unable to attend should be sure to complete and return an official proxy voting form. Proxy voting provides Bluebonnet members within the entire service area equal opportunity to participate and gives members who cannot be at the Annual Meeting, a way for their vote to be counted. With proxy voting, members can authorize either the Bluebonnet Proxy Committee or another person to cast a vote in their place.

During the month of March, proxy voting forms will be mailed to every member and will also be attached to the cover of the April issue of the *Texas Co-op Power* magazine. In addition, all Bluebonnet Member Service Centers will have a supply of the proxy voting forms for the convenience of our members.

Participate in the 2009 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting and get to know your electric cooperative.

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All Market Square ads should be sent to Bluebonnet at least two months in advance. Information can be emailed to: [magazine@bluebonnetelectric.coop](mailto:magazine@bluebonnetelectric.coop) or mailed to:

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c/o Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative  
P.O. Box 729, Bastrop, Texas 78602

**Area Events and ad information for the April 2009 issue are due by February 15.**

We reserve the right to refuse any ads due to space limitations or questionable content. Ads must be resubmitted each month. Please indicate "For Sale," "Free," or "Wanted."

### BLUEBONNET LOCAL PAGES STAFF

Editor / Barbara Turner

Editor / Will Holford

Graphic Designer / Holly Orsag

Photographer / Sarah Beal

Writer / Mycha Harris

# Silver Dollar Jim

BY GENE FOWLER

There's something about a silver dollar that makes it so much more appealing than the plain old folding green stuff. The chunky bucks shine with an aura of the Old West. Holding one in my hand, I always feel an urge to plunk it down on an antique bar and order up a shot of whiskey.

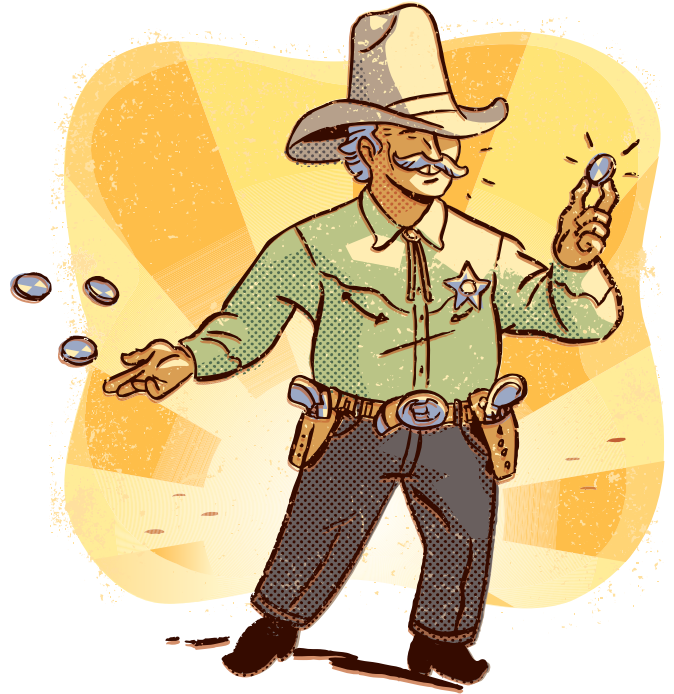
To James Marion "Silver Dollar Jim" West Jr. of Houston, the eight-bit coin was much more than mere lucre. It was a magic ticket, a powerful symbol of the land that bore his name. The heir to fortunes in ranching, timber and other resources greatly desired that his fellow Texans savor its romantic allure.

Custom pockets sewn into Silver Dollar's duds could hold as many as 80 silver dollars. Jim used them as tips and gifts of greeting wherever he went. When the spell was strongest, the millionaire would grab a handful, fling 'em into a crowd and watch folks scramble for the rolling dinero.

To the chagrin of Houston's less imaginative elite of the mid-20th century, Silver Dollar Jim liked to run around Texas "looking like a deputy sheriff out of an old western movie," as James Aswell described him in a 1953 *Collier's* profile. An Associated Press reporter marveled at West's monogrammed cowboy boots, gold-handled sidearms in jeweled holsters, ornate gold belt buckles and platinum collar points. Aswell rated Jim's headgear as "the 15-gallon Texas economy size." A treasured official Texas Rangers badge, rarely bestowed upon private citizens, adorned Jim's chest. As the badge was too small for silver dollars, Jim customized it with diamonds instead.

Guests at West's Figure 2 Ranch near Eagle Pass could belly up to the bar and play a slot machine rigged to pay off every time. At his Madison County ranch in East Texas, according to stories gathered by the late Texana specialist Frank X. Tolbert, Silver Dollar Jim often kept neighbors awake by blasting his country-western records all night long from a tower fitted with powerful loudspeakers. A portable sound system on a trailer allowed West to take his disc jockey act on the road, rolling through Madisonville and North Zulch at 4 a.m., serenading townsfolk with Hank Williams, Hank Thompson and Hank Snow. For towns deprived of the comforting sound of trains passing in the night, he played records of railroad sound effects.

Next to silver dollars and country music, the millionaire loved law enforcement. Though he resembled an Old West lawman, Silver Dollar Jim was definitely 1950s high tech. Wherever he was at any given moment—in his bedroom, office or garages sheltering his dozens of customized automobiles—special radio and telephone units kept him informed of the latest developments in Houston's crime scene. Detectives rode the all-night beat with Jim, monitoring the streets in plush Cadillacs equipped with .28-gauge



sawed-off shotguns, .30-.30 rifles, Tommy guns and state-of-the-art communications hardware.

With his reputation for passing the silver, Jim found himself constantly besieged with pleas for aid. One request that he rewarded came from an 8-year-old Irish boy. The lad wrote a letter asking for a cowboy outfit and addressed it to "Any Millionaire, Houston." The post office delivered the letter to Silver Dollar Jim. Believing that no one should suffer through life sans dude ranch duds, Jim shipped the boy a complete Western ensemble. A photo of the little buckaroo dressed for ridin' the range occupied an honored spot among the millionaire's mementos.

Sam Griswold also received the Silver Dollar treatment as a youngster. His parents were good friends with West's nurse and her husband. "I always thought he was kind of an honorary Texas Ranger," Griswold said. "Department of Public Safety troopers brought him to our house in Dallas four times, always late at night, and we kids would be roused from our sleep to receive his greetings, a case of Snickers, and four or five 19th-century silver dollars. We were impressed beyond words and frozen in place."

After Silver Dollar Jim died in 1957, Houstonians learned that he kept an ace in the hole. Before his primary residence in River Oaks was torn down, executors of his estate found some \$290,000, mostly in silver dollars with some stacks of \$2 bills mixed in, secreted in his cellar vaults. As *Time* magazine remarked, "Jim West was no man to let himself get caught in the embarrassing plight of having to hand out ordinary \$1 bills."

*A chapter on Silver Dollar Jim is included in Gene Fowler's Mavericks: A Gallery of Texas Characters (UT Press, 2008).*

# Baking Up a Breakfast

**BY KEVIN HARGIS** If any of you are like me, February—often cold and gray in Texas—seems like the longest, not the shortest, month. This is the time of year I like to curl up in my toasty bed for a couple of extra minutes of shut-eye.

One thing that can lure me from my flannel-sheeted cocoon on a gray, gloomy day is the smell of breakfast. I like making breakfast in the oven in the winter because it warms up not only the stomach, but the kitchen as well.

I'll have to admit to a certain weakness for pastries. One delicious recipe I found recently would be perfect served warm on a winter morning.

The recipe for Apple-Filled Turnovers comes from the *Culinary Institute of America Cookbook* (Lebhar-Friedman Books, 2008). The CIA, as it is known, is an organization devoted to raising the bar for home cooks and professionals alike.

The book is filled with recipes both basic and exotic from chefs across the country. It also includes loads of advice and photos illustrating essentials that everyone—from the most accomplished cook to a rank amateur—would find educational.

## APPLE-FILLED TURNOVERS

- 1½ pounds frozen puff pastry, thawed
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons cream or milk
- 1½ cups Apple Filling
- 1 cup Apricot Glaze

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Roll out dough into 12x16-inch rectangle. Dust dough and rolling pin with flour as needed to prevent dough from sticking. Cut dough into 12 4-inch squares. Place squares on prepared baking sheet and let chill in refrigerator until firm, about 10 minutes. Remove pan from refrigerator. Brush squares with wash made by whisking together egg and cream or milk. Place 2 tablespoons of Apple Filling in center of each and fold opposite corners together to form triangle. Press edges firmly together to seal. Chill turnovers 10 minutes before baking.

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Brush turnovers with egg wash. Cut slit in center of each turnover to vent steam. Bake until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Transfer to

cooling racks and brush with Apricot Glaze before they cool. Cool completely before serving.

## APPLE FILLING

- ¼ cup applejack or apple-flavored brandy
- ¼ cup apple juice
- 3 tablespoons canola oil, divided
- 4 cups Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and sliced
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons currants
- ¼ teaspoon orange zest
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon nutmeg

Combine applejack or brandy and apple juice in small bowl and set aside. Heat sauté pan over medium-high heat and add 1 tablespoon oil. Toss sliced apples with sugar. Add about a third of sugared apples and sauté until golden brown on both sides, about 4 minutes. Transfer apples to bowl. Add third of apple juice mixture to pan and stir to loosen sugar stuck in pan. Allow to simmer until slightly reduced and thickened, about 30 seconds. Pour over sautéed apples. Sauté remaining apples in two additional batches as above. When adding final batch of apple juice mixture to pan, stir in remaining ingredients. Add mixture to bowl and stir gently until currants are evenly distributed.

Put filling in bowl set in ice bath and cool, stirring occasionally. Once cooled, it can be kept in covered container in refrigerator for up to 5 days. Warm slightly before using.

## APRICOT GLAZE

- ¾ cup apricot jam
- ¾ cup water
- ¾ cup corn syrup
- ⅓ cup brandy

Combine all in saucepan and bring to boil over high heat, stirring until jam is completely melted. Strain through wire-mesh sieve into bowl. Allow to cool to room temperature before using. This can be kept up to 3 weeks in refrigerator. Warm slightly before using.

Serving size: 1 turnover. Per serving: 260 calories, 0.8 g protein, 6.2 g fat, 44.7 g carbohydrates, 0.8 g fiber, 40 mg sodium, trace cholesterol.







**JANIE FITZGERALD** *Victoria Electric Cooperative*

Prize-winning recipe: **Breakfast Pie**

In response to the call for Baked Breakfast dishes, we received many recipes for sweet treats. There were also some delicious and savory recipes. Our tasters universally liked everything, making the judging difficult. But this simple egg dish, with its hearty, spicy flavor, rose to the top.

## BREAKFAST PIE

- 1 pound pan sausage
- 1 can (10 ounces) tomatoes and green chilies
- 2 cups grated cheese, divided
- 4 eggs, beaten slightly
- 5 ounces evaporated milk
- 2 unbaked pie shells

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Brown sausage, add tomatoes and chilies. Mix in 1½ cups cheese and divide evenly into pie shells. Mix eggs and milk and pour evenly over sausage mixture; top with remaining cheese. Bake for 40-45 minutes until center of each pie is set. Makes 16 servings.

Serving size: 1 slice. Per serving: 265 calories, 12 g protein, 18.2 g fat, 9.5 g carbohydrates, 0.2 g fiber, 489 mg sodium, 94 mg cholesterol.

## CINNAMON BISCUITS

- 2 cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 6 tablespoons shortening
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons cinnamon, divided
- 1 cup powdered sugar

About 2 tablespoons milk

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Mix flour, baking powder, soda and salt. Cut in shortening. Add buttermilk and mix well. Sprinkle with half of cinnamon. Fold lightly and sprinkle with remaining cinnamon. Flatten dough to ½-inch thick. Cut to desired size with knife or biscuit cutter. Put in lightly greased baking pan and bake until lightly brown (about 10 minutes). Mix powdered sugar and milk together to glazing consistency and pour over hot biscuits. Serves 12.

Serving size: 1 biscuit. Per serving: 195 calories, 3.4 g protein, 7 g fat, 29 g carbohydrates, 1.2 g fiber, 448 mg sodium, 6 mg cholesterol.

**BERTHA CORLEY**

*Pedernales Electric Cooperative*

## CHERRY BREAKFAST STRATA

- 12 cups day-old Italian bread cubes (1½-inch cubes)
  - ½ teaspoon almond extract
  - 8 ounces cream cheese
  - ½ cup sugar, divided
  - ½ cup dried cherries
  - ½ cup chopped pecans
  - 4 eggs
  - 1½ cups half-and-half
  - 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Cherry Syrup**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put 8 cups of bread cubes in greased 13x9x2-inch baking dish. In mixing bowl, combine extract, cream cheese and ¼ cup sugar and beat until smooth. Stir in cherries and pecans. Spoon over bread. Top with remaining bread. In bowl, whisk eggs, half-and-half, cinnamon and remaining sugar. Pour over bread. Bake, uncovered, for 35-40 minutes or until browned. Let stand 5 minutes and top with warm Cherry Syrup before serving.

## CHERRY SYRUP

- 1 can (14½ ounces) sour cherries, undrained
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- ½ teaspoon almond extract

Combine all ingredients but extract in saucepan. Bring to boil, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in extract.

Serving size: 1 cup. Per serving: 792 calories, 19.5 g protein, 18.7 g fat, 134 g carbohydrates, 5.7 g fiber, 901 mg sodium, 102 mg cholesterol.

**HAZEL TURNER**

*San Bernard Electric Cooperative*

## 'COFFEE DOG' APRICOT-WHITE CHOCOLATE SCONES

- 3 rounded cups white bread flour
- ¾ cup sugar
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 stick margarine, chilled and diced
- 1 cup dried apricots, chopped
- ½ package (6 ounces) white chocolate chips
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup half-and-half or heavy cream

Mix flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in mixing bowl. Cut in margarine with pastry knife. Add apricots and chocolate chips. Break egg into bowl and add ½ cup of cream. Using spoon, mix by hand and gradually add cream until mixture resembles biscuit dough. Take care not to get it too wet (you might not use all of the cream). Knead dough into a ball in bowl. Transfer ball to a lightly floured surface, shape into smooth ball and flatten slightly. Cut into eight wedges. Place on nonstick cookie sheet, 1 to 2 inches apart, and bake at 300 degrees in convection oven (or 325 degrees in conventional oven) for about 20 minutes. Do not preheat oven. Cool on cookie sheet or wire rack.

Serving size: 1 scone. Per serving: 450 calories, 9 g protein, 11.2 g fat, 77.4 g carbohydrates, 2.2 g fiber, 447 mg sodium, 39 mg cholesterol.

**GUY AND KERRI ROUSH**

*Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative*

**Note:** The Roushes say these scones are a bestseller at their coffee shop, **Coffee Dog**, in Bastrop and are great warm out of the oven.

## RECIPE CONTEST

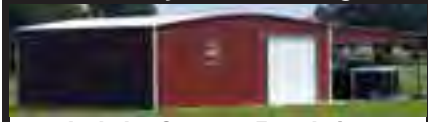
June's recipe contest topic is **Tomatoes**. The luscious summer fruits (or are they vegetables?) lend themselves to versatile uses: Bake 'em, slice 'em, sauce 'em. What's your favorite recipe? The deadline is February 10.

Send recipes to Home Cooking, 1122 Colorado, 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. You may also fax them to (512) 763-3408, e-mail them to [recipes@texas-ec.org](mailto:recipes@texas-ec.org), or submit online at [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com). Please include your name, address and phone number, as well as the name of your electric coop. The top winner will receive a copy of *60 Years of Home Cooking* and a Texas-shaped trivet. Runners-up will also receive a prize.

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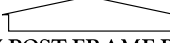


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# WARNING: IS YOUR MEMORY FADING?

## Breakthrough medical research reveals “forgotten moments” may be caused by “brain starvation”

You may be able to avoid long-term issues if you act before it's too late. Leading medical researchers reveal discovery that triggers body's own production of mental “superfuel” and may help reverse the damage caused by stress and age.

**D**o you remember your first kiss but not where you left your car keys? You're not alone. Millions are discovering that as they age, their short term memory and mental sharpness seem to be slipping. The cause of these inconvenient “gaps” in memory sits deep inside your brain, among the billions of tiny nerve connections. New brain cell growth starts dropping after age 25, and then dramatically after 50, starting a downward spiral that can lead to everything from those frustrating “senior moments” to even more severe memory breakdowns.

### Downward Memory Spiral is Reversible

Studies have shown that the efficiency of brain cells declines after years of free radical damage and stress. It was long believed that as we got older, memory problems were inevitable. But medical experts have revealed that **the downward memory spiral is reversible**. Compelling new research shows that there's a simple way to stimulate new brain cell growth that can boost your memory, improve your focus and restore your mind's mental sharpness.

### Achieve Peak Brain Performance

Challenging mental games aren't enough to build a better brain. Your mind is the most complex and demanding organ in your body. It's also a high-performance supercomputer that requires the right chemical “foods” to perform at its peak.

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### Are you starving your brain?

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to help manufacture new cells and improve vital neurotransmitters (the basic processes of thinking and memory). Until now, it was believed that there was no way to safely and naturally produce this remarkable mental “superfuel.” But after years of extensive research and testing, microbiologists and brain researchers at the University of North Carolina, in England at Newcastle General Hospital, and at the prestigious Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel have developed a way to help boost choline production. Their breakthrough formula also helps stimulate new brain cell growth, leading to a significant improvement in memory, concentration and helps clear stubborn “brain fog.”

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### Protect Your Memory Now Before It's Too Late

Why wait until your lack of focus or forgetfulness creates an unsafe situation? Today it was your reading glasses, but tomorrow it could be the stove. You forget a phone number today, but tomorrow it could be where you parked your car at the mall.

Just as important is the personal toll that a fading memory can take on your family and friends. Don't you owe it to them and your future to take your brain's fitness as seriously as you do your heart health? It couldn't be easier. In as little as 30 days you can get back the mental sharpness and focus you had when you were 20 years younger! Act today and unlock your mind's true potential!

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Most likely, the victorious Americans bought their flags, fireworks and libations with the most desired currency of the day, Spanish colonial silver dollars of considerable heft and quality. Now, thanks to a recent discovery, you can own that very coin—the Silver Dollar of the American Revolution!

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George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin recognized that the Spanish Silver Dollar was the most desired coin in colonial America. Jefferson recommended the Continental Congress adopt it as our nation's first monetary standard of value. The Congress agreed, and the rest is history...tangible history that you can now own at an amazingly affordable price.

### AMERICA'S HISTORY IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND

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Each of these heavy silver dollars weighs over 416 grains of .903 fine silver. With the price of silver recently soaring past \$20 per ounce, the silver value alone is an important consideration. Each of these Silver Dollars was recovered from a colonial-era galleon lost off the American coast, which adds luster to its value as a collector's item.

### TRUE HISTORY AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE

Authentic items from the time of the Revolutionary War are rarely found or can be seen only in museums. Over the last 225 years most of these silver dollars have been lost or melted down for their precious silver. So what would you expect to pay for an authentic silver dollar from that time? These coins currently sell elsewhere for as high as \$295. But because of this historic discovery, for a limited time you can own the coin of our Founding Fathers, the Silver Dollar of the American Revolution for just \$49!

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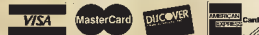
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▲ “Happy, Dopey and Grumpy seems to fit the picture,” Bowie-Cass Electric Cooperative member **Hazel Anderson** said of this snapshot of three of her grandchildren. **Mikenna Gerrald** and **Suede** and **Sydney Barron** had been playing in the fall leaves at Grandma’s house in New Boston.



► Boys will be boys, even when all grown up. **Tim, Daniel** and **Jeremy Davis** could hardly wait for this silly pose at their younger sister **Kristen’s** wedding. Their mother and Pedernales Electric Cooperative member **Karen Davis** submitted this happy photo.

◀ **Megan Connally’s** headshot session certainly turned into a hair-raising experience outside her home in Pleasant Grove. Parents **Mike** and **Melanie Connally** are members of Hamilton County Electric Cooperative and their neighbor, **Rita Berry**, snapped the picture.



Upcoming in **Focus on Texas**

ISSUE	SUBJECT	DEADLINE
Apr	Bridges	Feb 10
May	At the (Texas) Beach	Mar 10
June	Stained Glass Windows	Apr 10
July	Vacation Photos	May 10
Aug	Sisters	June 10
Sep	Texas Skyscapes	July 10

**BRIDGES** is the topic for our **APRIL 2009** issue. Send your photo—along with your name, address, daytime phone, co-op affiliation and a brief description—to **Bridges, Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado, 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701**, before **February 10**. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We regret that **Texas Co-op Power** cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline. Please note that we cannot provide individual critiques of submitted photos. If you use a digital camera, e-mail your highest-resolution images to [focus@texas-ec.org](mailto:focus@texas-ec.org), or submit them on our website at [www.texascoopower.com](http://www.texascoopower.com).

**SILLY POSES**

Remember those know-it-all phrases that Mom used to throw at you when you were a young pup? You know the ones: “Don’t make that face, or it will freeze that way,” which was a favorite along with “Be careful or you’ll put your eye out” and “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.” Well, readers, judging by the array of silly pictures we received, it appears that none of you listened very well to that first one. We had a really fun time deciding on our wacky finalists.

—ASHLEY CLARY



▲ What a catch! **Tinsley Huff** and **Shirley White**, 31-year members of Navarro County Electric Cooperative, sent in this photo of their then 8-month-old granddaughter **Haylee Rebel Huff** sitting in Papa’s boat in the barn.

▼ After a full day of touring and saluting local heroes at the Barksdale Air Force Base, a group of **Cub Scouts** from **Pack 30** out of Redwater/Maud strike a pose in front of an old Boeing B-47. The Scouts are members of Bowie-Cass Electric Cooperative.





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# AROUND TEXAS AROUND TEXAS



27

**GLEN ROSE**  
Jurassic Classic Barrel Race

## MARCH

01 **AUSTIN**  
Zilker Park Kite Festival,  
(512) 448-5483,  
www.zilkerkitefestival.com

07 **ROUND ROCK**  
Daffodil Festival,  
(512) 762-5594,  
www.rrdaffodilcapitaltx.us

10 **NEDERLAND** [10-15]  
Heritage Festival,  
(409) 724-2269

Everything's bigger in Texas, including this list of events. To see them all, please go to [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com).

Event information can be mailed to **Around Texas**, 1122 Colorado, 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701, faxed to (512) 763-3407, e-mailed to [aroundtx@texas-ec.org](mailto:aroundtx@texas-ec.org), or submitted on our website at [www.texascooppower.com](http://www.texascooppower.com). Please submit events for April by February 10.



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**ROUND ROCK**  
Daffodil Festival

21 **GRUENE** [21-22]  
Old Gruene Market Days,  
(830) 832-1721,  
[www.gruenemarketdays.com](http://www.gruenemarketdays.com)

23 **ODESSA**  
Shrimpfest 2009,  
(432) 550-9696

24 **KERRVILLE**  
Mardi Gras on Main,  
(830) 792-8395

27 **GLEN ROSE** [27-3/1]  
Jurassic Classic Barrel Race, (254) 897-4509,  
[www.glenroseexpo.org](http://www.glenroseexpo.org)

28 **WASHINGTON** [28-3/1]  
Texas Independence Day Celebration,  
(936) 878-2214,  
[www.birthplaceoftexas.com](http://www.birthplaceoftexas.com)

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It's rugged country that surrounds oil- and wind-rich Odessa, Midland and Big Spring, and sightseeing opportunities abound. But if it's indoor activities you're seeking, you won't be disappointed. From Shakespeare to fine art to a presidential museum and homes, there's something to suit every cultural taste in all three cities.

The route is simple enough: Follow Interstate 20 about 20 miles northeast from Odessa to Midland and then another 40 miles to Big Spring.

## ODESSA

Jack Ben Rabbit wasn't on my tourist schedule, but I just had to see this 8-foot-tall fiberglass statue at Eighth and Lee streets that Odessa—whose city mascot is the jackrabbit—bills as the world's largest jackrabbit. Then I traveled west to the **TEXON SANTA FE RAILROAD DEPOT MUSEUM** that features the original depot from the 1920s oil-boom town of Texon, southeast of Odessa. Tours of the museum—where you can ride a handcar on the railroad tracks in front of the depot—are by appointment only.

Next, I gawked at Odessa's **METEOR CRATER**, 10 miles west of downtown off I-20 (take exit 108 south). A walking trail runs through the 550-foot-wide crater that was formed approximately 50,000 years ago.

To get your Shakespeare fix, visit the **GLOBE OF THE GREAT SOUTHWEST**, a recreation of London's Globe Theatre on the Odessa College campus. The theater has scheduled its 2009 Southwest Shakespeare Festival for September 3-20.

No trip to Odessa would be complete without visiting the **PRESIDENTIAL MUSEUM AND LEADERSHIP LIBRARY** and the **FIRST TEXAS HOME OF FORMER PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH**, both

# ODESSA to BIG SPRING

*Pump jacks and presidents:*

*West Texas shows off its heritage.*

**BY CAMILLE WHEELER**



located on the University of Texas of the Permian Basin campus. The museum and library include sections on all 43 former presidents.

Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1-800-780-4678, [www.odessacvb.com](http://www.odessacvb.com)

## MIDLAND

My tour here took flight with a visit to the **CAF AIRPOWER MUSEUM** that sits next to Midland International Airport. Located at Commemorative Air Force headquarters, the museum tells the story of World War II military aviation through vintage aircraft and more than 850,000 archives and artifacts, including 34 pieces of airplane nose art.

Next I journeyed back 230 million years at the **PETROLEUM MUSEUM**, which lays claim to the world's largest collection of antique oil-drilling equipment and modern machinery. My favorite exhibit walked me through dioramas of the ancient Permian Basin sea and its oil-rich reefs.

I also lingered over paintings and

sculptures at the **MUSEUM OF THE SOUTHWEST**, whose collections emphasize works from New Mexico and Texas artists. In 2009, the museum plans to focus 90 percent of its exhibit schedule on its permanent fine arts collection, including John Audubon's hand-colored lithographs of North American animals scheduled to be shown in June and July.

Before leaving town, visit the **GEORGE W. BUSH CHILDHOOD HOME** at 1412 W. Ohio.

Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1-800-624-6435, [www.visitmidlandtexas.com](http://www.visitmidlandtexas.com)

## BIG SPRING

The No. 1 tourist attraction here? You got it: the big spring in **COMANCHE TRAIL PARK**. Although no longer an active spring, the rock-rimmed formation that once drew Comanche and Shawnee remains beautiful with water pumped in from Comanche Trail Lake.

Another tourist favorite is the view from atop **SCENIC MOUNTAIN** in **BIG SPRING STATE PARK** in the western city limits. Up here, almost 3,000 feet high, you can see all of Big Spring, including the 15-story **SETTLES HOTEL**—a 1930 structure being restored—that stands like a domino on the horizon. And if you want a close-up view of those impressively tall wind turbines cropping up all over the area, drive south of town on U.S. 87 where some stand near the road.

Big Spring boasts its own collection of military aircraft at the **HANGAR 25 AIR MUSEUM** beside the Big Spring McMahon-Wrinkle Airport and Industrial Park (watch for the prairie dog town when you're driving in). The museum is housed in a restored World War II hangar that was built in 1942 for the Big Spring Army Air Force Bombardier School.

Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1-866-430-7100, [www.bigspring-cvb.com](http://www.bigspring-cvb.com)

*Camille Wheeler is staff writer for Texas Co-op Power.*





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