

METER READERS STILL
MAKE THE ROUNDS

CHET GETS CHARMED
BY POLKA MUSIC

CUERO SHARES ITS TIES
TO TURKEYS

Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

OCTOBER 2022

Monarch Matriarch

One woman's quest to protect
the butterfly's future

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 18



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October 2022



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How one woman is earnestly spreading the word about monarch migrations through Texas.

By *Laura Tolley*
Photos by *Julia Robinson*

Reading Between the Lines

Decades after new tech started taking over, meter readers are still a valued part of co-op connections.

By *Chris Burrows*
Illustration by *Michael Koelsch*

ON THE COVER
Monika Maeckle in her pollinator-friendly backyard in San Antonio.
Photo by *Julia Robinson*

ABOVE
Meter readers have ready friends in Co-op Country. Ready enemies, too.
Illustration by *Michael Koelsch*

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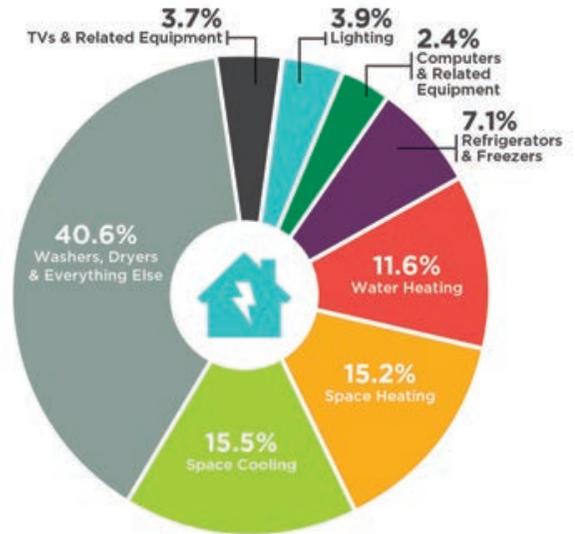
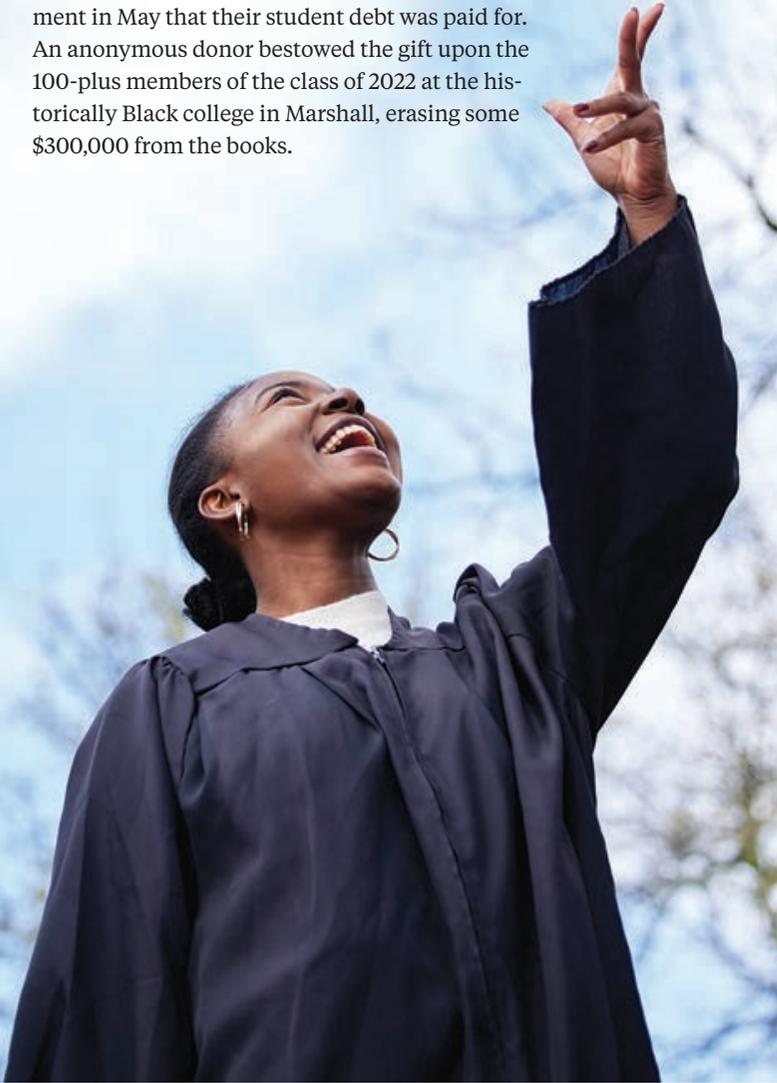
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By *Caytlyn Phillips*

Extra Credit

WILEY COLLEGE graduates learned at commencement in May that their student debt was paid for. An anonymous donor bestowed the gift upon the 100-plus members of the class of 2022 at the historically Black college in Marshall, erasing some \$300,000 from the books.



How We Use Electricity

This National Co-op Month, your electric cooperative and trusted energy adviser wants to show you where your money goes—and where you might focus on cutting back.

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

THE BEST CHRISTMAS GIFT I EVER GAVE WAS ...

TCP Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to letters@TexasCoopPower.com or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our August prompt: **The song that takes me back to high school is ...**

1999 by Prince. I graduated high school in 1999, and we played the song all year.

JENNIFER MAYFIELD OKERE
VIA FACEBOOK

Before the Next Teardrop Falls by Freddy Fender.

PEGGY DARSEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen. Every time I hear the song, I have to sing along and let my mind wander back to those glorious high school days.

JACINDA MOORE
TRI-COUNTY EC
GRANBURY

Don't Bring Me Down by Electric Light Orchestra. It was playing every day at lunch on our cafeteria jukebox.

LESLIE CHATHAM JAMES
WISE EC
PARADISE

To see more responses, read Currents online.

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Gourd as Gold

When Sherry Nelson attended a Texas Gourd Society show in 2017, she was stunned by the gourds she saw. "It's just amazing what people can do with them," she said. "But I thought I could never do that."

She was hooked. The Kerrville native and Central Texas Electric Cooperative member joined TGS and took classes. After a *Texas Co-op Power* illustration by David Danz in March 2021 caught her eye, she reached out to TCP for permission before spending three weeks burning it into a gourd for a Kerr Arts and Cultural Center contest in May.

It won—beating out 151 other gourds. "I'm going to enjoy this win for a while," she said.



Rangers Flashback

HALL OF FAME outfielder Ted Williams was a phenomenal baseball player, but he met little success as a manager.

His four-year managerial career started with the Washington Senators in 1969 and ended 50 years ago this month, in 1972, when the Senators relocated to Arlington and became the Texas Rangers.

Williams went out with a whimper, losing the season finale 4-0 on October 4 and finishing with a 273-364 record as manager.

Did You Know?

That Rangers team played in Arlington Stadium, a converted minor-league ballpark originally called Turnpike Stadium. Whatever the name, the summer heat plagued players and fans alike. One writer called the outfield stands "the world's largest open-air roaster."



WYATT MCSPADDEN

Why'd the Chicken Cross the Pit?

“I have tried barbecued chicken at Kreuz Market and around the state. Most (including Kreuz) do a great job, but the best is at Mumphord’s Place BBQ in Victoria.”

JOHN GEORGE
VICTORIA EC
VICTORIA

Raving and Squawking

If you haven't tried the Kreuz Market barbecued chicken, you need to [*Why'd the Chicken Cross the Pit?*, July 2022]. It's great.

Tom Faulkner
Pedernales EC
Leander

We were motivated to visit Kreuz after reading your glowing endorsement. What a disappointment. The chicken did not taste any better than a \$5 deli chicken from Sam's Club.

Gary and Gaye Kriegel
Pedernales EC
Williamson County

Walked a few yards onto it once and crawled back [*Colorado's Texas Bridge*, July 2022].

MARTHA BEIMER
VIA FACEBOOK

The Coach's Coach

The story about Tom Landry and his senior football season at Mission High School does not identify who his coach was [*The Most Glorious Autumn*, August 2022]. I believe it was my uncle, Robert Martin, as he was a lifelong friend of Landry and took Landry's father to many Cowboys games.

Ralph E. Martin Jr.
Medina EC
New Braunfels

EDITOR'S NOTE Landry's coach at Mission was indeed Robert L. "Bob" Martin.

The Cotton Patch

My family farmed west of Krum [*Prized Fibers*, July 2022]. Many days I was in the cotton patch hoeing weeds. I "missed" out on the picking as Dad hired a crew of pickers.

Ken Fairman
Wise EC
Krum



FOCUS ON SPORT | GETTY IMAGES

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letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

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

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A woman wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat, glasses, a white long-sleeved shirt, and blue patterned shorts stands in a natural setting. A brown and black dog is sitting on the ground next to her. The background features a large, leafy tree on the left and a rocky hillside on the right. The overall scene is bright and outdoorsy.

Funnel Vision

How one woman is earnestly spreading the word about monarch migrations through Texas



Monika Maeckle found her passion in a dry streambed of the San Saba River.

It was October 2004 when she and her husband drove from their ranch, a Hill Country getaway on the Llano River, over to a friend's place near tiny Hext for a "tagging event." She didn't know what that was really, but Maeckle likes an adventure and loves the outdoors.

At sunset, monarch butterflies started cascading from the sky. The group caught them in long nets, carefully plucking the bright orange marvels out to tag their wings with coded stickers. They tagged a couple hundred monarchs that evening, then set them free. Maeckle was completely smitten.

"It was a passion play from the beginning," says Maeckle, a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative. "It was this magical thing. I was entranced."

The San Antonio-based communications and marketing pro spent the following months reading and researching everything she could find about the monarchs' annual migration to Mexico. A year later, on a Saturday in October, Maeckle climbed into her kayak and ventured out on the clear-running Llano near Mason. She was equipped with tags, each about as big around as a pencil eraser.

"I figured they had to be at our place, too, because everything they needed was here: water, tall trees, nectar up against a limestone escarpment that shielded them from wind and held the heat during the cool nights," she says.

She guided the kayak to a spot near three pecan trees, and as she stepped out, there they were.

"I started tagging and ripped through a sheet of 25 tags in about 15 minutes, went back and got another sheet and tagged 25 more," she says. "They weren't dropping from the sky that day; they were already fluttering around, finding a spot to spend the night."

What captured Maeckle's heart, and a lot of her time, is the splendid monarch butterfly and its remarkable migration—up to 3,000 miles—from the northeastern United

States and southeastern Canada to the mountain forests of central Mexico, where they hibernate during the winter. The Central and South Texas region, called the Texas funnel, is part of the path south for all monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains.

Adult monarchs are easily identifiable, with two pairs of deep orange wings that have black veins and white spots along the edges. On average they weigh about as much as half of a dollar bill, with a wingspan of about 4 inches. Tagging doesn't harm the delicate creatures.

Maeckle is part of a groundswell of advocates who are tagging and tracking the monarchs' migration as well as planting and sustaining habitat that will help attract and protect them and other important pollinators, including bees.

But she's an overachiever when it comes to monarchs. The citizen scientist launched an educational website called the Texas Butterfly Ranch, writes and gives talks about monarchs, and is the founding director of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival, the seventh of which will be held October 8 at San Antonio's Brackenridge Park.

The free one-day festival offers children and adults opportunities to learn about the monarch migration and the importance of other wildlife pollinators to our own food sources. The festival also features arts and crafts activities and other entertainment, as well as monarch butterfly tagging demonstrations. An estimated 2,500 people attended last year's festival, and more than 550 butterflies were tagged.

Monarchs Matter

The monarch population has been in decline in recent years, but there is hope for this fall's migration despite the continuing drought and its detrimental effect on native habitat.

The World Wildlife Fund announced in May that a survey found that the number of monarch butterflies in Mexico's forests last winter actually increased 35% from the previous year. The rise "marks a sign of recovery—albeit a fragile one—and gives some reason for hope against a backdrop of several decades of decline for the iconic species," the organization said in a release.

"The increase in monarch butterflies is good news and indicates that we should continue working to maintain and reinforce conservation measures by Mexico, the United States and Canada," says Jorge Rickards, general manager of WWF's Mexico office. "Monarchs are important pollinators, and their migratory journey helps promote greater diversity of flowering plants, which benefits other species

OPPOSITE Monika Maeckle launched the website Texas Butterfly Ranch and is the founding director of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival in San Antonio. ABOVE A monarch feeds on a blue mistflower.



in natural ecosystems and contributes to the production of food for human consumption.”

Butterflies are pretty, fanciful things that don’t bite or sting, and that makes them interesting to humans, prompting a willingness to help them, which can help all pollinators, says Judit Green, urban wildlife biologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. She calls the monarch an “ambassador for all pollinators.”

“Our beautiful rural Texas landscapes are in existence because pollinators helped pollinate it, producing the various native plants from wildflowers, bunchgrasses, vines, shrubs, small trees to canopy trees,” Green says. “These plants make up habitat for a host of wildlife. Therefore all wildlife benefit from actions we take to support our pollinators.”

These insects also support crop production, which the scientific world is quick to remind not to take for granted. “They say, ‘Thank a pollinator with every third bite you take,’ since about 33% of the food we eat is pollinated by pollinators,” Green says.

How To Help

There are simple steps Texans can take to attract monarchs and other pollinators: Grow and cultivate native plants, and don’t use pesticides, Green says. In addition, you can plant native milkweed, the host plant for monarch caterpillars, which feed on the leaves. Migrating monarchs lay their eggs on these plants.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Monika Maeckle paddles the Llano River. Yellow cestrum planted beside the San Antonio River Walk. Queen butterflies fuel up on frostweed at the Llano River. Bees collect pollen from a coneflower plant. ABOVE A child holds a monarch at the San Antonio festival.

FESTIVAL: COURTESY DRAKE WHITE. BUTTERFLIES: COURTESY MONIKA MAECKLE



Maeckle is part of a groundswell of advocates who are tagging and tracking the monarchs' migration as well as planting and sustaining habitat that will help attract and protect them and other important pollinators, including bees.

There are larger endeavors underway as well. The city of San Antonio's advocacy for monarchs dates back to 2015, when then-Mayor Ivy Taylor signed the National Wildlife Federation's Mayors' Monarch Pledge, a commitment to creating better habitats for pollinators and educating the public about them. Today 42 Texas mayors have active pledges through NWF, including those from small towns like Cuero, Liberty and Nolanville.

NWF named San Antonio the first Monarch Champion City, and current Mayor Ron Nirenberg has continued those efforts. The city's pledge consisted of 24 specific actions, including holding or supporting a butterfly festival to raise awareness about pollinators. Not surprisingly, Maeckle took on that challenge.

"When I say I'm going to do something, I do it," says Maeckle, who, with her husband, Robert Rivard, founded a nonprofit digital news website now called the San Antonio Report.

Green says the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival has been important to raising awareness about the problems pollinators face and how the public can help.

"Getting the public to support our pollinators, like the monarch, is crucial," Green says.

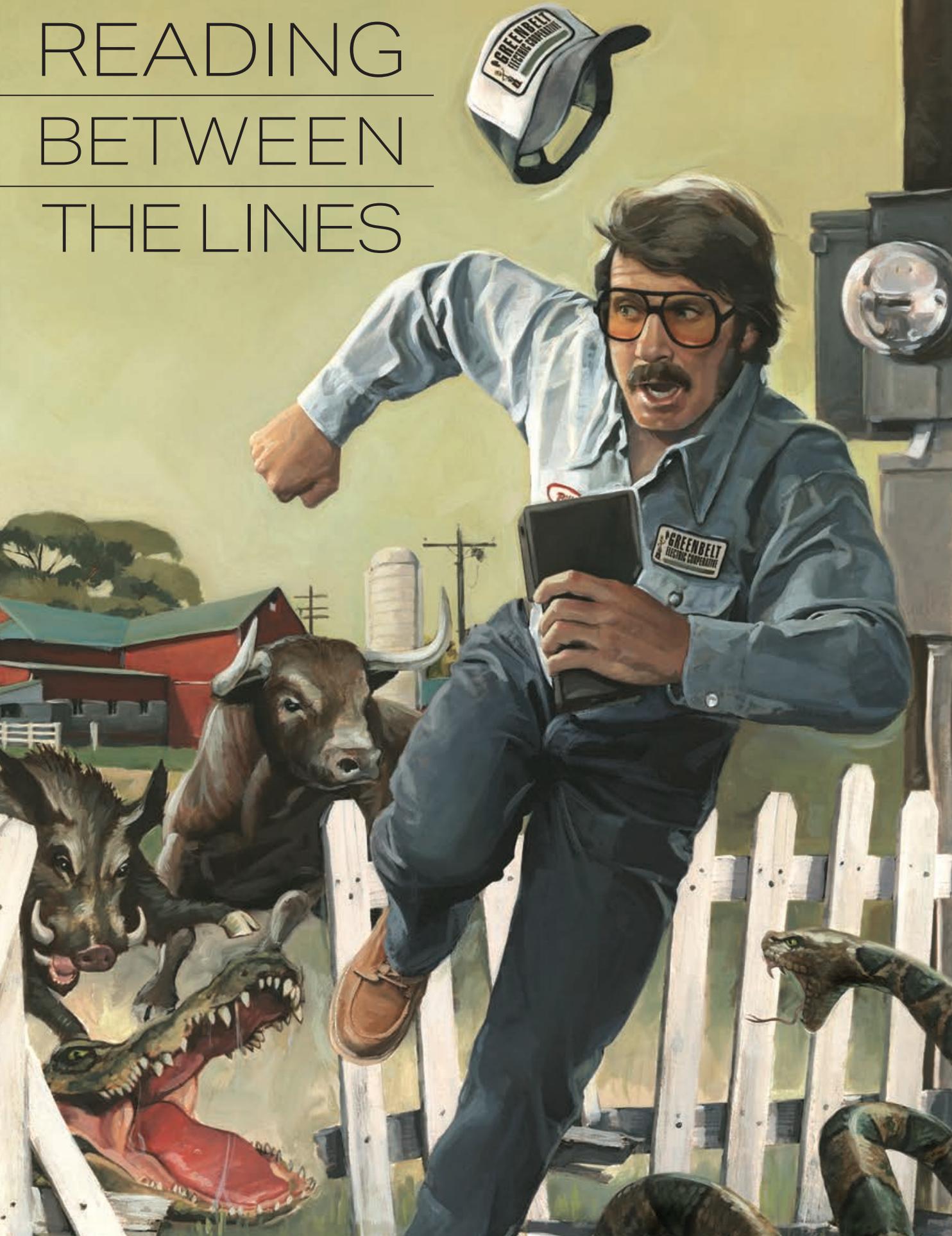
Cheri Tondre, an instructional specialist for San Antonio Independent School District, participated in a 2017 festival workshop that led to the creation of a pollinator garden at Collins Garden Elementary. She says the festival offers children the chance to explore the natural world.

"Opportunities to engage with science, nature and community are important to engage students in the type of learning we need," Tondre says. "They need to know they are part of the problem and solution."

Maeckle sees the monarch as an access point for viewing a number of complex issues—migration, climate change, sustainability. And she still takes joy in recalling how that evening in Hext ignited a lasting passion.

"They had always been there; I just hadn't realized," Maeckle says. "And it underscores the connectedness of us all." ■

READING
BETWEEN
THE LINES



Decades after new tech started taking over,

METER READERS are still a valued part of co-op connections

BY CHRIS BURROWS • ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL KOELSCH

Connie Turner can tell you all about the time she cracked three ribs battling a gate over a cattle guard, slipping on ice in the process. Or about the time an electric meter exploded in her hands, knocking her unconscious. Or the time she injured her foot jumping from a fence.

“And since then, I’ve had shoulder surgery,” she says. “I really think that that injury came from the repetition of pushing on gates.”

But in the last week of her 40-year career at Coleman County Electric Cooperative, Turner can also tell you that she misses working as a country meter reader, despite the toll it took on her body. Seventeen years into that career, she was able to move into an office role, but her injuries weren’t the only factor in that move.

Another was the folks on her route. They were like family to her—and aging.

“I could hardly stand to go out there, and they wouldn’t be there anymore,” she says. “A lot of them kind of adopted me. I used to load furniture; I’d get the lawn mower started for them and help them pick their garden. I just did everything that you wouldn’t really think that a meter reader would be out there doing.”

Turner was part of a group like no other—one accustomed to outsmarting dogs, boars, snakes, and the odd alligator or goose; to knowing the roads, power grid and land better than anyone; and to dealing with the occasional unhappy member, flat tires and whatever else came their way as they scoured the countryside, read dials and displays, and relayed kilowatt-hour usage to co-op accounting departments for accurate billing.

But ever since co-ops started installing automated meter reading systems in the 1990s, these neighborly, workaday men and women seemed doomed to be replaced by the very devices they regularly visited.

However, many still haven’t been. Sure, there aren’t as many meter readers working today, but Texas co-ops still employ dozens. And now many of them are armed with more technical skills than ever.

A GOOD READ

John Gross is one of them. For 19 years he’s been reading meters on his rural routes in Parker County, west of Fort Worth, for Tri-County Electric Cooperative.

“People didn’t know that we still walked around,” he says.

As others in his line of work do, he has plenty of stories. Like the time he tore his ACL climbing a fence to get to a meter—“I actually read about three more meters until I said I can’t keep doing this because I was hopping on the one good leg,” he says—or the time a bull chased him around a meter pole (he still got the reading).

“You don’t know what you’re going to walk into: coyotes, cows, deer, bulls,” he says. “A lot of times you have to run. Otherwise you’re going to have to tangle with some of the dogs.”

Gross says he drives hundreds of miles daily and gets plenty of walking in, but since TCEC started to deploy smart meters across its system in 2019, he’s part of a shrinking team.

Gross, co-worker Bobby Collins and a handful of others at TCEC no longer read all the co-op’s 125,000 meters. Collins has read meters for 23 years in an upscale area closer to Fort Worth, where he’s met celebrities Terry Bradshaw, Sandra Bullock and Josh Hamilton in the course of his work, but it’s the everyday folks who he especially appreciates.

“They’ll start a story, and you’ll end up leaving; and then next month, they’ll pick up right where they left off,” Collins says.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

Economist David Autor famously pointed out that the invention of the ATM in the 1970s seemed sure to spell the end for bank tellers. But a funny thing happened: As ATMs quadrupled between 1995 and 2010, the number of tellers actually increased over that period.

“The last 200 years, we’ve had an incredible amount of automation,” Autor said in a 2017 interview with CBS News. “We have tractors that do the work that horses and people used to do on farms. We don’t do bookkeeping with books. But this has not, in net, reduced the amount of employment.”

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Binoculars for reading meters from the road.

Extra meters and meter seals for making repairs in the field.

Nontoxic dog repellent.

Sunglasses, hat and sunscreen.

Fiberglass hot stick for adjusting lines and transformers.

Four-wheel-drive pickup.

Keys for Co-op Country gates.

Car jack, for fixing flats.

Fence stretcher for slinking through barbed wire.

Since the 1990s, when electric utilities began to implement AMR systems, jobs for electric meter readers in the U.S. fell by more than half, from a peak of 55,000 in 1996 to 24,000 in 2021, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Today, nearly all co-ops in Texas have deployed some form of advanced metering infrastructure—a further revolution in metering technology that unleashed myriad benefits for co-ops and their members. But like any complex system, even AMI needs humans to watch over it and fix it when it falters.

When that happens, a worker still has to drive out, find the meter, get a reading and make a fix.

“We generally troubleshoot,” says Kevin Gray, one of two meter readers at Fort Belknap Electric Cooperative. “If we have a meter not sending a reading in, you go out to see: Is the transformer fuse blown? Is the AMR itself dead and not sending a reading? We check transformer connections, look for trees burning on the line.”

As meters have become more complex, so too have the jobs of meter readers like Gray, who has developed new skills to troubleshoot issues in the field.

“I can remember back when the technology began to get a good foothold in the market, obviously the meter readers got very nervous,” says Mike Cleveland, manager of meter products at Texas Electric Cooperatives, the statewide association for co-ops. He says a lot of co-op leaders initially used that as an excuse to delay upgrading to the new meters.

“It took a while for people to understand the benefits and understand that you can take meter readers and turn them into more advanced technicians for running the AMR system,” Cleveland says. “You’re implementing something that has to be babysat all the time. It’s a complex piece of technology that doesn’t just run on autopilot in the background. Somebody has to monitor and manage it.”

MORE THAN METERS

In the 1970s and '80s, many electric cooperatives started meter reading departments, some citing frustrations with the self-reporting postcards that most utilities of the era relied on.

At Southwest Texas Electric Cooperative, that meant closing the office for about a week every month. Each of the co-op's employees would grab a pickup, take a meter route and gather readings from rural West Texas. General Manager Buff Whitten did his part when he started at the co-op in 1977.

“You don’t get to see the system like we once did,” he says. “You’re looking at poles, you’re looking at crossarms, you’re able to see the system and recognize problems that you take back, keep track of and correct. And there’s always an opportunity, when you’re out there, to meet the members.”

AMI won’t spot a broken crossarm or start a lawn mower for a member, but these systems of smart meters, communications networks and data management systems can do so much more. The granular data they capture increases

reliability by enabling advanced outage management systems and troubleshooting and provides cost savings for co-ops and their members.

“The old mechanical meter, as good as it was, it was pretty dumb,” Cleveland says. “All it could sit there and do was just count revolutions, but these new meters, they just have so much horsepower under the hood. They’re very powerful instruments.”

Meter readers Mario Manriquez and Donald Priesmeyer keep Wharton County Electric Cooperative’s powerful instruments humming.

“My main thing right now is helping with the AMI system,” says Manriquez from the side of a South Texas road where he and Priesmeyer are installing a communications relay for WCEC’s AMI system.

Over 23 years at WCEC, Manriquez’s work has changed a lot, but the dangers of the job haven’t. “I almost stepped on a snake once,” he says. “They say good snake, bad snake. I say all bad snakes.”

But Scott Thomas, who was the last full-time meter reader at PenTex Energy in North Texas, will tell you that it’s still the folks at the end of the line who make his job so gratifying.

“The best part is going out into the community and visiting with the customers because every one of them liked to talk and visit,” he says, in between greeting folks by name at the co-op’s annual meeting in April. “You had a schedule, and you tried to stay on schedule, but you had to visit.” ■

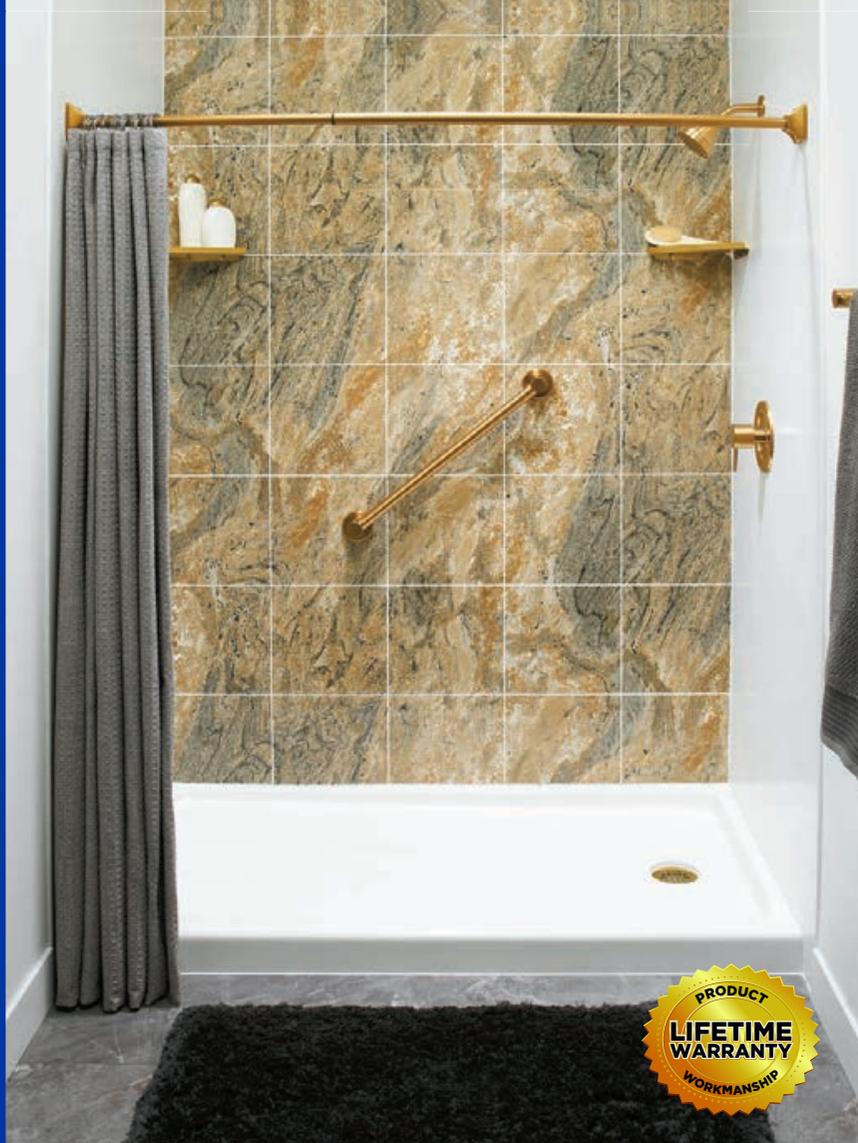


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storing SUN

**Going solar or already gone?
The next hot sellers in Central Texas
homes are battery storage systems,
which can conserve that power
for later use.**

Stories by Alyssa Dussetschleger

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME coming, but home battery storage of solar-generated power has started showing up on the walls and garages of homes in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area.

Although battery technology has improved and prices have gone down in recent years, adding battery storage to your solar system is still pricey. The average cost of a 13-kilowatt hour (kWh) home battery plus its installation in Texas ranges from about \$13,700 to \$18,530, according to EnergySage, an online database of solar and battery installers that partners with the U.S. Department of Energy. Those prices will probably drop by thousands of dollars in the next eight years, according to forecasts from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.

Increasingly, homeowners in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative area, as well as in Texas and across the nation, are taking the leap into renewable energy. Storing excess energy generated by their solar arrays could save homeowners money and provide a backup source of power during an electric outage.

Solar power is one of the fastest-growing sources of electricity in the United States and has the potential to provide as much as 40% of the nation's power needs by 2035, according to a 2021 study by the U.S. Department of Energy.

U.S. households with solar systems produced enough electricity in 2021 to power 23 million average homes for one hour, a

whopping 126.1 gigawatts of power (a gigawatt is 1 billion watts). Texas has more than 160,000 residential and small commercial solar systems, second in the nation behind California, according to a spring 2022 study by the Solar Energy Industries Association, Wood Mackenzie Power & Renewables and The Solar Foundation.

There were 2,558 home solar installations on the Bluebonnet system as of September 2022. At the end of August, Bluebonnet members (including large commercial members) with solar installations had the capacity to generate 26.58 megawatts of power (a

Components of a home system for battery storage

On the side of the house of a Bluebonnet member are all the components that go into a system of batteries to store power generated by a solar panel array on the roof.

1. TWO TESLA POWERWALL BATTERIES

These batteries store electricity generated by the homeowner's solar panels. The panels provide power only when the sun is shining, which is why there is increased interest in and use of home battery storage. Batteries are available on the market from a variety of manufacturers.

2. SECONDARY BREAKER BOX

Looking much like a regular breaker box, this contains breakers just for the power-storage batteries.

Continued on page 20

SHINE



Joe Stafford illustration



3. JUNCTION BOX

Contains wires leading from the solar panels on the roof. This box and boxes 4 and 5 are part of the solar system's connection between the house and the batteries.

4. MAIN DISCONNECT BOX

Allows solar system to be manually turned off for maintenance or repairs.

5. DC-TO-AC CONVERTER

Turns direct current (DC), which is what the solar panels generate, to alternating

current (AC), which is the form of electricity you get from Bluebonnet, and what is used to power your home.

6. BREAKER BOX

Familiar to most homeowners, this contains the wiring and breakers for all your home's electric appliances and devices.

7. TESLA BACKUP GATEWAY

A component in the Tesla Powerwall system that can quickly, safely disconnect your home's power-generating system from the Bluebonnet grid when a power outage is detected. The device then automatically shifts your home's energy use to the backup power from the batteries.

8. BLUEBONNET METER

This device measures the flow of electricity to your home from Bluebonnet's power lines, the amount of that electricity you use and how much solar-generated power you return to Bluebonnet.



BLUEBONNET'S ENERGY EXPO

Join us Oct. 22 to talk about the evolution of renewable power, battery storage and electric vehicles

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Energy Expo event will be from 9 a.m. to noon, Saturday, Oct. 22, 2022, at the cooperative's service center in Maxwell, in Caldwell County. The facility is at 10400 Texas 142. In conjunction with National Energy Awareness Month, Bluebonnet will provide members information on the evolution of renewable power systems, battery storage and electric vehicles.

The event, formerly known as the co-op's Solar Tour, will also include information on renewable system billing, conversations with Bluebonnet members who have solar and battery storage systems, and feature a solar installer fair hosted by the Texas Solar Energy Society.

The society is a statewide organization dedicated to educating Texans about the benefits of solar energy. Since 2016, the Texas Solar Energy Society has supported Bluebonnet in helping its members learn about home solar-energy systems through presentations and discussions with experts.

Members who attend can also tour the cooperative's Maxwell facility. The service center, which opened in July 2020, is located between Lockhart and San Marcos. The service center has 292 solar panels that generate, on average, 62% of the facility's total annual energy consumption. The facility also has two 30,000-gallon rainwater collection tanks.



Continued from page 18

megawatt is 1 million watts). That's enough to power 5,316 homes during periods of peak electricity demand.

In 2021, Bluebonnet residential and commercial members with renewable power systems sent 8,940 megawatt hours of unconsumed power back to the grid. There are approximately 67 new solar systems, primarily residential, added to Bluebonnet's grid every month.

Those are all great resources when the sun is shining, and power production peaks at midday. But households use the most electricity from 3 to 8 p.m. in the summer, when solar power production is waning. No sun means no electricity from a solar system.

Storing that power has been an elusive next step.

Residential battery storage systems connect to solar (or less-commonly, wind energy systems) to capture electricity that isn't used while it is being produced. The electricity stored in residential batteries can be used in the evening, during a power outage or when cloudy skies or still air prevails.

Because battery storage system installations are not regulated by the state or federal government, official statistics are not available. A study by S&P Global Market Intelligence estimates an eight-fold increase in home battery installations since 2020. Bloomberg New Energy Finance, which conducts research on how industries can adapt to energy transitions, forecasted in 2019 that by 2024, battery installations will have increased 122% globally.

In addition, the new federal Inflation Reduction Act, enacted in August of this year, increases federal tax credits for installation of

solar and other renewable energy systems — including battery storage — beginning in 2023. The credit will equal 30% of the costs of eligible home improvements made during the year. Learn more about the Inflation Reduction Act at bit.ly/3QfvqQ1.

"We are seeing a 24% (sales) rate for batteries (paired) with solar so far this year, up from 18% last year," said Sherren Harter, chief marketing officer at Freedom Solar. By late August, the Austin-based company had installed 68 combined solar and battery systems for Bluebonnet members.

Amancio Gutierrez, a Bluebonnet member in southern Travis County, installed a full-home battery backup and rooftop solar system in 2020. His two Tesla Powerwalls can provide up to 18 hours of backup power for his home.

Another Bluebonnet member, Aaron Contreras of eastern Travis County, added solar battery storage in 2020. "The icing on the cake for battery storage was being able to keep the lights on" during the winter storm of 2021, he said. "At the time I added battery storage I didn't consider that at all. I had been a Bluebonnet member for 11 years and only lost power one time for more than five minutes. But during the winter storm, I was able to keep the lights, heater and a few outlets on without interruption the entire time."

Want to learn more? Here are a few questions and answers about battery storage systems.

How does battery storage work?

Electricity generated by solar or wind systems is direct current, or DC, which cannot be used in homes. That electricity flows



Amancio Gutierrez, a Bluebonnet member in southern Travis County, installed a full home battery backup for his solar-powered system in 2020. Gutierrez has two Tesla Powerwalls that can provide up to 18 hours of backup power for his home. *Sarah Beal photo*

through an inverter, turning it into alternating current, or AC, which can then power your home. Any excess electricity flows back through the system to the battery, where that power can be stored and used when needed. If the battery doesn't have enough power stored to meet your electricity demand, your home will use electricity from Bluebonnet's system.

Without a battery, what happens to power my system generates that I don't use?

Excess electricity you produce is returned to the grid and purchased from you by Bluebonnet. If you add battery storage to your system, that excess power first charges the battery before being returned to the grid.

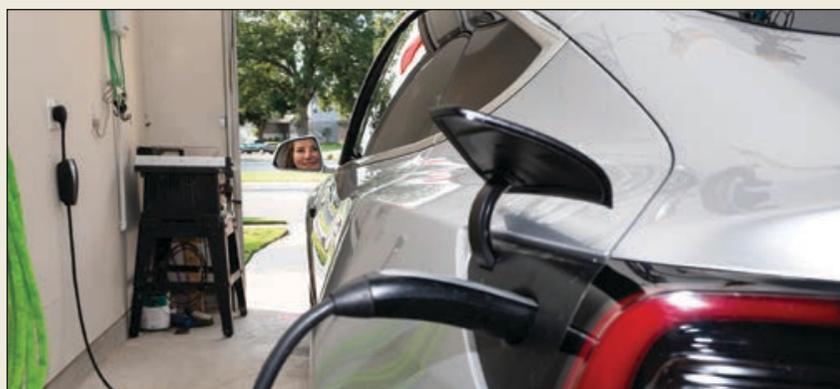
What is in these batteries?

Typical home battery storage systems use lithium-ion or lead-acid batteries. Lithium-ion batteries cost more, but have a longer life expectancy and come with more all-in-one, wall-mountable packages. Lead-acid batteries are less common and carry some safety risks.

Are there different battery sizes? How do I know the size I need?

The average electric battery storage system for homes stores about 10 kilowatt-hours, or kWh, enough to run a clothes dryer for 2 to

Continued on page 22



A Model 3 Tesla charging in the garage of Bastrop resident Deanna Bodine in 2021. Her charger connects directly to a 240-volt wall outlet. *File photo*

Take smart steps to charge electric vehicle at home

That humming sound you hear might be the electric vehicle market buzzing all around Central Texas. Many automakers have added at least one all-electric vehicle model to their fleets and have plans to sell more electric vehicles than gasoline-powered ones by 2040.

Tax credits available under the recently enacted federal Inflation Reduction Act add incentives to electric vehicle purchases in the next few years. Although there are requirements about household income and sales prices, people who buy a new electric vehicle may be eligible for a tax credit worth up to \$7,500, and one up to \$4,000 for used vehicles.

Some of those vehicle details can be found at the Alternative Fuels Data Center website, at afdc.energy.gov/laws/inflation-reduction-act.

If you're thinking about buying an electric vehicle, or EV, you're probably thinking a lot about how to charge its battery.

While a lot of electric vehicles can be charged using a common 120-volt wall outlet, that is probably going to be a slow process. Many electric vehicle owners opt to install a level 2, 240-volt charger, which can charge an EV two times quicker than an ordinary electric outlet.

A Kia EV6, for example, can charge to 100% after a 50-mile commute in 1½ hours. This would cost a Bluebonnet member \$1.60 with a level 2 charger at home. It would take nearly 12½ hours to charge that same Kia with a regular 120-volt wall outlet. Though you can charge the vehicle relatively quickly at level 2, it's recommended that EVs be charged overnight, not during the day.

Good news: Retrofitting your garage

with an electric vehicle charger is easier than you think.

First, consult an electrician on whether your home has adequate electrical capacity for a vehicle charger. Some homes might not be able to power level 2 equipment. However, a qualified electrician can add circuits to accommodate the capacity needed for level 2 charging. The average cost in 2021 to install an outlet for a level 2 vehicle charger was \$750, with costs varying by your location and your home's electric wiring.

Chargers can be purchased separately from your vehicle's manufacturer, home improvement store or through an online retailer, and costs vary. Some manufacturers, such as Chevrolet, include a level 2 charger with an electric vehicle purchase.

Some electric vehicle owners opt to charge their EV using the outlet for their home's clothes dryer. It's the same 240-volt outlet required for a level 2 charger.

Once a 240-volt outlet is installed, electric vehicle owners can mount a 10- to 15-pound level 2 charger on the wall near the 240-volt outlet and plug it in to the new outlet. Many automakers sell home charging stations for an additional fee with your electric vehicle, but you can also purchase an Energy Star home charger online at energystar.gov/products/other/ev_chargers.

If you're on the road and need a charge, high-powered commercial charging stations can power up that same Kia EV6 for 100 miles with a level 3 fast charger in 8 minutes. Getting that same charge for the Kia from a level 2, 240-volt home charger would take 3.5 hours, or 26.5 hours with a level 1, 120-volt charger.

Continued from page 21

5 hours. For an average home with solar panels in Central Texas, under sunny conditions and using no electricity, a solar system could recharge, for example, a 9.6 kWh battery from the LG Chem company in two hours.

Batteries range in size, from about the dimensions of a large flat-screen TV to a clothes dresser. The most compact, LG's Energy Solution home battery, is 36 inches tall, 29 inches wide and 8 inches deep. The Sonnen Eco 15, one of the largest home batteries, is 84 inches tall, 26 inches wide and 19 inches deep.

The capacity size of the battery (measured in kWh) or number of batteries you need depends on how much electricity you want to store and how you plan to use it. Stored electricity can back up just part of your home, or it can provide full-home backup. An additional breaker box, with only breakers to the appliances that will be backed up by the battery storage, will need to be installed for a partial backup system. The time it takes to charge one or more batteries varies based on the size of your solar system and how much electricity you use from it while it is generating power.

The most common items that residents back up are refrigerators, freezers, TVs and a few outlets, said Ray Schafer, a technical sales associate at Lighthouse Solar. Large appliances, such as HVAC systems and clothes dryers, often use too much power for a single battery.

The more devices and appliances using power from your battery storage system, the less time you'll get power from it. A whole-home battery backup will exhaust its power storage faster than a partial one.

Gutierrez, the Bluebonnet member in southern Travis County, became interested in additional solar and battery storage at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, when he was spending more time at home. He decided to get a full-home battery storage backup "in case of emergencies."

A professional installer can help you determine the size and number of batteries needed. Ideally the company will spend time helping you make the best decision for your needs with your renewable energy system. Battery installation education can be tricky, said Chris Lermann, owner of Affordable Solar, Roof & Air, a Tomball-based solar and battery storage installation company. "There are so many different loads you can utilize batteries for, so education is key," he said.

You can also gauge the battery size you might need by using online calculators at pwwatts.nrel.gov.

Is there a wait for batteries?

Since 2020, supply chain delays have impacted residential battery availability. Batteries from the company Enphase, for



The Tesla backup switch automatically switches between renewable electricity and Bluebonnet-distributed electricity. *Illustration of components from tesla.com*

Bluebonnet among nation's first utilities to test new Tesla battery device

The Tesla backup switch — designed to simplify installation of the company's Powerwall solar battery storage system — was tested by Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative in 2021.

Bluebonnet reviewed the device for use in conjunction with Bluebonnet meters. It switches automatically between using stored renewable electricity and Bluebonnet-distributed electricity. Bluebonnet approved the backup switch for use on its system last year.

The use of the backup switch cuts Powerwall installation time from 10 hours to about one hour by avoiding the need to extensively rewire the connection from a home's breaker panel, according to Tesla's website. Since October 2021, every Tesla Powerwall whole-home backup system (which costs \$11,500 before installation) comes with a Tesla backup switch.

The switch also provides greater safety to Bluebonnet's line workers. If a power outage is detected, the switch automatically disconnects the battery-stored electricity from Bluebonnet's lines. That prevents the stored power from being pushed back onto the lines, keeping line workers who are restoring power safe.

Licensed electric battery storage installers can find specifications for installing Tesla backup switches on the cooperative's website at bluebonnet.coop/document-center.

example, can take about 120 days to be delivered once a contract is signed. A Tesla Powerwall for solar energy can take from two months to a year to arrive, depending on the installer, location and available stock.

Where can I get good advice about buying a battery storage system?

Most solar installers also install battery storage systems. The brands of batteries installers sell and install will vary by their training and certification for the battery brand.

For example, Sonnen, a popular battery manufacturer, requires licensed electricians to take and pass an online exam before selling or installing its batteries. Make sure your installer is registered with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation at tdlr.texas.gov.

Micah Jasuta, a Texas Solar Energy Society member and past board chair, recommends that if you know someone who has had a battery installed, ask them about their experience. There are online tools to help,

too. Energysage.com is a database to help consumers learn average system costs by battery size and model, and to find storage system installers in your area. Each company in that database has reviews from other buyers, along with services it provides, industry certifications, manufacturer partnerships and associated companies. The Texas Solar Energy Society also recommends reviewing battery storage installation companies with the Better Business Bureau or on online review sources.

Jasuta advises getting at least three bids from licensed battery storage installers. "When people tell you something is free, be skeptical," he said.

How much will it cost?

The average cost to purchase and install a residential solar system with battery storage can range from a little more than \$19,840 to about \$57,040, according to EnergySage. Prices vary greatly based on system sizes, quality and type of equipment installed. The average electric battery storage system in Texas costs \$1,232 per kWh of storage. A 10 kWh system, which could power a typical home for 8 hours a day, costs about \$12,400 in Texas.

The new federal Inflation Reduction Act provides a 30% tax credit for the cost of installing solar (including battery storage), wind and other renewable home systems. The credit is available from 2022 through 2032, and then will decrease to 26% in 2033 and 22% in 2034. The credit will then expire.

The tax credit can reduce the cost of a typical home energy-storage system by thousands of dollars, and the new law also offers tax credits and rebates for a variety of energy-efficient purchases, including electric vehicles and home improvements, according to a Kiplinger report.

Where are the batteries and other pieces of equipment placed?

Energy storage systems can only be installed in certain areas of your home, according to national fire protection regulations. Those areas include attached or detached garages, exterior walls or outdoors at least 3 feet from doors, windows, utility closets or storage/utility spaces.

The systems are typically connected to the electric grid through your Bluebonnet meter and your home's electric panel. Licensed, professional electricians and battery storage installers can recommend the best location for your system, based on your wiring needs, but most batteries can be placed either in your home's garage or on an exterior wall.

Some cities, including Austin, have ordinances prohibiting batteries from being installed inside your home. The city allows batteries in garages as long as there is a

Five top options on the home battery market

EnergySage is an online database that helps consumers identify average energy battery-storage system costs by size, top battery models and nearby storage system installers. The database was launched in 2013 with help from the U.S. Department of Energy to provide consumers with a platform to do comparison shopping for a solar energy system. Get information on energysage.com, and type in your ZIP code to find the nearest installers. Estimated battery prices do not include installation, but you can find an installer to get a custom quote through EnergySage's website (scroll to Marketplace).

The five most frequently referenced batteries in the EnergySage database are:

Enphase Energy IQ 10

A lithium-ion phosphate battery with a 10.5 kilowatt-hour capacity that can provide 3.84 kilowatts of continuous power, enough to operate an air-conditioning system for one hour. It comes with a 10-year warranty. The 346-pound battery is about 26 inches tall, 42 inches wide and has a depth of 12½ inches. Battery cost ranges from \$7,000 to \$9,000.



Enphase Energy IQ 10a

Tesla Powerwall 2

A lithium-ion battery with a 14.04 kilowatt-hour capacity that can provide 5 kilowatts of continuous power. It also has a 10-year warranty. The 250-pound battery is approximately 45 inches tall, 30 inches wide and has a depth of 6 inches. It costs \$11,500, but all Bluebonnet members are eligible for a \$500 Tesla backup switch discount. The switch makes the installation process easier.



Tesla Powerwall

Generac PWRcell Battery (M3)

A lithium-ion battery with an 11.6 kilowatt-hour capacity. It can provide 3.4 kilowatts of continuous power and has a 10-year warranty. The battery is about 68 inches tall, 22 inches wide and has a depth of 10 inches. It sells for \$12,435 from Generac.



Generac PWRcell Battery (M3)

LG Energy Solution Resu Prime 16H

A lithium-ion battery with a 16 kilowatt-hour capacity that can provide 7 kilowatts of continuous power. It also has a 10-year warranty and weighs 352 pounds. It's about 43 inches tall, 20 inches wide and has a depth of 12 inches. Battery cost ranges from \$10,000 to \$13,000.



LG Energy Solution Resu Prime 16H

Sonnen ecoLinX 12

A lithium-ion battery with a 12 kilowatt-hour capacity. The battery can provide 8 kilowatts of continuous power and comes with a 15-year warranty. It measures approximately 84 inches tall, 26 inches wide, and has a depth of 19 inches. Five authorized dealers sell these batteries in Texas for approximately \$36,000, before installation. The batteries lose their charging efficiency more slowly than competing products and have the ability to integrate with smart home devices, such as a Google Nest.



Sonnen ecoLinX 12

Continued on page 24

Looking for a Ford Lightning?

Haven't spotted any of the highly anticipated Ford Lightning electric trucks on the roads? That's because they're very hard to get.

Ford unveiled the all-electric F-150 in May 2021 and began production at the Rouge Electric Vehicle Center in Dearborn, Mich., in April 2021. A year later, the vehicle officially launched and the first deliveries began arriving at Ford dealerships in May 2022.

As of late August, more than 4,500 F-150 Lightning trucks had been sold, but demand quickly outpaced supply. The current 2022 F-150 Lightning is no longer available for order online at ford.com. Ford began sending invitations to order a 2023 F-150 Lightning in August of this year, and production for the 2023 model started this fall. Ford plans to produce 80,000 of the 2023 F-150 Lightning trucks, a minuscule quantity compared to the 362,686 gas-powered F-150s sold as of July, 2022. Orders will be accepted for the 2024 Ford Lightning in summer 2023, according to Ford.

Can you get one now? Orders are closed for the 2022 F-150 Lightning through Ford, but you can order through



a local dealership. Availability at each dealership is limited and vehicles could only be purchased at dealerships as of late August.

How far will it go? 230-320 estimated miles per charge, based on the vehicle trim and battery options.

How much does it cost? From \$46,974 (base) all the way up to \$96,874 for the Platinum Extended Range model.

How much will it cost to charge it?

The average cost to charge a 2022 F-150 Lightning at home, with a daily commute of 40 miles, is \$59 a month. A comparable gasoline-powered 2022 F-150, if fuel prices average \$3.50 a gallon, would cost \$212 a month. That translates to an annual savings of more than \$2,000, if you charge

from home at least 70% of the time.

Why aren't there more of them? A global semiconductor shortage is impacting the production of these and other vehicles. Ford plans to double all-electric F-150 Lightning production to 150,000 units annually.

To get notifications on the availability of the electric trucks, visit Ford's website, ford.com.

Sources: Ford Media Center, Consumer Reports, Energy.gov, Wall Street Journal

Continued from page 23

firewall between the garage and house, and there is a heat sensor. Many smoke detectors have heat-sensors.

Bluebonnet member Contreras purchased a Tesla Powerwall in July 2020. He placed it inside his garage, although his solar system inverter and wiring were on an exterior wall.

After a solar and battery storage installation is complete, a Bluebonnet service technician must ensure the installation meets safety requirements. Then a new meter will be installed to register how much solar power is returned to Bluebonnet's power lines. You'll sign an interconnection agreement, and then the systems can be turned on.

Will battery storage help me save on my electric bill?

Yes, if you use stored power when renewable energy is not being produced. For a typical 10 kWh battery, if you used 100% of the stored energy when your solar system is not producing power, that would save about \$35 a month. But, if you used only 70% of your stored energy in a home that uses the average 1,000 kWh of electricity a month, you would save about \$24 a month.

It will take much longer for your savings to cover the cost of your investment when compared to a solar-only system. The "break even" period for solar and battery storage systems is based on your out-of-pocket costs, and tax incentives and credits, along



Factory shout-out to the sun

Tesla's Gigafactory off Texas 130 in eastern Travis County is nearly finished with the first phase of its rooftop solar installation project: Solar panels spelling out TESLA in Texas-sized letters. Those panels are expected to produce 9,900 kilowatts of electricity, which is the equivalent amount of electricity used by 1,980 homes on a sunny day in Central Texas. At the end of 2021, the company had installed solar panels capable of generating 21,405 kilowatts on several of its electric vehicle factory rooftops in other locations, according to Tesla's 2021 Impact Report. Tesla's factory east of Austin is one of 41 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative commercial members with solar installations, and seven of those systems produce 50 kilowatts or more.

Photo courtesy Jeff Roberts YouTube channel

with savings on your electric bill. In 2020, the average payback period for a solar-power system was about 12 years, according to data from EnergySage. The online calculator at energysage.com/solar/calculator-results can estimate your savings and payback period based on an average installation cost in your area and financing options. Battery

storage systems often have a longer payback period than solar panel systems, although the benefits of backup power may outweigh the financial impact.

Payback time on a battery system has many variables, and can range from 5 to 14 years, according to a 2021 EnergySage study. ■



File illustration by Joe Stafford

Your co-op, focused on you

Being a cooperative member has its advantages

IT'S NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

— a time to celebrate you, the members of the co-op!

A group of neighbors banded together and organized Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative more than 83 years ago. They worked together for the benefit of the whole community, and the newly established electric lines helped power economic opportunity in our community.

As a utility, we provide safe, reliable and affordable energy to our members. But as a cooperative, we are also motivated by service

to the community rather than profits. Among the advantages to being a Bluebonnet member are:

- You are a member, not a customer, which makes you a partial owner of the cooperative.
- You elect the members who lead the cooperative — the board of directors — at Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting on the second Tuesday of every May.
- Bluebonnet members get capital credits every year, which are much like a return on dividends.

■ We support the communities we serve, because we live here, too.

■ Every year we provide scholarships to students in Bluebonnet's service area and sponsor numerous nonprofit groups and events.

This month and every month, we're so happy to have you as a member of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. Keep an eye on our social media for cooperative stories, videos and giveaways. Plus, learn about your cooperative benefits at bluebonnet.coop/co-op-benefits.

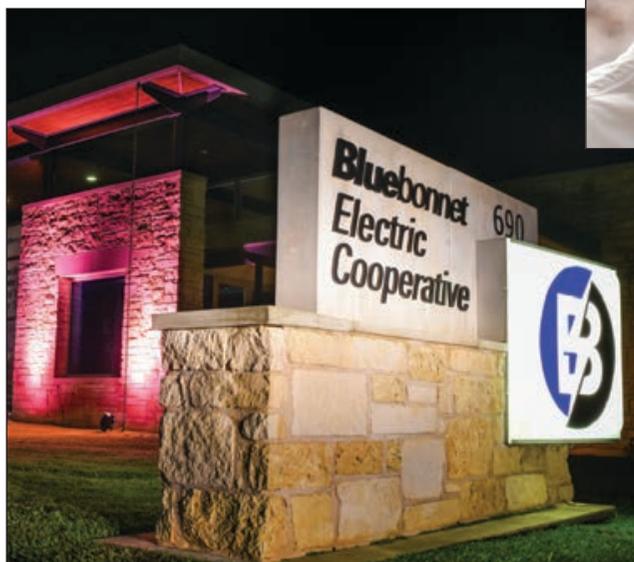
Bluebonnet marks 10 years recognizing Breast Cancer Awareness Month

THIS OCTOBER marks a decade since Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative began working to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month in the communities it serves.

To bring attention to the cause, Bluebonnet has illuminated its five member service centers in pink, field crews have put on pink hard hats, service trucks have sported pink ribbon decals and employees have been wearing pink shirts on select days.

This month, members are encouraged to come to a member service center drive-through — in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor — during business hours, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, to pick up a self-exam reminder card and a fabric pink ribbon pin to support the cause.

Are you or someone you know a breast cancer survivor? Share your story of strength and hope for possible use on our social media. Please send your story (100 words or less) and a photo to Sidni Carruthers at sidni.carruthers@bluebonnet.coop.



For a decade Bluebonnet has been lighting its member service centers pink and finding other ways — like pink hard hats, above — to show support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

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If you're anything like my dad, you give your family everything. Your name, your time, your values — the people in your life know they can depend on you for practically anything. In exchange for imparting all of this energy and experience, you expect nothing in return.

The point? You deserve to treat yourself once in a while. You do so much for the people you care about. Now it's time to focus on you for just a few minutes. That's where the Men's Due Volta Watch comes in. This astonishing innovation provides a digital readout that's powered by a precise quartz engine, combining both analog and digital timekeeping.

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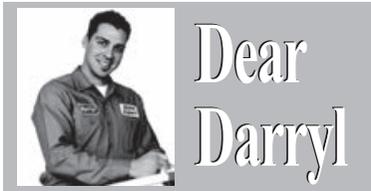
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A D V E R T I S E M E N T

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

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



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

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

Clogged and Smelly – Austin, TX

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

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SeptiCleanse® Shock and Maintenance Programs are designed to work on any septic system regardless of design or age. From modern day systems to sand mounds, and systems installed generations ago, I have personally seen SeptiCleanse unclog and restore these systems in a matter of weeks. I highly recommend that you try it before spending any money on repairs. SeptiCleanse products are available online at www.septicleanse.com or you can order or learn more by calling toll free at 1-888-899-8345. If you use the promo code "TXS17", you can get a free shock treatment, added to your order, which normally costs \$169. So, make sure you use that code when you call or buy online.

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This 16" full tang stainless steel blade is not for the faint of heart —now **ONLY \$99!**

In the blockbuster film, when a strapping Australian crocodile hunter and a lovely American journalist were getting robbed at knife point by a couple of young thugs in New York, the tough Aussie pulls out his dagger and says "That's not a knife, THIS is a knife!" Of course, the thugs scattered and he continued on to win the reporter's heart.

Our Aussie friend would approve of our rendition of his "knife." Forged of high grade 420 surgical stainless steel, this knife is an impressive 16" from pommel to point. And, the blade is full tang, meaning it runs the entirety of the knife, even though part of it is under wraps in the natural bone and wood handle.

Secured in a tooled leather sheath, this is one impressive knife, with an equally impressive price.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

But we don't stop there. While supplies last, we'll include a pair of \$99, 8x21 power compact binoculars, *and* a genuine leather sheath **FREE** when you purchase the *Down Under Bowie Knife*.

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Bison at the Brink

When just 23 were left in Yellowstone National Park, a Texan revived the herd

BY W.F. STRONG • PHOTO BY JULIA ROBINSON

IF IT WEREN'T FOR TEXAS, there would likely be no bison in Yellowstone National Park. This is a large claim, but it's not without merit.

To be honest, Texas had considerable liability in driving the poor bison to near extinction in the first place. However, once people finally realized the range just wouldn't be as happy a home if the buffalo didn't roam, Texas took a leading role in saving these magnificent creatures. Here's how it came about.

In the early 1900s, the U.S. Army, which patrolled the park in those days, estimated that there were just 23 bison left in Yellowstone. They believed that

those might be all the bison that remained in the whole of the wild, wild West. Imagine—just 23 bison left when, 100 years before, there had been some 30 million of them on the American plains. At one time, there were 10 bison for every American, but by 1900, they were nearly gone.

Despite efforts to protect the Yellowstone herd, the poachers poached away. After all, one impressive bison head could fetch \$2,000 to forever gaze across a bar in someplace like Chicago. That's \$60,000 in today's money. Profit was high, and the risk was low. This was the reality that nearly doomed the creatures.

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



After the Army managed to intimidate and scare off most of the poachers, Yellowstone needed some good, purebred bulls to rebuild the meager herd. And it needed them fast.

The problem was that most of the bison then in captivity were cattalo—a mixture of bison, or buffalo, and cattle. But in Texas the famous Charles Goodnight—perhaps the most omnipresent figure in Texas history—had his own herd of bison. His herd had been gathered and nurtured by his wife, Mary Ann Goodnight, who personally saw to it that the orphans found wandering the ranch were saved and protected. And so Goodnight, at his own expense, sent three fine, purebred bulls up to Yellowstone to help rebuild that herd.

It worked. Today there are some 5,500 bison in Yellowstone, thanks in part to Goodnight. True, Congress created Yellowstone, and the U.S. Army did its part to help protect the herd from poachers in that enormous park. But it was Goodnight's gift that truly saved the majestic creatures.

In fact, Yellowstone now says it has too many bison, and the herd needs culling. If you add those to the herd that Goodnight donated to Caprock Canyons State Park in Texas, you can say that Texas is largely responsible for bringing bison back from the brink of absolute extinction. And that's no bull. ■

Nuts About Nuts

These tasty treats draw unique flavors out of their shell

BY MEGAN MYERS, FOOD EDITOR

While walnuts are traditional in Greece, and Turkey uses pistachios, in Texas our thoughts naturally turn to pecans for baklava. This sticky, nutty dessert is easier than it seems—it's simply a matter of layering. Use a basting or pastry brush to lightly apply the butter to each layer, taking care to not rip the delicate phyllo dough.



Pecan Baklava

1 cup water
1½ cups sugar, divided use
½ cup honey
1 tablespoon lemon juice
4 cups pecan halves, finely chopped in a food processor
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
1 pound (1 box) phyllo dough, thawed according to package instructions
¾ cup (1½ sticks) butter, melted

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a small saucepan, combine water, 1 cup sugar and honey, and bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking to dissolve sugar. Once boiling, reduce heat to low and simmer 5–7 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in lemon juice and let syrup cool.
2. In a bowl, combine pecans, remaining ½ cup sugar, cinnamon and cloves.
3. Unroll phyllo dough and trim as necessary to fit a 9-by-13-inch pan. Brush a thin layer of melted butter on the bottom and sides of the pan, then begin building the baklava.
4. Lay down a sheet of phyllo and brush butter over it. Repeat until you have 15 layers. Spread 1 cup of pecan mixture on top. Add 5 layers of phyllo, brushing on butter between each layer, then add 1 cup of pecans. Repeat twice until all pecans are used, then place on remaining phyllo layers, buttering between each.
5. Using a very sharp knife, cut baklava into squares or diamonds, making sure to cut through each layer. Hold the phyllo in place as you cut. Pour over any remaining butter.
6. Bake 40–50 minutes, turning the pan halfway through. Remove from oven and immediately pour the cooled syrup over the top; you should hear it sizzle. Let cool completely before serving.

SERVES 24

TCP Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com, where she features a recipe for Honey Pistachio Shortbread.



Bostock (Almond Toast)

MELISSA TIDWELL
PEDERNALES EC

If you're a fan of bakery almond croissants, you'll love this easy bostock (BOH-stock) recipe. It's perfect for serving at brunch, and you can also freeze the unbaked slices and simply bake one or two as desired.

- 1 loaf challah or brioche**
- 1 cup sliced almonds, divided use**
- 6 tablespoons (¾ stick) butter**
- ⅓ cup sugar**
- 2 teaspoons flour**
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch**
- 1 egg**
- ½ teaspoon almond extract**
- Powdered sugar, for serving**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment. Slice the bread into ½-inch slices and arrange on the baking sheet.
2. In a food processor, pulse ¾ cup almonds until finely chopped. Add butter, sugar, flour, cornstarch, egg and almond extract. Purée until a smooth almond cream is formed.
3. Spread 2–3 tablespoons of the almond cream onto each slice of bread, leaving a small border around the edge to allow for spreading. Sprinkle each piece with a few of the reserved sliced almonds.
4. Bake 15–20 minutes, until almond cream is puffed and browned. Let cool 5–10 minutes, then serve with powdered sugar sprinkled on top.

SERVES 6

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

Spaghetti Squash With Cashew Pesto

RHAE BROWN
SAM HOUSTON EC



Fresh and flavorful, this dish uses cashews to create a dairy-free pesto you'll love. Depending on the size of the squash you use, you might have leftover sauce. Use it as a zesty vegetable dip or spread on crusty bread.

SERVES 2–4



- 1 spaghetti squash**
- ¼ cup plus 1–2 teaspoons olive oil, divided use**
- ¾ cup raw cashews, divided use**
- 2 lemons**
- 2 cups fresh basil**
- 1 avocado, pitted**
- 3 tablespoons water**
- 1 clove garlic**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- ½ teaspoon pepper**

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment. Halve the spaghetti squash and scoop out the seeds. Rub the insides of the squash with 1–2 teaspoons olive oil, then place cut-side down on the baking sheet. Bake 40 minutes or until tender.
2. Meanwhile, chop ¼ cup cashews, then toast in a dry pan over medium heat until golden brown. Set aside for topping.
3. Zest 1 lemon for topping if desired, then juice both. Measure out ¼ cup juice and set aside the rest.
4. In a food processor, combine basil, remaining cashews, avocado, ¼ cup lemon juice, remaining olive oil, water, garlic, salt and pepper. Blend until a smooth pesto forms. Taste and add more lemon juice, salt or pepper if desired.
5. Once the squash is done, use a fork to shred the inside to make "noodles" and scoop into a bowl. Add pesto and mix well. Serve topped with toasted cashews and lemon zest.

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

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Walnut Surprise

GALE HEEP
TRI-COUNTY EC

This simple dessert is a cross between a cookie, a bar and a candy. Heep recommends it warm with ice cream, but it's just as good enjoyed simply with a cup of tea.

- ½ cup flour
- ⅞ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 egg

- 1 cup brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees and coat an 8-inch square pan with nonstick spray.
2. In a small bowl, combine flour, baking soda and salt. In another bowl, beat egg until foamy, then stir in brown sugar and vanilla. Add flour mixture and stir until completely incorporated. Stir in walnuts; the batter will be thick.
3. Spread the batter into the prepared pan, using a greased spatula or spoon to spread to the edges, if needed.
4. Bake 18–25 minutes, until golden brown.

SERVES 9

TCP Find more recipes on our website that make the most of nuts—as the featured or accompanying ingredient. They're perfect heading into the holidays, and most come from the kitchens of *Texas Co-op Power* readers.

Tips for Toasting Nuts

BY MEGAN MYERS

Many recipes call for toasting nuts, which enhances their flavor and makes them deliciously crunchy.

Stovetop method: Set a dry skillet over medium heat and add nuts in a single layer. Cook 3–5 minutes, stirring, until fragrant and starting to darken.

Oven method: Place nuts in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees until fragrant and starting to darken, 5–8 minutes depending on the nut.

To prevent burning, remove nuts from heat as soon as they are toasted.



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COURTESY CHET GARNER

Oodles of Oompahs

A Schulenburg museum preserves polka's enduring power

BY CHET GARNER

IF YOU PASS THROUGH the rolling prairies northeast of San Antonio and listen carefully to the wind, chances are you'll hear the faint sound of a tuba and an accordion floating along. Follow the sound to its source and you could end up in any of dozens of old German and Czech dance halls as polka bands play the music of their ancestors.

Since the late 1800s, polka has been the soundtrack of life for many residents of Fayette County. To learn more about how this unique musical style keeps the beat, I headed to the Texas Polka Music Museum in downtown Schulenburg.

I stepped into the small repository on Lyons Avenue and immediately felt my feet bouncing to the signature "oompah-oompah" playing on the speakers. I was helpless to repel the power of the polka. The walls are covered in pictures, records and stories of the numerous polka artists who have hailed from the Lone Star State—bands like Vrazel's Polka Band, which toured Texas for more than 50 years.

There are also dozens of cases and displays filled with instruments and mementos going back well over 100 years, including booths from local radio DJs that kept the polka power going around the clock. Of course, any proper polka band needs an accordion, tuba and saxophone. But just as important are the matching outfits. This museum has some that would give Elton John a run for his money.

Like most folks, I don't listen to a lot of polka music, but after visiting this museum, I discovered a newfound appreciation for the art and culture of polka. I even bought a CD so I could oom-pah-pah all the way home. ■

ABOVE Chet takes in the polka grooves that resonate in Fayette County.

TCP Toe-tap with Chet in 2/4 time to this nearly two-century-old music. Our website features his latest video, and watch all his Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



Know Before You Go

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

OCTOBER

07

Fredericksburg [7-9] Texas Mesquite Arts Festival, (830) 997-8515, texasmesquiteartfestivals.com

08

Lexington Blue Volunteer Fire Department Fund-raiser, (512) 229-8533, facebook.com/bluevfd

Stonewall Fish Fry, (830) 990-8793, stonewallvfd.com

Tyler Rose City Music Festival, (903) 593-6905, therosecitymusicfestival.com

Chappell Hill [8-9] Scarecrow Festival, (979) 836-6033, chappellhillhistoricalsociety.com

Edom [8-9] Art Festival, (903) 258-5192, edomarts.com

Pearland [8-9] Art on the Pavilion, (281) 997-5971, visitpearland.com

13

Collinsville 42 Bed Bash, (903) 465-6041, texomafamilyshester.com

Tyler [13-16] Texas Rose Festival, (903) 593-6905, texasrosefestival.com

14

Kyle Halloween Movie in the Park, (512) 262-3939, cityofkyle.com

Canton [14-15] Texas Star Quilters Guild Quilt Show, (903) 312-5252

Henderson [14-15] Rusk County PRCA Rodeo, (903) 657-3699, visithendersontx.com

15

Driftwood [14-16] Austin String Band Festival,
(512) 644-0212, aftm.us

Canyon Lake BBQ Cook Off, (830) 964-2223,
canyonlakechamber.com

Clifton FallFest,
(254) 675-8337,
cityofclifton.org

Conroe Fall Herb/Vegetable and Succulent Sale,
(936) 539-7824, mcmga.com

Frisco The Boho Market at Frisco Square,
(214) 202-2668,
thebohohomarket.co

Plano International Festival,
planointernationalfestival.org

Waco Oakwood Cemetery's Walking Tales, (254) 717-1763

Brenham [15-16] Texas Arts & Music Festival,
(979) 337-7580,
texasartsandmusicfestival.com

21

Cisco [21-22] Pie Fest,
(254) 334-9621,
ciscotxpiefest.com

Austin [21-23] Gem Capers,
(512) 458-9546,
agms-tx.org

Plano [21-23] Hollydays Market, (972) 941-5840,
visitplano.com

22

Burnet Zombie Color Run,
(512) 756-6182,
burnet.revtrak.net

Fredericksburg Food & Wine Fest, (830) 997-8515,
fbgfoodandwinefest.com

MORE EVENTS >

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Pick of the Month

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OCTOBER EVENTS CONTINUED

22

Kyle Center Street Trick-or-Treat, (512) 262-3939, cityofkyle.com

Palestine Hot Pepper Festival, (903) 723-3014, visitpalestine.com

Plano Fall Harvest Festival and Outdoor Market, (469) 467-9995, visitplano.com

Round Rock Diwali Festival, info@rrdiwalifest.com, rrdiwalifest.com

Cottonwood Shores [22-23] Legends of the Falls, (830) 693-3830, cottonwoodshores.org

Kerrville [22-23] Mountain Bike Festival, (830) 896-6864, kerrvillemountainbikefestival.com

25

Kenney [25-29] Hodges Farm Antique Show, (979) 865-9077, hodgesfarmtexas@gmail.com

28

Imperial [28-29] Horsehead Crossing Trails of Time, (432) 336-6316, pecoscountyhistoricalcommission.org

Kerrville [28-30] Texas Fleece and Fiber Festival, (361) 537-0503, texasfleeceandfiber.com

29

Copperas Cove Fall-O-Ween Festival, (254) 542-2719, www.copperascovetx.gov

Llano Llano River Pumpkin Float, (325) 247-5354, llanochamber.org

Sanger Sellabration, (940) 458-7702, sangertexas.com

Salado [29-30] Table-rock's Fright Trail, (254) 308-2200, tablerock.org

31

Kerrville Family Fright Night, (830) 257-7300, kerrvilletx.gov

NOVEMBER

04

New Braunfels [4-13] Wurstfest, (830) 625-9167, wurstfest.com

05

Brenham Radney Foster & Darden Smith, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

Jefferson Fall History Haunts and Legends Event, (903) 601-3375, visitjeffersonstexas.com

07

Georgetown Wurstbraten 50th Sausage Festival, (512) 863-3065, zionwalburg.org

Hometown Pride

Sports, artwork, history and landmarks all make us proud as peacocks to call our town home, no matter the size. These reader offerings just make us beam with Texas pride. So pull up a lawn chair and gather the kids. Here comes the parade.

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1 JOAN WILSON
BLUEBONNET EC

Wilson's granddaughter, Maddie Wilson, gets an early start experiencing Friday night lights with the Hendrickson Hawks cheerleaders in Pflugerville.

2 JONNIE ENGLAND
NUECES EC

Pecos, in far west Reeves County, shows hometown pride with the Pecos Boot Trail, a public art project.

3 JULIE TUPY
HILCO EC

Willie Nelson, painted on a downtown garage in his hometown of Abbott.

4 KATE MANRRIQUEZ
WHARTON COUNTY EC

Taylor Manriquez plays first base for the El Campo High School Ricebirds.



2



3



4

Upcoming Contests

- DUE OCT 10** First Responders
- DUE NOV 10** Land, Sea or Sky
- DUE DEC 10** Riding the River



Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for more Hometown Pride photos from readers.



Quay Rathbone of Victoria was the first Turkey Trot sultana, in 1913.

TCP Go to our website to see Caytlyn Phillips' documentary, *Because Two Birds Raced*.



turkey capital of the world.

Thus began the Great Gobbler Gallop, with a Cuero turkey perpetually named Ruby Begonia facing Worthington's Paycheck ("nothing goes faster than a paycheck").

Ruby Begonia heads to downtown Worthington for the first leg every year at King Turkey Day, a month before Turkeyfest. Then the birds race again along Main Street in Cuero, a frenzy of feathers spurred on by crowds lining the way. The bird with the best cumulative time claims the Traveling Turkey Trophy of Tumultuous Triumph for its town.

It's no surprise that the gallop is one of my fondest childhood memories. Cuero's peculiar history with gobblers has long been my favorite aspect of my hometown and even became the focus of my master's thesis. It's not every day that you get to see flightless fowl excitedly plod down an ordinarily busy street. Our silly little tradition enthralled me and drew me in every October.

But the birds barely scrape the surface. It's the enriching union of the communities that brings the festival to life.

Turkeyfest organizers are still moved to tears recalling the generosity of their Worthington friends over the years. Five years ago, when Hurricane Harvey's winds whipped through Cuero, Worthington's residents sent a tractor trailer loaded with essentials, including bottled water and cleaning supplies, to our community.

So at Turkeyfest this year, October 7–9, we will again relish gathering with friends, family and visitors. We'll enjoy cool beverages, good food and all kinds of fun activities. And we'll treasure our bond with that faraway town up north.

It's true: Birds of a feather do flock together. ■

Not for the Birds

Trotting turkeys—and so much more—unite towns separated by a thousand miles

BY CAYTLYN PHILLIPS

AMID THE PASTURES on the main road between San Antonio and the Gulf Coast sits the turkey-centric town of Cuero.

Its long history with the fowl dates back to 1908, when its first turkey processing plant opened. Crowds flocked to witness farmers parade their poultry down the streets, and the town seized the opportunity, dubbing it the Turkey Trot. The first one occurred in 1912, and they continued intermittently into the 1970s.

Fifty years ago this month, the Turkey Trot shifted to a four-day festival known as Turkeyfest. No longer did thousands of turkeys march down Main Street. Instead, Cuero partnered with rival turkey town Worthington, Minnesota, and they jointly decided an annual turkey race was the best way to determine the

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