AT HOME
IN A MISSILE SILO

ONE-SKILLET
DINNERS

FRITO PIE:
A TEXAS ORIGINAL

Texas Co-op Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

SEPTEMBER 2025

Reining in the Parks

Hitting the trails on horseback is the way to go

BLUEBONNET EC NEWS

SEE PAGE 16

BREAKING GROUND ON GROUND BREAKING HOMES

You may not realize it, but the homes you build are sitting on a **free and renewable supply of energy**. WaterFurnace geothermal systems tap into the stored solar energy underground to provide savings up to 70% on heating, cooling, and hot water. In fact, the average WaterFurnace owner in Texas pays **only $57 per month to heat and cool their homes**. WaterFurnace units not only save more money than any ordinary HVAC systems, but also **last 40% longer**, are quieter thanks to no outdoor equipment, and require less maintenance—which all contribute to higher satisfactions levels from your clients.

Contact our WaterFurnace Concierges Team at waterfurnace.com/TexasPower to learn more today.

Scan to learn more about the benefits of switching to geothermal.

WaterFurnace
Smarter from the Ground Up™

WaterFurnace is a registered trademark of WaterFurnace International, Inc.

1. 14.5¢ kWh – 2024 Indiana's Annual Electricity Rate Average eia.gov/opendata/qb.php?category=1012 | Actual data powered by Symphony

September 2025

10

ON THE COVER
Mary Apple-Williams leads the way on a trail ride at soon-to-open Palo Pinto Mountains State Park.
Photo by Dave Shafer
ABOVE
Bruce Townsley at the launch control panel of his 1960s missile silo south of Abilene.
Photo by Eric W. Pohl

Pluck the Perfect Book

DO YOU LOVE being cooped up with a good book?

Central Texas author A.A. Davenport's *A Chicken Was There* collection aims to entertain while imparting history along the way—a perfect escape for National Read a Book Day on September 6.

Through the eyes of chickens, Davenport, a Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative member, takes readers to colonial America, the Civil War, Wild West and more.

"I was watching a movie with my husband. He really likes Westerns, and I noticed that there were chickens everywhere—in town, out on the homestead, at the stagecoach station," says Davenport, a former English teacher at Smithville Junior High School. "That's when I thought that the chickens have been eyewitnesses to a lot of historical events."

Her sixth book in the series came out in July.

A Pioneer in Academia

June Brewer made history in 1950 when she became one of the first African American women to apply and be admitted to graduate school at the University of Texas.

Brewer, born 100 years ago this month in Austin, got her bachelor's degree at the college now known as Huston-Tillotson University. After getting her doctorate from UT, she taught English for 35 years at what was then Huston-Tillotson College.

TCP *Contests and More*

ENTER CONTESTS AT TEXASCOOPPOWER.COM

$500 RECIPE CONTEST
Cheesecake

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Snakes Alive!

RECOMMENDED READING
Revisit our September 2005 issue to see how our Best of Co-op Country picks stand up to the test of time. Read it at TexasCoopPower.com.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My favorite football team is ...

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 July prompt: **My favorite Fourth of July was ...**

The bicentennial celebration in 1976, with the huge regatta of tall ships in New York Harbor and the massive fireworks show over Lady Liberty.

STUART BERKOWITZ
PEDERNALES EC
MANCHACA

When my city relatives visited our farm, and for the first time I tasted soda pop and saw fireworks.

LORETTA BEDFORD
DEEP EAST TEXAS EC
SAN AUGUSTINE

When I came back from Vietnam in 1970.

LIONEL ROACH
CENTRAL TEXAS EC
BLUFFTON

When my husband and I had our first date and first kiss.

ELLEN HOLDCROFT
WOOD COUNTY EC
QUITMAN

Visit our website to see more responses.

BOOKS: STACY COALE. FOOTBALL HELMET: YOBRO10 | DREAMSTIME.COM. JUNE BREWER: COURTESY TEXAS STATE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

JULY 2025 **A Century of the Simon**

"I grew up in the late 1950s, early '60s spending Saturday afternoons at the Simon Theatre. Kids got money for the show and maybe popcorn and a soda."

TED KEMPER
SAN BERNARD EC
BELLVILLE

Dressed for the Theater

When I was a student at Blinn Junior College in Brenham in 1977, I attended my first viewing of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* at the Simon Theatre [*A Century of the Simon*, July 2025].

A friend and I were driving by one night and saw a long line of people dressed in what is now common garb for the *RHPS* experience. Back then it was quite a shock to see some of my dormmates in that line wearing fishnet stockings and bustiers.

William Culver III
Farmers EC
Murphy

Rodgers' Influence

Jimmie Rodgers did not sell more records—10 million—than any other RCA Victor artist before Elvis Presley [*The Fast Track*, July 2025].

In a 10-year period before Presley's first release, Perry Como sold more than 30 million records for RCA Victor.

Coy Prather
Trinity Valley EC
Montalba

EDITOR'S NOTE You're correct, and we'll regret this mistake "till the end of time." We have fixed the story online.

I wonder if the author is familiar with Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass Music. Monroe played, sang and recorded many of Jimmie Rodgers' songs back in the mid-to-late 1920s, 1930s and very possibly into the 1940s.

Rodgers very likely influenced Monroe into occasionally adding yodeling to his own music.

Mike Adams
San Bernard EC
Magnolia

Family Love

Stepping Up [May 2025] brought tears to my eyes. As a stepparent, I related to this story. DNA isn't what matters in a blended family—it's the love.

Rosie Strode
Tri-County EC
Parker County

SIMON THEATRE: NATALIE LACY LANGE | COURTESY THE BARNHILL CENTER AT HISTORIC SIMON THEATRE. JIMMIE RODGERS: COURTESY JIMMIE RODGERS LEGACY

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor
Austin, TX 78701

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

Texas Co-op Power

TEXAS CO-OP POWER Volume 82, Number 3 (USPS 540-560). *Texas Co-op Power* is published monthly by Texas Electric Cooperatives. Periodical postage paid at Austin, TX, and at additional offices. TEC is the statewide association representing 76 electric cooperatives. *Texas Co-op Power*'s website is TexasCoopPower.com. Call (512) 454-0311 or email editor@TexasCoopPower.com.

SUBSCRIPTIONS Subscription price is $5.11 per year for individual members of subscribing cooperatives and is paid from equity accruing to the member. If you are not a member of a subscribing cooperative, you can purchase an annual subscription at the nonmember rate of $7.50. **Co-op members:** Please notify your co-op of address changes or other subscription requests.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to *Texas Co-op Power* (USPS 540-560), 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. Please enclose label from this copy of *Texas Co-op Power* showing old address and key numbers.

ADVERTISING Contact Elaine Sproull at (512) 486-6251 or esproull@texas-ec.org for information about purchasing display ad space in *Texas Co-op Power* and/or in our 26 sister publications in other states. Advertisements in *Texas Co-op Power* are paid solicitations. The publisher neither endorses nor guarantees in any manner any product or company included in this publication.

Texas Electric Cooperatives
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
Alliance for Audited Media
American MainStreet Publications

Mounts in the Hills

Equestrian trails maintained by volunteers offer a stunning way to take in Texas

BY ANNA MAZUREK
PHOTO BY DAVE SHAFER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN O'ROURKE

Mary Apple-Williams was riding her retired ranch horse, Slick, on the equestrian trails at Benbrook Lake south of Fort Worth in April 2016 when she noticed sections of two trails were closed due to storm damage.

After talking with a park ranger, she discovered the nonprofit Texas Equestrian Trail Riders Association helped maintain the trails. She immediately joined the organization, reached out to her region's manager and led efforts to reopen the trails, which are now maintained by TETRA continually.

For her and many others who find great joy in trail riding, this is important work.

From right, Mary Apple-Williams on Cutter, Brenda Laing on Sunshine, Staci Barnes on Shadow and Matt Barnes on Lily depart the equine campground at Palo Pinto Mountains State Park in North Texas. The park is expected to open in 2026.

"For equestrians, riding is more than a hobby; it's a profound connection with nature," Apple-Williams says. "From the fragrance of spring blooms to the thrill of mountain trails, every ride is a celebration of the natural world."

Apple-Williams, who went on to serve as TETRA president from 2022 to 2024, says the nonprofit's goal is to develop and maintain riding trails across the state.

"We're a voice for equestrians in the state of Texas, and that is needed so much more today than it has been in the past," Apple-Williams says.

TETRA members and volunteers maintain more than three dozen trails, including some at Army Corps of Engineers lakes and many at state parks, through fundraising rides and scheduled workdays during the spring and fall. Volunteers put in a combined 800–1,000 hours a year doing trail maintenance, Apple-Williams says.

At Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway in the Panhandle, TETRA helped prevent a section of the trail built along a former railroad from being shut down in May 2022. That's despite the group's aging and dwindling membership, declining from 2,000 members when it was founded in 1997 to fewer than 300 statewide today.

"We were out there replacing boards off of the railroad trestle, and that was hard work," Apple-Williams says. "When you look at our volunteers, the average volunteer age of our organization—we're not spring chickens anymore."

Many state parks and other natural areas are supported by nonprofit organizations founded by volunteers, including TETRA members, who enjoy using and maintaining the outdoor spaces. "We support those groups with labor, expenses [and] grants," Apple-Williams says. "We'll do a benefit ride out there where any funds we collect … we turn back into that group to help maintain that park."

Since equestrian trails are often multiuse trails, TETRA's restoration efforts also benefit hikers and mountain bikers at state parks, where attendance has topped 9 million each year since 2021, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

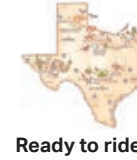
Apple-Williams is now a manager for TETRA's Region 4, which encompasses a section of North Texas that includes the soon-to-open Palo Pinto Mountains State Park. To assist construction efforts, TETRA held trail rides at the site in 2017 and 2018 and donated proceeds to the park's nonprofit, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park Partners, which advocated for trail riders during the park design process.

In November 2024, she volunteered at an on-site workday.

"To me, that day wasn't a workday but a preview of what riders would experience for years to come—beautiful streams, winding trails through large boulders [and] high plateaus where you can see for miles," she says.

If you ask Apple-Williams about her favorite place to ride in Texas, she can't pick one because there are too many amazing and diverse trails.

"I think the best place to ride is Texas," she says. ■



Ready to ride? Turn the page to explore five state parks that are top picks among trail riders.

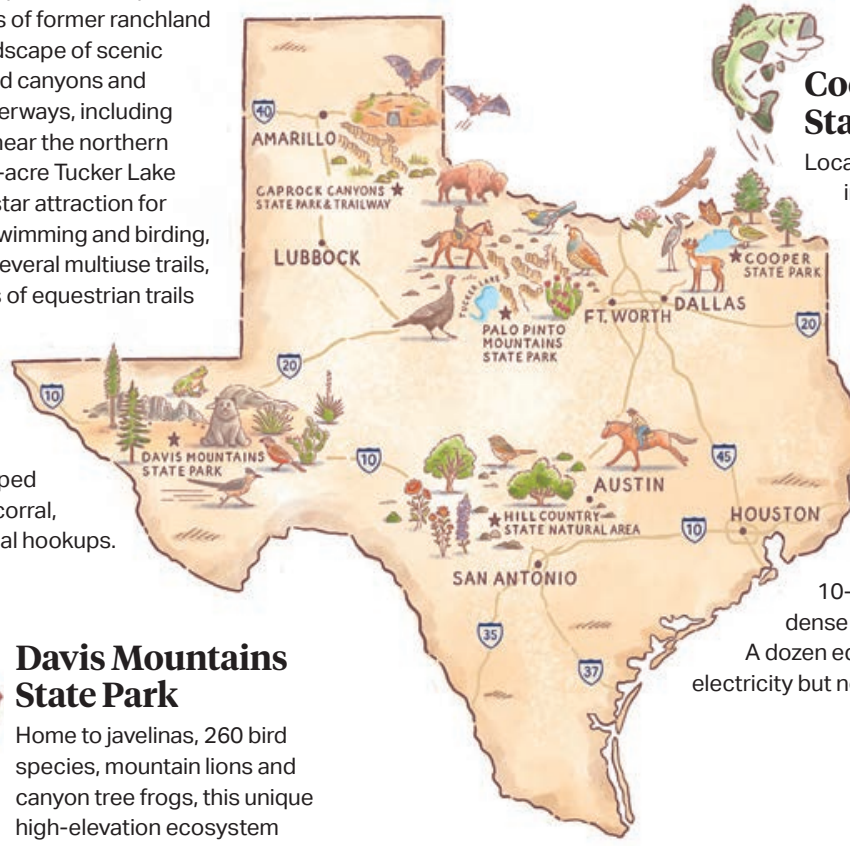
Across the Lone Star State, there are 19 equestrian trails in state parks (all of which require proof of a current Coggins test, which screens for potentially fatal equine infectious anemia). These are some of trail riders' favorites.

Palo Pinto Mountains State Park

Tucked halfway between Abilene and Fort Worth, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park will be Texas' first new state park in 17 years when it opens. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has not set an opening date. The park will comprise nearly 5,000 acres of former ranchland with a rugged landscape of scenic plateaus, sheltered canyons and crisscrossing waterways, including Palo Pinto Creek near the northern boundary. The 90-acre Tucker Lake will be the park's star attraction for fishing, boating, swimming and birding, and there will be several multiuse trails, including 11 miles of equestrian trails with substantial trailhead parking for trail riders. Each of the 10 equestrian campsites will be equipped with a two-horse corral, water and electrical hookups.

Caprock Canyon State Park and Trailway

Home to the Texas State Bison Herd, this 15,000-acre park has 90 miles of trails, including the equestrian-friendly 64-mile-long multiuse trailway built on a former freight and passenger railway that operated from the early 1920s until 1989. The trailway has a variety of access points and passes through Clarity Tunnel, home to a half-million Mexican free-tailed bats. The Panhandle park also has a dozen primitive equestrian campsites with two corrals each.



Cooper State Park

Located on Jim Chapman Lake in northeast Texas, this park is an angler's paradise with an abundance of water activities and trails to explore. The park consists of two areas—the northern Doctor's Creek Unit and the equestrian-friendly South Sulphur Unit on the southern shore. The challenging Buggy Whip Equestrian Trail is a 10-mile adventure through dense forests and creek ravines. A dozen equestrian campsites have electricity but no stables.

Davis Mountains State Park

Home to javelinas, 260 bird species, mountain lions and canyon tree frogs, this unique high-elevation ecosystem at the base of the Davis Mountains was formed 25 million–30 million years ago by volcanic eruptions. This volcanic activity is responsible for the West Texas park's most unique formations, Frazier's Canyon, Sleeping Lion and Barrel Springs. Trail riders can explore the stunning landscape on 11 miles of trails that meander from 4,900 to 5,700 feet with scenic overlooks in the Limpia Canyon area. There are six primitive equestrian campsites.

Hill Country State Natural Area

At this former ranch northwest of San Antonio, 40 miles of shared-use equestrian trails cover terrain that includes flat, broad prairies and steep, rocky canyons. The park's extensive equestrian facilities include a day-use area near the headquarters with a water trough, hitching posts and a flush toilet. Overnight equestrian accommodations include six primitive campsites with pens, a group camp that has a barn with stalls for nine horses, and a 1930s ranch house that sleeps 12 humans and has stalls for five horses.

AMERICAN CRUISE LINES

Explore New England

with the Leader in U.S. Cruising

Immerse yourself in the sights, sounds, and tastes of New England. From quaint island villages to the breathtaking beauty of the coastline, summer in New England is a truly delightful experience. Discover the region's rich maritime heritage, savor a traditional Lobsterbake, and marvel at grand mansions of the Gilded Age. Return to the comfort of your onboard sanctuary and bask in the warm camaraderie of fellow guests and crew.

Your Grand New England Cruise Includes:

- ★ 15-days/14-nights on board the ship
- ★ An exploration of 15 ports of call, with guided excursion options at each
- ★ All onboard meals and our signature evening cocktail hour
- ★ Full enrichment package with guest speakers and nightly entertainment
- ★ All tips and gratuities

Call today

800-459-2596

to request a free Cruise Guide

Small Ship Cruising Done Perfectly®

BY SAMANTHA BRYANT • PHOTOS BY ERIC W. POHL

COUNTING DOWN

Missile silo owners are fighting rust and ruin to preserve and repurpose subterranean Cold War relics

BRUCE TOWNSLEY'S FAVORITE place to visit in Japan is Ryoanji Temple Rock Garden in Kyoto. The enigmatic garden has 15 stones, but only 14 are visible to the viewer, no matter where they stand. One side of the garden is arid and stark, but walk around a corner and there's lush greenery.

It's the unexpected that gets him.

So it's little wonder that Townsley's home in Oplin, south of Abilene, is an illusion all its own. Drive onto his property, and you'll see a few small buildings and a Quonset hut. But that's the tip of the iceberg—one that descends 18 stories into the ground.

For the past 25 years, Townsley has lived underground in the two-story launch control center of a decommissioned missile silo. A relic of the Cold War, the 185-foot silo is one of 12 near Dyess Air Force Base that once housed nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missiles meant to deter the Soviet Union from using their own.

The Atlas F missile sites roughly encircle Abilene like points on a clock face, a silently ticking time bomb that thankfully never had to be ignited—despite veering dangerously close during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

In 1965, the government salvaged much of the metal, removed the 82-foot missiles and sold the silos to private owners and municipalities. Townsley bought his in 1997, and he's one of several missile silo owners bent on preserving the structures so future generations can learn about and honor this pivotal moment in the Cold War.

Townsley, formerly a real estate broker in Colorado, initially was interested in the site as a renovation project. He still remembers his first visit to West Texas, crawling into the silo by way of an air vent shaft and shining his flashlight deep inside the cavernous concrete and steel structure.

"It felt like it was—this is going to sound strange—alive," he says. "It was just like something was sleeping. It wasn't a frightening feeling; it was just an unusual feeling."

OPPOSITE Bruce Townsley in his missile silo in Oplin. The crib, the silo's steel framework, held an Atlas F intercontinental missile in the early 1960s.

RIGHT, FROM TOP A close-up of Townsley's Cold War-era missile launch control panel. He converted the control center into a living space.

"IF WE DON'T KNOW OUR PAST, WE CAN'T LIVE OUR FUTURE THE WAY LIFE IS INTENDED TO BE LIVED."

As with many of the 72 Atlas F silos built across six states, water had seeped into the vast void over the years, and the walls were graffitied with the names of local students who had sneaked onto the property decades ago.

Townsley, a Taylor Electric Cooperative member, purchased the property for $99,000 and set about making the control center into a personal residence. Connected to the silo by a 40-foot tunnel, it once housed a five-man missile crew on its upper floor and equipment and offices on another floor.

After about 18 months of renovations, Townsley began his subterranean existence that has lasted more than a quarter century. He says he enjoys the quiet. The living spaces are white and open, with plenty of lighting and high ceilings.

"You don't have that sense of claustrophobia," Townsley says. "Now, some people really react to there being no windows, but cameras and monitors provide a pretty good substitute."

After renovating the control center, Townsley, with the help of others, turned his efforts to the silo itself, draining the water and removing debris (the only bones he found belonged to a coyote and an armadillo). He was also able to get one of the 75-ton, 3-foot-thick silo doors operable so that it once again opens to the sky with the press of a button.

As Townsley renovated the property, he became friends with people who had helped construct the facilities and missileers who served when the sites were active, 1962–65.

"You can't help but get involved in the history of it," Townsley says. "It's just part of it."

One of the people he met was Roger Jensen, who enlisted in the Air Force in 1961 at age 19 and worked on the Abilene silo sites as an electrical technician with the 578th Strategic Missile Squadron.

Now in his 80s, Jensen still remembers some of the passwords he spoke at the door to gain access to the control center, words like "bicycle" and "wheelbarrow."

"We spent 24 hours in and out of the silo," Jensen says. "We had to go out into the silo at least once every hour to take specific readings on various pieces of equipment."

Tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union were high during those years, especially during the 13-day Cuban Missile Crisis, when the Soviets deployed nuclear missiles to Cuba. The Air Force's Strategic Air Command was at DEFCON 2, one step away from the highest level of readiness for nuclear war.

With a wife and baby in Abilene, Jensen says the possibility of nuclear war became undeniable for the crew. "It was a big dose of reality and what was reality at that time," he says.

The crisis was averted through diplomatic agreements, and Jensen says the crew was "elated when it was over."

In homage to that history, Townsley had long thought his silo should be turned into a museum, an idea planted by the broker who showed it to him. And in January 2024, he started the Atlas Missile Museum of Texas, a nonprofit organization with a five-member board.

Visitors must make an appointment through his website, www.atlasmissilemuseumoftexas.org, to tour the silo and control center and learn about the site's role in the Cold War. They can walk into the silo and see the steel crib once equipped with an elevator capable of raising the Atlas F missile to the surface and launching it in about 10 minutes. Townsley has a model elevator to show how it works and a refurbished control console that simulates a missile launch.

A short drive down the road in Lawn, Larry Sanders is also preserving the history at his missile silo, which he acquired in 1999. Sanders spearheaded a movement in 2001 to get the roadway it sits along renamed to the Atlas ICBM Highway.

He spent years saving the complex from its more recent No. 1 enemy: rust.

"My immediate concern was stabilization," Sanders says. "You have to keep in mind that water was everywhere. Wood rot, decomposing Sheetrock, metals being compromised totally to rust. So we did nothing for the first five years but demolition."

Now that the site is stable and clean, Sanders plans to add back infrastructure. Through the Atlas Missile Base Cold War Center, a nonprofit he founded, he holds on-site events and gives presentations to groups about the Cold War, a time that can sometimes get forgotten.

"No one received the recognition and the honor that they deserved in winning the Cold War, unlike World War II," Sanders says.

In addition to veterans, Sanders says the heroes of the time include civilian contractors and city administrators. "Texas had a significant role in America's Cold War victory, and Texans need to celebrate Texas' role in that victory," he says.

Like a lot of American schoolchildren in the early Cold War era, Sanders grew up doing "duck and cover" air raid drills in elementary school and watching the political tension unfold on TV.

Mark Hannifin, who owns a missile silo in Shep, also remembers this tense time and tells younger generations that for them, "the Cold War might as well have been in black and white. It's kind of like us looking at the second World War or our predecessors looking at the first World War and Civil War. No, it was in color. It was a real thing."

Hannifin and his wife, Linda, bought their silo in 1982 and were "armchair survivalists" at the time, he says. To avoid detection, they used a code word whenever they referred to the facility in public.

An avid scuba diver, Hannifin eventually decided to open the silo for diving and began cleaning out the debris. Their business, Dive Valhalla, hosts scuba dive clubs in the 120 feet of water.

"It's nice, crystal-clear well water," Hannifin says. "We have been letting people dive in there for about 30 years now."

Hannifin's control center is equipped with beds for overnight stays, and he shows a short Cold War documentary and slideshow so visitors are aware of the silo's original mission.

The Hannifins no longer feel the need to keep it under wraps, and Mark says he's seen other missile silo owners move from concealing their purchase to being more open about it.

The silos were part of a top-secret mission (although folks in Abilene couldn't have missed the construction crews that arrived in 1960 to build them). When that secret mission faded, the silos "had fallen out of use," Hannifin says. "Fallen out of memory."

But these dutiful owners are ensuring this important history isn't buried by time.

Jensen, who spent many hours in the silo as a young man during the beginning of his military service, certainly won't forget.

"If we don't know our past," Jensen says, "we can't live our future the way life is intended to be lived."

OPPOSITE Mark Hannifin turned his silo in Shep into Dive Valhalla for scuba divers. A staircase and gangplank connect to a floating platform.

BELOW The entry to Larry Sanders' silo in Lawn.

TCP Watch the video on our website to get a window into this underground world.

Survival of the Sharpest

*When it's you against nature, there's only one tool you need: the tempered steel Stag Hunter from Stauer—now **ONLY $59!***

That first crack of thunder sounded like a bomb just fell on Ramshorn Peak. Black clouds rolled in and the wind shook the trees. I had ventured off the trail on my own, gambled with the weather and now I was trapped in the forest. Miles from camp. Surrounded by wilderness and watching eyes. I knew that if I was going to make it through the night I needed to find shelter and build a fire... fast. As the first raindrops fell, I reached for my ***Stag Hunter Knife***.

Forget about smartphones and GPS, because when it comes to taking on Mother Nature, there's only one tool you really need. Our stunning ***Stag Hunter*** is the ultimate sidekick for surviving and thriving in the great outdoors. Priced at $149, the ***Stag Hunter*** can be yours today for an unbelievable **$59!** Call now and we'll include a bonus leather sheath!

A legend in steel. The talented knifemakers of Trophy Stag Cutlery have done it again by crafting a fixed-blade beauty that's sharp in every sense of the word. The ***Stag Hunter*** sports an impressive 5⅓" tempered German stainless steel blade with a genuine deer stag horn and stained Pakkawood™ handle, brass hand guard and polished pommel. You get the best in 21st-century construction with a classic look inspired by legendary American pioneers.

But we don't stop there. While supplies last, we'll include a pair of $99 30x60 HD pocket binoculars *and* a genuine leather sheath **FREE** when you purchase the Stag Hunter Knife.

Your satisfaction is 100% guaranteed. Feel the knife in your hands, wear it on your hip, inspect the craftsmanship. If you're not completely impressed, send it back within 30 days for a complete refund of the item price. But we believe that once you wrap your fingers around the ***Stag Hunter's*** handle, you'll be ready to carve your own niche into the wild frontier.

Stag Hunter Knife ~~$149~~*

Offer Code Price Only **$59** + S&P Save $90

1-800-333-2045

Your Insider Offer Code: SHK372-10

You must use the insider offer code to get our special price.

Stauer® 14091 Southcross Drive W., Dept. SHK372-10
Burnsville, Minnesota 55337 www.stauer.com

**Discount is only for customers who use the offer code versus the listed original Stauer.com price.*

Rating of A+

EXCLUSIVE
FREE
Stauer 30x60 HD Pocket Binoculars
-a $99 value-
with your purchase of the Stag Hunter Knife

BONUS! Call today and you'll also receive this genuine leather sheath!

TAKE 60% OFF INSTANTLY! When you use your INSIDER OFFER CODE

Not shown actual size.

★★★★★
"This knife is beautiful!"
— J., La Crescent, MN

★★★★★
"The feel of this knife is unbelievable... this an incredibly fine instrument."
— H., Arvada, CO

• 5 1/3" fixed German stainless steel blade (9 3/4" total length) • Stag horn and Pakkawood™ handle • Includes leather sheath

Stauer... *Afford the Extraordinary.*®

FARM TEC

Bluebonnet-area farmers combine their instincts and experience with apps, artificial intelligence, data, drones and advanced equipment to yield better crops and more efficient care for cattle.

Story by Addie Broyles ● Photos by Sarah Beal

As farming technology advances, Emory Thomas looks forward to the future. He also wants to keep driving his truck.

Thomas is the second-generation owner of a turfgrass company with several farms in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area. He grew up in North Texas, where his father and grandfather were originally dairy farmers. They moved to Central Texas and transitioned to growing sod in the late 1960s.

It was a family affair with all three of his brothers working at the company until his dad sold it in 1999. Thomas eventually started Thomas Turfgrass, which he now runs with his wife, Sandy, and their two children, Seth Thomas and Traci Thomas Claughton.

In some ways, the process of growing turfgrass and cutting it into squares or rolling it into mats hasn't changed much in recent decades, but technology today results in a more efficient and automated process.

Until a few years ago, Thomas Turfgrass used a harvesting machine that required two people to stand on the back and stack sod onto a pallet. Now they use a machine with a robotic arm that can move five rolls of turf at a time onto pallets that can hold 35 rolls each — all while the harvester is moving. That machine and their mowers are all guided by built-in GPS systems that keep them from overlapping when they mow, Thomas said.

The next big investment will likely be an autonomous mower that can cover 25 acres per hour, but Thomas said they won't rush into it. "You can tie a lot of money up real quick buying new equipment," he said, adding that they will wait until "all of those bugs are worked out before we try it."

Thomas embraces technology and is always learning, even if it doesn't come naturally to him. "If I have a problem with my phone, I may work on it for three hours; then my daughter will straighten it out in three seconds," he said. "I learn as much as I can as fast as I can, but my daughter and my son have to educate me frequently."

Above: A drone operated by Brian Peoples sprays crops in Brenham. Drones are increasingly becoming an indispensable tool for farmers and ranchers.

Above, the Firefly Automatic ProSlab 160 turf harvester has sped up operations at Thomas Turfgrass farms in the Bluebonnet region. At left, members of the family-owned business are, from left, Traci Thomas Claughton, Emory Thomas, Sandy Thomas, Seth Thomas and their dog, Henry.

Even with equipment that reduces the number of people needed to harvest grass, he still needs 80 workers at the height of the summer season, Thomas said.

He envisions a future where his operations will be completely autonomous, he said, "but in my mind, that's only a dream."

Which is just as well, because Thomas doesn't plan to give up driving. "We look forward to that." he said.

The best tech tool is in farmers' pockets

Despite the availability of expensive new high-tech equipment, the most significant technological advancement available to farmers across the Bluebonnet service area is likely already in their pockets, said Bonnie Dredla of the Luling Foundation, a teaching farm in Caldwell County.

Smartphones offer numerous apps, like Weather Underground for precise forecasts and Acres for buying and selling farmland.

The 406 Bovine app is one of Dredla's favorite (and cheapest) tools to show visitors at the teaching farm. Farmers can scan the face of each cow in their herd and use facial recognition to identify them, much like technology used for humans at airports.

A standard smartphone can even help a farmer find a low spot in a field or make sure a fence is level.

Dredla has learned a lot about the needs and concerns of farmers in her 20 years managing the foundation. It was founded in 1927 by Luling oil wildcatter Edgar B. Davis and is now a 1,100-acre farm that hosts visitors from around the world who are interested in newer technolo-

Continued on Page 18

Bonnie Dredla is office manager for the Luling Foundation teaching farm in Caldwell County. At the farm, drones are used to monitor the health of cattle and capture images of ear tags and brands, reducing the time it takes to locate a herd.

INSIDE

OTHER VOICES FROM THE BLUEBONNET REGION

Derrick Smith

Bulls Eye Ranch
BURTON

Derrick Smith, owner and operator of Bulls Eye Ranch and Bulls Eye Products and Concrete, has been around ranching his entire life. He learned a lot from family and 4-H as a kid. Now he runs the business, sells champion cattle and travels internationally to judge livestock.

Artificial insemination of his cattle is the technology with the biggest impact on his ranch. A microscopic vacuum extracts eggs from cows that are then combined with "reverse-sorted" semen — processed to select for female-producing sperm — to produce female embryos. "We were the first to reverse-sort Brahman semen in the United States," Smith said.

He relies on online cattle management software to keep up with daily details. The TagMax by CattleMax app allows him to track when a cow is in heat, when a calf is born and which cows are in which pasture.

Greg Fryer

Rivers Edge Cattle Company
WINCHESTER

Greg Fryer grew up around cattle and has worked in the agricultural industry for more than 20 years. His wife Mindy's family owned the land where Rivers Edge Cattle Company now raises its primarily Brangus herd and offers custom hay baling.

Over the years, Fryer has taken advantage of improved technology to produce and bale hay. He relies on GPS technology when planting, spraying and fertilizing fields. The Raven spraying and EZ-Pilot guidance systems on his New Holland tractor can map where crops have been planted or sprayed, making the process more efficient, he said. Looking ahead to agriculture's next few decades, Fryer envisions more use of automated systems and drones.

Continued from Page 17

gies and strategies for living off the land sustainably.

Dalton Merz, Dredla's 82-year-old father, is a lifelong farmer and former rangeland management specialist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. He uses his smartphone to identify plants today.

While the past 20 years have seen an abundance of new technology and tools, it can take a long time for them to be widely adopted, said Wayne Morse, Caldwell County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent, who grew up not far from the Luling Foundation.

Economic and environmental pressures factor heavily into farmers' decisions to adopt new tech tools, Morse said. The size of an operation, as well as droughts, predators, pests or poor yields can increase interest in new equipment and devices.

This year, spring rains in the Bluebonnet region eased some concerns about a prolonged drought, but the prices of essential materials such as fertilizer and feed have remained high, Morse said. Technology may help farmers use less fertilizer, but it won't make that fertilizer any more affordable. "Technology isn't going to save us," Morse said. "You still have to adopt good farming practices alongside it," like rotational grazing and crop diversification.

According to the USDA's 2022 Census of Agriculture, Texas lost about 1.6 million acres of farmland between 2017 and 2022, yet statewide income from farm-related sources grew by 64% during that time.

Those numbers vary widely in the Bluebonnet region. While total farmland acreage declined in many fast-growing counties in the cooperative's service area, it increased in Lee, Gonzales and Washington counties.

In Texas, where cattle production remains one of the largest sectors of the agricultural industry, ranchers have embraced ultrasound scanners that can show the size of the ribeye and the marbling of the fat while the animal is still grazing in a field. Another older but still widely used tool is EPD, or expected progeny difference, a formula and rating system to estimate the genetic value of cattle for breeding. DNA analysis has made these ratings more precise.

"We had to go from our old-school way of thinking about livestock to looking at the genetic profile," said Morse, who grew up in Kingsbury and participated in livestock judging competitions from elementary school through his years at Blinn College and Texas A&M University.

"A bull might not look the best," he said, but its EPD score might show otherwise.

Dalton Merz uses the plant ID app Seek by iNaturalist to identify a desert horse purslane plant simply by taking a photo. The app works without an internet connection, allowing plant identification in remote areas. Users' observations help expand the app's database and improve its accuracy.

Wayne Morse, Caldwell County Extension agent, operates a drone. Drones can also be used to observe the weaning process of calves from mothers and collect data on animal stress and how it impacts the herd's health.

Drones expand farmers' and ranchers' horizons

Drones of all sizes have buzzed their way into the toolkits of many Central Texas farmers and ranchers. Aerial images of farmland that could once only be taken from helicopters or prop planes can now be captured with a small $300 drone.

Larger, more sophisticated and complex drones can precisely spray fertilizers and pesticides, measure and monitor land or keep track of livestock. There are drones equipped with radar, thermal and lidar (laser imaging, detection and ranging) technology that can measure soil moisture, canopy coverage, germination and plant growth rate.

"Drone technology has made leaps and bounds, and people are adopting it," Morse said. "People finally understand the data that we have access to."

Prices for precision drones can top $20,000, so some Bluebonnet service area farmers are contracting the work to trained, skilled owners of specialized drones.

Brian Peoples

Brian Peoples of Brenham is one of those specialists. The retired police officer and corporate pilot grew up and then worked in farming and ranching in Washington County. He saw an opportunity to bring lidar- and radar-enabled crop dusting to the area, and last year, he co-founded Independence Aerial Solutions with his wife, Lisa Peoples. Their drones help local farmers map and spray their fields and monitor their livestock.

Like advanced drones, other technology innovations can create new jobs and eliminate dangerous on-the-ground work.

For example, the hydroponic farming company Inevitable Technology — formerly Iron Ox — uses robots to move heavy containers of water at its 12,000-square-foot indoor growing facility on the eastern edge of San Marcos.

Since the 1990s, row-crop farmers have embraced GPS technology to make sure their furrows are straight. The newest high-tech tractors have devices that do much more, such as analysis of soil composition and moisture. That allows every seed to be planted at exactly the right depth. The most expensive tractors on the market have machine-learning-based navigation and can work in tandem with drones and satellites — but they can easily top $500,000.

Besides, repairs of high-tech tractors are expensive and time-consuming. "Farmers

Continued on Page 21

Laser scarecrows and robotic harvesters? Possible future farming technology

From robotic harvesters to laser scarecrows and blockchain hay bales, tomorrow's farms may rely on a host of emerging technologies now being tested, imagined and refined in labs and pilot fields across the country. These are just a few of the technologies that could shape the future of farming.

- Robotic harvesters and robots that seed or weed are in development.
- Controlled environment agriculture, including indoor farming, will become even more automated.
- Minichromosomal technology may be used to create different traits in plants to improve resilience, crop yield and quality.
- Bee vectoring, a precision agriculture system, uses bees to disseminate naturally derived pesticides to flowering crops.
- Laser scarecrows, developed by researchers from the University of Rhode Island and Cornell Cooperative Extension, use moving laser beams to frighten birds away from fields.
- Zero-waste and regenerative farming is a type of ecosystem-based agriculture that focuses on improving the soil and reducing waste. It includes practices like crop rotation, bringing animals into the farming system, and using fungi and algae to refresh the soil naturally.
- Precision planting equipment, guided by a GPS system, tracks placement and spacing of seeds to ensure uniform crop growth and yields.

Sources: Texas A&M AgriLife, Farm Progress

Brian Peoples, who operates a drone spraying company out of Brenham, is also an aviation pilot. He started flying his radar and lidar drones during downtime at the airport.

Farmers' tools have evolved with every generation

Farmers have been creating and improving their tools since the birth of agriculture, about 12,000 years ago.

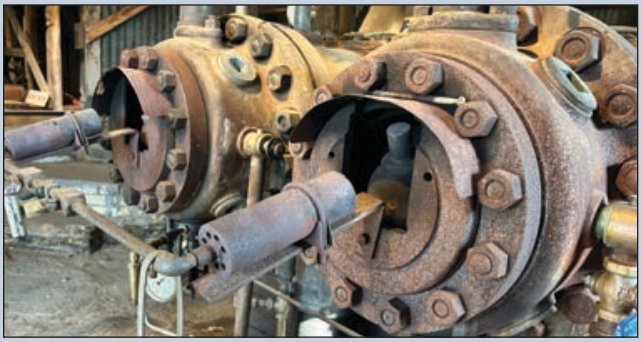
The earliest agricultural tools in Texas were made by indigenous people from sticks, deer antlers, bison bones and freshwater mussel shells. When European settlers arrived in the Bluebonnet region in the 1800s, they used oxen and horses to pull wooden plows and harvested crops by hand with sickles and flails — two connected wood sticks used to thresh grain.

The late 1700s and early 1800s brought new cast-iron plows with interchangeable parts and mechanical harvesting tools, such as the mechanical reaper and John Deere's self-scouring steel plow. That made it easier for Texas farmers to cut through the nutrient-dense, clay-heavy soils of the Bluebonnet-area's Blackland Prairie.

The Homestead Act of 1862 accelerated westward migration, increasing demand for efficient farming tools: windmills to allow farmers to dig deeper wells and barbed wire fencing to create large, enclosed pastures.

As cars started to fill American cities after 1910, gasoline-powered tractors began arriving on Texas farms. By the 1940s, they replaced most animal labor. The Rural Electrification Act of 1936 brought electricity to remote farms and ranches, ushering in an era of machines such as irrigation pumps and mechanical threshers. After World War II, large-scale farms introduced chemical fertilizers, cultivators to break up soil, planters to drill wide swaths of seed, and combines to cut, thresh and clean grains in a single process. Bigger fields were planted faster.

Starting in the 1940s, biotechnology brought about artificial insemination for livestock on ranches. The satellite-based Global Positioning System, launched for military use in 1973, became available to the public in the late 1980s, making agricultural mapping, planting and harvesting on farms more accurate.



In 1925, the Burton Cotton Gin's original steam engine was replaced with this $6,000 2-ton Bessemer oil engine, known as 'Lady B.' It powered the gin until the early 1960s, and was restored in 1992. Burton's is the oldest operating cotton gin in the United States. *Burton Farmers Gin Association photo*

One trusty printed tool that has remained in ranchers' and farmers' pockets for more than 230 years has stayed relatively unchanged.

The Old Farmer's Almanac — an annual publication that includes weather predictions, harvest timetables, lunar cycles and sunrise times — has been printed since 1792. Nevermind that studies find the almanac's weather predictions are correct about half of the time: Many of today's farmers still turn to the book for guidance. It is online today, too, at almanac.com.

Sources: Texas State Historical Association, American Society of Animal Science

Continued from Page 19

used to be able to fix their tractors with just a few basic mechanical skills, but that's different now," Morse said.

From artificial intelligence to food-treatment technology

Another major technological advance in the past decade has been the advent of artificial intelligence. Commonly used online AI tools such as ChatGPT can help with the administrative side of running a farm, from creating and analyzing spreadsheets to tracking weather and market forecasts.

Despite new technology and online tools, humans are still essential to agriculture, said Ali Fares, a professor at Prairie View A&M University who specializes in the intersection of water and food.

He and his team have used AI to process results they gleaned from studying farmland using thermal drones, ground-based sensors and satellites. That technology gathered data about a farm's water use, soil condition and health of its plants.

One day, Fares hopes more artificial intelligence analysis will be available to farmers on a smartphone app. From the app, a farmer could learn ways to treat and prevent problems. For generations, farmers have known about amending and improving soil, but such precision monitoring and reporting technology could give them valuable new information.

"We want to help farmers take advantage of whatever technological opportunities are available," said Fares, who has worked with farmers for more than a decade. When they see the results of a new piece of tech, whether at a neighbor's farm or an extension service's outreach event, they are interested in using it, he said.

"At the end of the day, farmers are businesspeople," Fares said. "They need to make a living so they can have a life."

While some high-tech agricultural workers fly drones, others work under microscopes.

Gary Beall worked in nanoparticle research for decades and taught chemistry and biochemistry at Texas State University in San Marcos. He developed barrier technology to create an edible, protective layer — made of clay and a polymer extract from a tree — that extends the shelf life of fruits and vegetables.

In 2021 he co-founded Nabaco, a company based east of San Marcos, to produce the barrier called NatuWrap. The company worked with fruit orchards in states in the Northwest U.S., California and Hawaii to coat cherries, pears, apples, oranges, lemons and limes. Nabaco's headquarters are in the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area.

Nabaco, founded by Gary Beall, produces NatuWrap, an edible barrier that extends the shelf life of fruits and vegetables.

Although many forms of ag technology are aimed at increasing production, Beall's goal is to reduce food waste. About 30% of all fruit grown goes to waste, he said.

Despite new tech, product innovations and smartphone apps, nothing can replace knowledge handed down from one farming or ranching generation to the next, Dredla said. "You can't replace someone who has spent a generation in the field analyzing cows with a science that can count the parasites," she said. "A lot of being successful is understanding the history and not repeating things that didn't work in the past."

Farmers and ranchers are stewards of the land. They've learned the dangers of overapplying chemicals, and the importance of conserving water, protecting beneficial insects and maintaing a conservationist mindset.

Morse grew up hearing these messages from farmers who didn't have drones to check the ID tags on their cows' ears.

"There will never be a replacement for the hands-on nature of this business," Morse said. "It turns out that you can't learn everything on YouTube." ■

Farm Safety Week, year-round awareness

Farm Safety and Health Week is Sept. 21–27, a time to recognize the importance of safety in agriculture and raise awareness about the hazards farmers face every day. While this designated week serves as an important reminder, safety on the farm should be a year-round priority.

Farm accidents involving equipment and utility infrastructure can result in injuries, deaths and power outages. Among the most common incidents are collisions between tractors or other machinery and power lines or utility poles. While these accidents can have serious consequences, many are preventable with caution, awareness and safe operating practices.

Farm electrical safety tips

- **Maintain a safe distance.** Keep at least 10 feet of clearance from all utility equipment in all directions.
- **Use spotters and flags.** Spotters and visible markers provide guidance and awareness to help farmers safely navigate around electrical hazards.
- **Know what to do if you make contact.** If your equipment touches a power line, stay inside and call 911.
- **Treat all equipment as conductive.** Materials such as lumber, hay, tree limbs, irrigation pipes and bulk goods can carry electricity — keep them away from power lines.

— From the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

HARD HATS, HIGH STAKES

FOURTEEN apprentice lineworkers, 12 journeymen and 12 staff judges plus two barbecue pitmasters from Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative joined competitors from other electric utilities at Nolte Island Park near Seguin for the 29th Texas Lineman's Rodeo on July 19. The daylong, multievent competition, hosted by the Texas Lineman's Rodeo Association, simulates the challenges lineworkers encounter daily in providing power to members.

As it does every year, the rodeo began at 6:30 a.m. Lineworkers raced against the clock to climb and competitively work on unenergized power lines to replace equipment. Apprentices tested their knowledge with a written exam. Family, friends, coworkers and employees from other electric utilities cheered on participants.

Apprentices Cooper Lucherk, Lane Magnuson, Tucker Saegert and Taylor Burney secured first, second, third and fourth places, respectively, in the written test component of the competition.

"The most challenging part of the competition was the practices, and of course, the test," Saegert said. "At the event, it was nothing but support from coaches, journeymen and fellow teammates. Even when something went wrong, they pushed us to do better on the next event."

Lucherk and Magnuson also received first and second places, respectively, in the overall apprentice competition.

Magnuson said the experiences helped him grow professionally. "It allows me to become more comfortable and efficient while working," he said. "We always practice going our fastest, trying to beat our previous times. It was an amazing feeling knowing all the hard work paid off."

Danny Bolding, a journeyman coach, praised the team's dedication. "These apprentices put in hours of practice, and it showed. Their performance reflects the pride and professionalism we strive for at Bluebonnet," he said.

Other apprentices include Ty Berreth, Carter Brymer, Jace Cordova, Lance Kay, Justin Lewis, Kyle Miller, Drayten Morgan, Matthew Rodriguez, Larry Salinas and Dartanian Wallace. Journeyman team members include Ty Duesterheft, Kendal Fiebrich, Michael Guajardo, Obed Guajardo, Kyle Kasper, Logan Lancaster, Joe Lockhart, David Martin, Troy Moore, Chris Rivera, Kenneth Roush and John Zamora. Coaches were JD Boecker, Danny Bolding and Daniel Fritsche. ■

1. David Martin and Michael Guajardo place protective orange covers on a neutral wire during an event demonstrating equipment replacement. The covers help keep lineworkers safe when working on energized power lines.

2. From left: Daniel Fritsche, rodeo coordinator; Taylor Burney; Cooper Lucherk; JD Boecker, apprentice coach; Lane Magnuson; Tucker Saegert; and Danny Bolding, journeyman coach.

3. Dartanian Wallace uses an insulated pole saw to remove a wooden block from a utility pole, replicating the task of clearing tree debris from power lines.

Bluebonnet lineworkers test skill, knowledge and grit at 29th annual **Texas Lineman's Rodeo**

4. Cooper Lucherk descends a pole after completing a rescue during the apprentice hurtman rescue event, where he retrieved a human-sized mannequin from the top of the pole.

5. Daniel Fritsche, rodeo coordinator, congratulates Lane Magnuson on his second-place overall apprentice finish. This was Magnuson's second rodeo.

6. Drayten Morgan connects a wire to pole-top equipment during the apprentice obstacle pole event, which tests common pole work tasks.

7. Logan Lancaster with his twin sons, Jensen and Randen, at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo. ***Sarah Beal photos***

Shining for childhood cancer awareness

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's buildings will shine in gold at night and trucks will display gold ribbons in September for Childhood Cancer. Stop by any of the cooperative's five member service centers to pick up a ribbon to show your support. Visit bluebonnet.coop/childhood-cancer to find resources and ways to get involved. *Sarah Beal photo*

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Monday, Sept. 1, for Labor Day. If your power goes out, you can report it by texting OUT to 44141, using bluebonnet.coop or the MyBluebonnet mobile app, or calling 800-949-4414. You can pay your bills anytime online, on the mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (select Option 2 when prompted).

MAGNILIFE®

Dept. TX2
300 State St., Ste. 92039
Southlake, TX 76092

Name:

Phone:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email:

PAYMENT METHOD

☐ Check/Money Order enclosed payable to: ***MagniLife***
☐ Charge my credit card

Acct. #:

REQUIRED
Exp. Date: **CVV #:**
/

Signature:

Leg & Back Pain Relief Cream	
☐ **Buy 2 Get 1 FREE** - (Equals $13.33 per unit)	~~$59.97~~ **$39.98**
☐ Single unit - $19.99 per unit	$19.99
Shipping & Handling	+ $7.95
TOTAL	

MADE IN USA

Rapid Pain Relief – GUARANTEED!

Available in the Pain Relief section

MAGNILIFE®

Dept. TX2
300 State St., Ste. 92039
Southlake, TX 76092

Name:

Phone:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Email:

PAYMENT METHOD

☐ Check/Money Order enclosed payable to: ***MagniLife***
☐ Charge my credit card

Acct. #:

REQUIRED
Exp. Date: **CVV #:**
/

Signature:

Dark Spot Care +	
☐ **Buy 2 Get 1 FREE** - (Equals $13.33 per unit)	~~$59.97~~ **$39.98**
☐ Single unit - $19.99 per unit	$19.99
Shipping & Handling	+ $7.95
TOTAL	

MADE IN USA

Renewed, Refreshed & Relieved – GUARANTEED!

Available in the First Aid section

Order Now! **1-800-995-2082 / MagniLife.com**

Available at These Fine Retailers (OFFER NOT GOOD IN STORES):

amazon CVS Walgreens Walmart Save money. Live better.

It's in the Bag

How did Frito Pie make its way to Hank Hill and football fans across Texas?

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY GISELA GOPPEL

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

FRITOS PIE OR Fritos chili pie or simply Frito pie—whatever *you* call it—is a much-loved delight often spooned up under Friday night lights.

I've heard many baby boomers claim their mother invented the dish out of necessity to feed incessantly hungry kids back in the 1950s. I've heard claims that their grandmothers had been making something like Frito pie since the '20s, which would have been a neat trick since Fritos weren't invented until 1932.

A version of Frito pie was served at a gathering of the Dallas Dietetic Association in 1949. The recipe came from the Frito Co. itself and originally called for putting a layer of Fritos in a casserole dish, covering it with chili and then covering everything with liberal amounts of cheese and onions. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes.

You can see how this got MacGyvered into just pouring chili into bags of Fritos for efficiency and transportability. Today, you'll also find it with the added ingredient of a mound of jalapeños on top.

Whatever the case, Fritos and the pies are Texas originals.

Charles Doolin of San Antonio created the chips, putting his own spin on a recipe he bought for $100 from a Mexican restaurant in 1932. He fried strips of corn dough, and Fritos were born. It's interesting that most Texans now associate the chip with piles of meat, as Doolin was a vegetarian.

He called them *fritos*, Spanish for "fried." Doolin also invented Cheetos, around 1948, by the way.

In the 1960s, my mother made something she called "creamed tacos," which was a cheesy chili con carne poured over a plate of Fritos. Exceptionally filling, the recipe no doubt came from Frito-Lay itself. Though the company, now based in Plano, had its own brand of chili by then, my mother, like Hank Hill, preferred Wolf Brand Chili ("Neighbor, how long has it been?"), another Texas original.

This type of mixing and matching was encouraged in the early days of Fritos—as they were not marketed as a stand-alone snack. They were sold as an ingredient for casseroles. The inventor's wife, Mary Kathryn "Kitty" Doolin, even experimented with pouring chocolate over Fritos and baking them on a cookie sheet.

Kitty also is credited with coming up with the original chili pie recipe. We know this because her daughter, Kaleta Doolin, wrote the most thorough history on the subject you can find, her 2011 book *Fritos Pie: Stories, Recipes, and More*. It's an incredibly detailed history that provides all manner of Fritos recipes you have never imagined. Maybe there's another classic in there, waiting to be popularized in today's world of spicy snack foods.

Along with her mother, Kaleta gives credit to another woman for popularizing the dish. She writes with admiration that Teresa Hernandez sold thousands of Fritos chili pies at the Woolworth's counter in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in the 1960s, reportedly selling 56,000 bags in one year.

And at the same time, it was all the rage in San Antonio and across Texas at football games as fundraisers for civic and student groups. Who knows how many kids were sent to college on profits from Frito pies. ■

One-Skillet Dinners

Where convenience and flavors unite for a delicious cause

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

Growing up in Aransas Pass, home of the Shrimporee Festival, we enjoyed the freshest harvest delivered by the shrimp boats daily from the Gulf Coast. We grilled, fried and sautéed shrimp in countless marinades and spices, and we always served them with plenty of fresh lime juice. This one-pan dinner is a family favorite.

Spicy Shrimp and Rice

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 small onion, diced
1 yellow bell pepper, seeds removed, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup uncooked white rice
2 cups chicken or vegetable broth
½ cup salsa verde
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon ground oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
Juice of 1 lime
Cilantro leaves, for serving
Lime slices, for serving

1. In a skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion, bell pepper and garlic. Cook until onion is light and translucent, stirring often, about 5 minutes.

2. Add rice, stir and continue to cook 2 minutes. Stir in broth, salsa verde, cumin, oregano, salt and black pepper.

3. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to simmer, cover and cook 15 minutes.

4. Remove lid, place shrimp over rice, cover and cook until shrimp are opaque, about 5–7 minutes.

5. Add lime juice and fluff the rice mixture. Serve with cilantro and lime slices.

SERVES 6

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Skillet Chicken Fajita Rice.

Cider Stew

THERESA SHELDON
CHEROKEE COUNTY EC

Stews are good for the soul and the belly. This one-skillet wonder starts with chunks of beef that are seared then simmered with vegetables and herbs in a rich and savory broth that tastes complex in flavor but is actually simple to make. The whole family will love it.

2 tablespoons (¼ stick) butter
2 pounds beef chuck stew meat, cut into 1-inch pieces
¼ cup flour
2 cups water
1 cup apple cider
½ cup steak sauce
2 teaspoons dried thyme
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 bay leaf
3 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
3 medium carrots, sliced
1 medium onion, chopped
1 package frozen cut green beans (10 ounces)

1. Heat butter over medium-high heat in a large skillet. Add beef and brown on all sides, 2–3 minutes per side.

2. Stir in flour. Gradually stir in water, apple cider and steak sauce. Bring to a boil.

3. Stir in thyme, pepper and bay leaf. Reduce heat to low, cover and simmer 2 hours.

4. Add potatoes, carrots, onion and green beans. Cover and cook an additional 30 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Discard bay leaf before serving.

SERVES 8

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >

RECIPE PHOTOS: JASON DAVID PAGE. WINNER PHOTO: COURTESY JENNIFER CURTIS

$500 WINNER

Egg Roll Stuffing Stir Fry

JENNIFER CURTIS
PEDERNALES EC

This might just be my new favorite dinner. It takes everything delicious in classic egg rolls and turns it into one ridiculously easy, healthy and flavor-packed meal with no rolling required. Spoon the stuffing into lettuce cups or over rice. The leftovers are a great lunch the next day.

2 tablespoons avocado oil or other neutral cooking oil
1 large yellow onion, diced
2 pounds ground pork or ground chicken
2 teaspoons salt
2 teaspoons ground black pepper
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
2 teaspoons ground ginger
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 teaspoons white sesame seeds
2 teaspoons black sesame seeds
1 cup shredded carrot
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
4 tablespoons honey
⅓ cup coconut aminos or soy sauce
2 cups shredded purple cabbage
2 cups shredded green cabbage
Lettuce leaves or rice, for serving

1. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion and cook until light and translucent.

2. Add pork or chicken and cook, breaking meat up into small pieces with a spoon, until cooked through, about 6 minutes. Season with salt, pepper, red pepper flakes and ginger.

3. Reduce heat to medium and stir in garlic, sesame seeds and shredded carrot and cook 3 minutes.

4. Make a well in the center of the skillet and add the rice vinegar, honey, and coconut aminos or soy sauce. Stir to combine.

5. Stir in cabbage and cook 3 minutes to slightly soften cabbage.

6. Serve warm, spooned into lettuce cups or over rice.

SERVES 6

TCP $500 Recipe Contest

CHEESECAKE DUE SEPTEMBER 10
Did you know they served cheesecake at the first Olympics 2,800 years ago? We want to serve yours while we watch the 2026 Games. The best recipe will score $500. Enter by September 10.
UPCOMING: BARBECUE SIDES DUE OCTOBER 10

Southwest Chicken With Toasted Orzo

GAIL PATTERSON
PENTEX ENERGY

One of the main reasons I enjoy cooking with orzo is its quick and easy preparation. I usually add a splash of lemon juice and a touch of grated Parm, but once I spotted Patterson's Southwestern spin, I knew I had to give it a try. Brothy orzo and blistered tomatoes combine with perfectly seasoned chicken.

½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon granulated garlic
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon kosher salt
4 boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1-inch pieces
5 teaspoons olive oil, plus more as needed, divided use
1 cup cherry tomatoes
1 tablespoon (⅛ stick) butter
1 cup uncooked orzo
1 tablespoon chicken base
3 cups water, plus more as needed
1 cup corn kernels
1 can black beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed
½ cup chopped cilantro, for serving
Tortilla chips, crushed, for serving

1. In a small bowl, mix together cayenne, cumin, granulated garlic, black pepper and salt.

2. Season chicken with half the spice mixture, reserving remaining half.

3. In a skillet, heat 3 teaspoons oil over medium-high heat. Sear chicken in 2 batches until lightly browned on both sides, adding more oil if needed. Set cooked chicken aside in a bowl.

4. Add 1 teaspoon oil to skillet and add cherry tomatoes, stirring to coat in oil. Cover and cook, shaking pan occasionally, 5 minutes or until tomatoes slightly blister. Add tomatoes to bowl with chicken.

5. Add butter and remaining 1 teaspoon oil to skillet. Reduce heat to medium and stir in orzo. Cook, stirring occasionally, until orzo is golden and glistening, about 5–7 minutes.

6. Stir in chicken base and 3 cups water, bring to a simmer. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, 6 minutes or until almost all liquid is absorbed.

7. Stir in corn, black beans, prepared chicken and tomatoes, and remaining spice mixture. Add water if orzo becomes dry. Cover and cook an additional 3 minutes. Serve warm, with cilantro and tortilla chips.

SERVES 4

Why I Love One-Skillet Meals

I tell myself I cook for a living, but in reality I wash dishes for a living. Not when it comes to one-skillet meals.

Less cleanup: Forget about the mess of juggling several pans on the stovetop.

More flavor: Mixing all the ingredients together in one skillet brings out richer flavors.

Budget friendly: Beans, rice, pasta and vegetables help make these recipes easy on the pocketbook.

—Vianney Rodriguez

MORTON BUILDINGS®

Built Stronger. Lasts Longer. Looks Better.

4869

WE PREP. YOU SAVE.

SAVE NOW THROUGH THE END OF OCTOBER.

Order now for site prep savings and project delivery by spring. Get peak savings on the best buildings in the business during our winter build sales event. With offers this great, why wait?

Scan here or call 800-447-7436.

COURTESY CHET GARNER

Saga on the San Saba

The remains of Menard's Spanish fortification predate the U.S.

BY CHET GARNER

THE SMALL TOWN of Menard (population 1,300) sits along the blurry line where the Hill Country turns into West Texas. It's more than an hour from any major city, but if the Spanish had had their way, it might have become our largest metropolis.

As I stood in the middle of a dusty field, staring at the crumbling walls of the Presidio de San Sabá, I couldn't help but feel the dramatic story of conquest, bloodshed and what-could-have-been. Today, what remains of the abandoned Spanish fort covers a few acres on the north bank of the San Saba River.

The fort was constructed in 1757 to protect the Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá, 4 miles to the east. Spain brought in a caravan of 300 soldiers and civilians to push their presence and control deeper into the heart of Texas.

Native Americans (and the French) didn't want the missionaries there. And in March 1758, 2,000 Comanche and other natives (likely armed with French weapons) attacked the mission and massacred its residents. A decade of fighting between the Spanish citizens inside the fort and the surrounding tribes followed, until the Spanish gave up and left in 1772.

Over the centuries, the ruins became a sort of roadside attraction. Famous Texan Jim Bowie even carved his name in the stone gate after supposedly hiding his silver cache, but that's another story. Sadly, the presidio's history began to fade as its stones were scavenged to construct Menard's growing downtown, and the grounds became an attraction on the city golf course. Seriously!

Luckily, it's now a protected site that's been extensively studied and cataloged.

If you're a lover of Texas history and want a glimpse into the past—but without the constant threat of death—it doesn't get much better than walking the grounds of the old presidio and pondering life on the Texas frontier.

ABOVE Chet in front of the ruins of Presidio de San Sabá in Menard.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all Chet's Texplorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.

Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

SEPTEMBER

7

Gainesville [7–14] Fall Art Exhibition, (940) 613-6939, gainesvilleareavisualarts.org

11

Grapevine [11–14] GrapeFest, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

12

Bryan [12–13] Brazos Bluebonnet Quilt Guild Quilt Show, (979) 776-8338, bbquiltguild.org

13

Chappell Hill Airing of the Quilts, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

Luling Luling Foundation Youth Grill-Off, (830) 875-2438, lulingfoundation.org

Stephenville Local Art & Wine Walk, (254) 965-6190, downtownstephenvilletx.com

14

Yorktown Holy Cross Festival, (361) 564-2893, holycrossyorktown.net

19

Giddings [19–20] Happy Stitchers Quilt Show, (979) 540-8043

25

Grand Saline [25–27] Salt Festival, gssaltfestival@gmail.com, facebook.com/gssaltfest

26

Commerce [26–27] Bois D'Arc Bash, (903) 886-3950, commerce-chamber.com

Winnsboro **[26–27] Cowboy Music and Poetry Gathering,** (903) 342-0686, winnsboro centerforthearts.com

27

Hallettsville **Kolache Fest,** (361) 798-2662, hallettsville.com

Lake Dallas **50th Anniversary Celebration of the Lake Dallas Library,** (940) 497-3566, friendsoflakedallaslibrary.com

Lakehills **Medina Lake Cajun Festival,** (830) 460-0600, cajunfestival-medinalake.com

Woodville **Ghosts and Legends of Texas Past,** (409) 403-2025, heritage-village.org

28

Meyersville **Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church Fall Festival,** (361) 275-3868, stspeterpaulaloysius.org

OCTOBER

3

Granbury **[3–5] Oktoberfest,** (682) 936-4550, granburysquare.com

4

Burnet **Texas State Button Society Fall Workshop and Sale,** texasstatebuttonsociety.com

Huntington **Catfish Festival,** shophuntingtontx.com

Johnson City **Blanco County Wild Game Dinner,** (830) 833-4138, facebook.com/wildgamedinner

Taylor **Bluebonnet Horse Expo & Training Challenge,** 1-888-542-5163, bluebonnethorseexpo.com

TCP *Submit Your Event*

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your December event by October 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

We're Bringing You Some Star Power

Nobel Prize Winner Brings Us Perfection From Deep Space

The story begins in 1893 when Nobel Prize-winning French scientist Henri Moissan discovered an extraordinary gem while studying rock samples from a meteor in Canyon Diablo, Arizona. Extremely rare in nature, moissanite is the **cosmic treasure that has been perfected by scientists** right here on Earth, offering an unrivaled brilliance that outshines even diamonds.

According to the Gemological Institute of America, moissanite **surpasses all other gems in brilliance, fire, and luster**. Its unique **"double refraction"** means that light enters the stone and exits not once but twice—something **no diamond can achieve**.

Now, for an **extremely limited time**, you can own this celestial beauty at an unheard-of price! The Star Power Moissanite Ring features a stunning **1-½ carat moissanite** set in yellow gold-finished .925 sterling silver—**normally $499 but all yours for just $59!** Why such a spectacular price? Because we want you as a long term client. This carat weight of moissanite is sold for $1,700 at a major national retailer, but that is ridiculous. **Only ~~1,000~~ 563 available** for this offer. So don't wait—once this deal is gone, it's gone!

Jewelry Specifications:
- Moissanite in gold-finished .925 sterling silver settings
- Ring: Available in whole sizes 5-10

Star Power Moissanite Ring

1-½ carat moissanite solitaire ~~$499~~ $59* + S&P ***Save $440***

**Special price only for customers using the offer code.*

1-800-333-2045

Your Insider Offer Code: SPM145-01

Stauer, 14091 Southcross Drive W., Dept. SPM145-01, Burnsville, MN 55337 | **www.stauer.com**

Stauer® | AFFORD THE EXTRAORDINARY®

Off-Road Adventures

These Texans find there's much to explore just off the beaten path. Grab your gear and come along as we see what awaits us in the great outdoors.

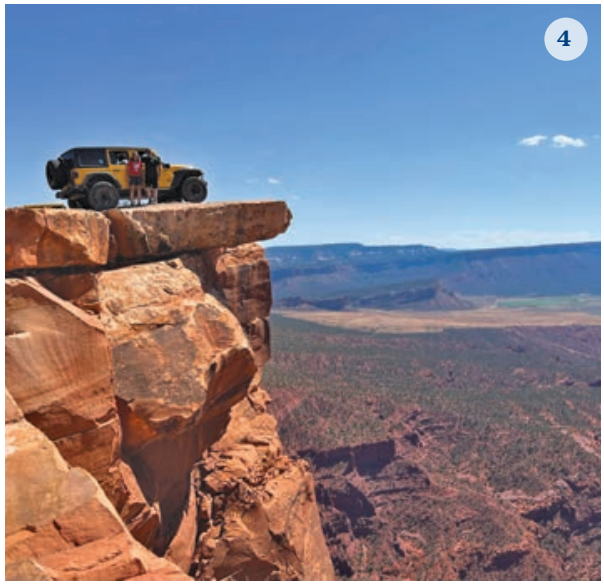
CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ

1 SABINE BREDOW
PEDERNALES EC
"A perfect way to end an adventurous day is off-road, enjoying good company and unspoiled views of the beautiful Texas Hill Country."

2 REAGAN FERGUSON
CENTRAL TEXAS EC
Navigating Engineer Pass in Colorado, with a 1,000-foot drop on the right.

3 STEVEN MOORE
BLUEBONNET EC
"Rock crawling Texas style at Wolf Caves off-road park in Mason."

4 LESLI SAN JOSE
PEDERNALES EC
At the end of a trail called Top of the World in Moab, Utah.



Upcoming Contests

DUE SEP 10 **Snakes Alive!**
DUE OCT 10 **From the Oil Fields**
DUE NOV 10 **Still Life**

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/contests.

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Off-Road Adventures photos from readers.

Ebb and Flow

People come and people go, and when they do, nature reclaims

BY MARTHA DEERINGER
ILLUSTRATION BY JONATHAN RICE

A SPRING BURBLES in a peaceful Central Texas valley. Hidden beneath the tall weeds and grasses around the spring are the foundation stones of old buildings.

They are all that is left of a small Texas town—a town that was once as alive as the mockingbirds that bicker in the live oak trees.

Two hundred years ago, someone dug a well near the spring where the unmistakable aroma of wild onions filled the air. A windmill built above the well pumped water into a trough for horses and cattle.

The well never went dry, and during the hottest, driest weather, settlers drove their wagons for miles to get its water. The families who came to live there built a small Baptist church out of logs.

Eagles made their nests in the oak trees near the spring. And so the people who built their homes in the area called it Eagle Springs.

Before long, a post office and a general store were added. Since farmers near the spring grew lots of cotton, a cotton gin was built. Blacksmiths set up shop and fixed wheels, sharpened plows and put shoes on horses. A woodworking and harness shop opened, and a doctor set up his practice in town. Court was held, and a jail was needed when horse thieves arrived.

Eagle Springs had become a noisy, bustling town of more than 200 by 1884.

The well always had plenty of water, so ranchers drove great herds of cattle through the town on their way north along a branch of the Chisholm Trail. Parents worked together to build a school for the children, and one little boy named Pat Neff grew up to become the governor of Texas.

One day the railroad announced that they were building a track in the area, but it would not go through Eagle Springs. The railroad brought business to other towns, and Eagle Springs began to decline.

The stores and blacksmith shops moved closer to the railroad. The farmers took their cotton there, and the gin closed.

The children were sent to a bigger school. The cattle went north in railroad cars. Little by little, the old, abandoned buildings at Eagle Springs fell into ruin.

After nearly two centuries, little is left but the spring and the church, rebuilt in 1876 after the log church burned.

Bit by bit, nature has erased Eagle Springs, relegated to Texas' long list of more than 500 ghost towns.

The water still burbles cheerfully over stones, and wild onions grow all about. The evening breeze shivers the leaves of the live oak trees, making a sound like the soft whispering of voices from long ago. ■

GRAB YOUR PIECE OF AMERICA'S SILVER LEGACY

FILL YOUR VAULT WITH MORGAN SILVER BARS

Not only are these hefty bars one full Troy ounce of real, .999 precious silver, they're also beautiful, featuring the crisp image of a Morgan Silver Dollar struck onto the surface. That collectible image adds interest and makes these Silver Bars even more desirable. Minted in the U.S.A. from shimmering American silver, these one-ounce 99.9% fine silver bars are a great alternative to one-ounce silver coins or rounds. Plus, they offer great savings compared to other bullion options like one-ounce sovereign silver coins. Take advantage of our special offer for new customers only and save $10.00 off our regular prices.

Morgan Silver Dollars Are Among the Most Iconic Coins in U.S. History

What makes them iconic? The Morgan Silver Dollar is the legendary coin that built the Wild West. It exemplifies the American spirit like few other coins, and was created using silver mined from the famous Comstock Lode in Nevada. In fact, when travelers approached the mountains around the boomtown of Virginia City, Nevada in the 1850s, they were startled to see the hills shining in the sunlight like a mirror. A mirage caused by weary eyes? No, rather the effect came from tiny flecks of silver glinting in the sun.

A Special Way For You to Stock Up On Precious Silver

While no one can predict the future value of silver in an uncertain economy, many Americans are rushing to get their hands on as much silver as possible, putting it away for themselves and their loved ones. You'll enjoy owning these Silver Bars. They're tangible. They feel good when you hold them, You'll relish the design and thinking about all it represents. These Morgan Design One-Ounce Bars make appreciated gifts for birthdays, anniversaries and graduations, creating a legacy sure to be cherished for a lifetime.

Order More and SAVE

You can save $10.00 off our regular price when you buy now. There is a limit of 25 Bars per customer, which means with this special offer, you can save up to $250.

Hurry—Secure Yours Now

Call right now to secure your .999 fine silver Morgan Design One-Ounce Silver Bars. You'll be glad you did.

One-Ounce Silver Morgan Design Bar
~~$53.95~~ ea.
Special offer - $43.95 ea. +s/h **BUY MORE SAVE MORE!**
SAVE $10 - $250
Limit of 25 bars per customer

Free 1-oz Silver Bullet – .45 Caliber Pistol Round Replica with every order over $299
(A $69.95 value!)

FREE SHIPPING over $99!
Limited time only. Product total over $99 before taxes (if any). Standard domestic shipping only. Not valid on previous purchases.

SPECIAL CALL-IN ONLY OFFER

1-888-201-7144

Offer Code MSB349-14
Please mention this code when you call.

GOVMINT

GOVMINT • 1300 Corporate Center Curve, Dept. MSB349-14, Eagan, MN 55121

RENEWAL by ANDERSEN
FULL-SERVICE WINDOW & DOOR REPLACEMENT

Get a **FREE** consultation!
Call **855-733-0719**

WINDOW AND DOOR SAVINGS EVENT!

Save Big on Replacement Windows and Doors!

Buy Two, Get One

60% OFF

All Windows and Doors[1]

MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 3

AND

NO Money Down
NO Monthly Payments
NO Interest for 12 months[1]

MINIMUM PURCHASE OF 3 – INTEREST ACCRUES, BUT IS WAIVED IF PAID IN FULL WITHIN 12 MONTHS

TESTED, TRUSTED, AND TOTALLY PROVEN.[2]

RENEWAL BY ANDERSEN HAS THE NATION'S BEST WARRANTY[3] -COVERAGE- Fully Transferable FIBREX® MATERIAL INSTALLATION HARDWARE GLASS

Offer Ends 10/31/2025

Call for your **FREE** consultation.

855-733-0719

FINDYOUR**WINDOW**.COM

More 5 Star Reviews

Than Other Leading Full-Service Window Replacement Companies[4]

[1]**DETAILS OF OFFER:** Offer expires 10/31/2025. Not valid with other offers or prior purchases. Buy two (2) windows or entry/patio doors, get one (1) window or entry/patio door 60% off, and 12 months no money down, no monthly payments, no interest when you purchase three (3) or more windows or entry/patio doors between 9/1/2025 and 10/31/2025. 60% off windows and entry/patio doors are less than or equal to lowest cost window or entry/patio door in the order. Subject to credit approval. 12-month Promo Period: while no payments are due, interest accrues but is waived if the loan is paid in full before the Promo Period expires. Any unpaid balance owed after the Promo Period, plus accrued interest, will be paid in installments based on the terms disclosed in the customer's loan agreement. Financing is provided by various financial institutions without regard to age, race, color, religion, national origin, gender, or familial status. Savings comparison based on purchase of a single unit at list price. Available at participating locations and offer applies throughout the service area. See your local Renewal by Andersen location for details. License numbers available at renewalbyandersen.com/license. Some Renewal by Andersen locations are independently owned and operated. [2]Based on testing of 10 double-hung units per ASTM E2068 20 years after installation. [3]It is the only warranty among top selling window companies that meets all of the following requirements: easy to understand terms, unrestricted transferability, installation coverage, labor coverage, geographically unrestricted, coverage for exterior color, insect screens and hardware, and no maintenance requirement. Visit renewalbyandersen.com/nationsbest for details. [4]Review aggregator survey of 5-star reviews among leading national full-service window replacement companies. January 2024 Reputation.com. "Renewal by Andersen" and all other marks where denoted are trademarks Andersen Corporation. RBA14201