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FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

JUNE 2026

She Walked the Walk

Opal Lee helped elevate
Juneteenth every step
of the way

**BLUEBONNET
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

ATTO SPORT

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June 2026



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ON THE COVER

Opal Lee at her home on East Annie Street in the Historic Southside neighborhood of Fort Worth.

Photo by Robert Seale

ABOVE

Live Oak Trees on Williams Ranch, Bandera County is a 1915 oil painting by Julian Onderdonk.

Painting by Julian Onderdonk



Volts Charge Into Texas

AFTER A FOUR-TEAM barnstorming season in 2025, the Athletes Unlimited Softball League is set to start its second season with six teams, including one in Texas.

The Texas Volts will return and play their home games at Dell Diamond in Round Rock and join teams based in Chicago; Durham, North Carolina; Oklahoma City; Portland, Oregon; and Salt Lake City.

“Texas is synonymous with softball excellence at every level,” said Kim Ng, the league’s commissioner.

The Volts start their 25-game season June 9 in Oklahoma City. Their first home game is June 18 against the Utah Talons.

“We have simply got to make people aware that none of us are free until we’re all free, and we aren’t free yet.”

— OPAL LEE

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

The greatest innovation in my lifetime 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 April prompt: **If I could use only one electronic device, it would be ...**

The air conditioner.

MARILYN WERKHEISER
BLUEBONNET EC
BASTROP

My cellphone.

KAT CROSS
HOUSTON COUNTY EC
CROCKETT

My coffee maker.

KERRY BEREND
FORT BELKNAP EC
LOVING

Ham radio. Communication is most important.

GARY DAVID ANTLEY
VIA FACEBOOK

Phone with FaceTime.

JOHNNA HALE
TRINITY VALLEY EC
CANTON

Visit our website to see more responses.



TCP Contests and More

\$500 RECIPE CONTEST
Cranberry Harvest

FOCUS ON TEXAS PHOTOS
Tailgating

RECOMMENDED READING

The Bluebonnet Painter from April 2023 tells more about how Julian Onderdonk’s ethereal South Texas landscapes flourish. Find it on our website.



ENTER ONLINE

APRIL 2026 Kickin' Ashe

“A lot of fitness can still be gained by using a chain saw. The sweat washes off, but the sap stays on the arms for many days.”

RAY WOLBRECHT
PEDERNALES EC
BLANCO



DAVE URBAN

A Whole Mess of Trash

I had seen all the Don't Mess With Texas signs and so was surprised by a surge in litter [A *Tidy Revolution*, March 2026]. I complained and complained to my husband about the litter and the fact that no one seemed worried about it.

Finally, I grew tired of complaining and decided to act. Now, I try to collect litter once a week—one bag of cans and bottles and one bag of trash.

Lynda Southwick
Bluebonnet EC
Brenham

Wear a Life Jacket

I was excited by the paddling trails article [Charted Waters, March 2026]. However, I was dismayed when pictures showed paddlers not wearing life jackets and reading only to “pack a personal flotation device, as required by Texas law.”

While canoeing, I've experienced several hairy situations and would never not wear one. According to the U.S. Coast



ERICH SCHLEGEL

Guard, 85% of boating-related drowning victims were not wearing a life vest.

Kat Saul
Grayson-Collin EC
Allen

Cavalry Hopes

I always wanted to be in the Army cavalry [From Posts to Pillars, February 2026].

When I came of age, the cavalry was no more.

But I knew a man who was born on Fort Ringgold. His father was the post bandmaster. He used to tell me many interesting stories of those times.

Wallace L. Morgan
GVEC
Nixon

Blocker Billboard

Yes, at one time there was a billboard announcing that O'Donnell was the hometown of Dan Blocker [Tiny Dots on a Big Map, January 2026]. Sadly, the fading signage went AWOL, probably blown away by high winds that frequent this part of the High Plains.

Betty Morgan
Bryan Texas Utilities
Bryan

TCP WRITE TO US
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

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Austin, TX 78701

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

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Giant Footsteps

Even as Opal Lee—the Grandmother of Juneteenth—approaches 100, she says her important work isn't done

Opal Lee says she was the “little ol’ lady in tennis shoes getting into everybody else’s business” when, in 2016, at age 89 and buoyed by her faith, she embarked on an ambitious campaign to make Juneteenth a national holiday by walking from her home in Fort Worth to Washington, D.C. Ten years later, the holiday is official, she is celebrated as the Grandmother of Juneteenth and her well-worn tennis shoes are getting a long-deserved rest.

That doesn’t mean the contemporary folk hero is finally settling into idleness—even as she approaches centenarian status (she turns 100 on October 7). And once you get a sense of her life, you realize inactivity is not a concept she embraces. Retirement?

“You’ve got to be kidding!” she quickly retorts, flashing her wide, congenial smile. “People who are old can’t sit in a rocking chair and wait for the Lord to come and get them. There’s still plenty of work to be done, and I’ll do what I can as long as I can.”

She speaks with an eloquent urgency and passion about her work over many decades as a civil rights and community activist who advocated for the homeless, jobless and hungry; for education; and for Juneteenth recognition—all of which she connects to being free. She says she fully intends to continue her work through her belief that “we are our brother’s keeper, and we’d better act like it”—but at a slower pace.

For sure, there will be no more extended walking campaigns. An illness last summer was a setback, and though she’s recovered, the episode supported growing suggestions from her family, which includes 15 grandchildren and 40 great-grandchildren, that it was time to step back a bit.

“It’s been great to see her dream come true, something she’s been after most of her life,” says Promise Roland, one of Lee’s granddaughters and a Fort Worth real estate agent. “It’s been overwhelming, but we’re delighted. She’s been asked to slow down, but that’s not her.

“With her tenacity, she’s going to keep at it; she doesn’t take no for an answer.”

Lee, a 1943 graduate, at age 16, of Fort Worth’s I.M. Terrell High School, has maximized her century on this planet with service to family, church and community. She raised her four children as a young single mother, got a bachelor’s degree in education from Wiley College in Marshall, earned a master’s degree in counseling and guidance in 1963 from North Texas State University (now the University of North Texas), and taught third grade for 15 years at Amanda McCoy Elementary School, her alma mater.

She helped start a food bank by contributing fresh produce grown in her 5-acre urban farm that also helps address Tarrant County food deserts.

She is an iconic, revered change agent, so getting into everybody else’s business—good trouble—teaching and helping others is what she does, and she does it very well. She’s received eight honorary doctorates, was named 2021 Texan of the Year by *The Dallas Morning News*, was a Nobel Peace Prize nominee and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2023, her portrait was placed in the Texas Senate Chamber, making her only the second Black person (after U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan) so honored. In January, Mattel introduced the “Opal Barbie.”

Opal Lee on her Juneteenth walks: “If people can be taught to hate, they can be taught to love. The promise of freedom is only as strong as those who choose to uphold it. Will you rise to the occasion or stand still as history passes you by?”





COURTESY OPAL'S WALK 2 DC TEAM

LEFT Lee walks for her cause in February 2020 in Las Vegas.

BELOW Lee, on her porch in November 2025, lives on the same Fort Worth plot where, in 1939, a mob burned down her family's home.

Despite it all, Lee lives in a modest new house on Fort Worth's East Annie Street—on the same corner lot where, in 1939, her family's home was burned down by a mob of 500 angry would-be neighbors who objected to the family integrating the neighborhood. It happened on Juneteenth.

Her new house was a gift from Trinity Habitat for Humanity in 2024 as a tribute to Lee, one of the nonprofit's founding board members.

The Marshall native was a child when she first learned about the date June 19, 1865, when Union Gen. Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston to make the first notifications that enslaved Texans were free—two and a half years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. She joined family and friends annually to celebrate the day with “plenty of food, food and more food.”

Lee was a co-founder in 1977 of the Tarrant County Black Historical and Genealogical Society, through which she organized Fort Worth's Juneteenth events, including walks, for 40 years. But she felt there was more she could do.

A quest was born: Make Juneteenth a national holiday.

Her plan was to walk to D.C. and present a signed petition to Congress as a symbol of nationwide support for passage



*I don't feel no ways tired,
I've come too far from where
I started from.
Nobody told me that the road
would be easy,
I don't believe He brought me
this far to leave me.*

—African American spiritual

of the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act. Forty-seven states, including Texas, had already established state holidays or observances.

The octogenarian took to the road, her T-shirt emblazoned with “Opal’s Walk for Freedom,” and was joined by thousands of diverse supporters, many carrying homemade signs of support (“Go, Ms. Opal!”) and walking with her in festive, joyous parades.

“I just started walking, and people started participating, coming to join me, finding a place for me to stay,” she said. “I got 1.5 million signatures. I met all kinds of people, not just those in power. People who were beginning to understand what the day was all about. Not just red soda water and barbecue, but there was meaning to it. People embraced Juneteenth.”

The distance between Fort Worth and D.C. is a little over 1,200 miles as the crow flies. Lee took the scenic route, walking a symbolic 2.5 miles (for the two and a half years it took for news of emancipation to reach Texas) in 20 cities that supported her movement and invited her to walk, including Shreveport, Louisiana; Atlanta; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Pueblo, Colorado; Chicago; and Philadelphia.

She began the walks in September 2016 and four months later was in Washington with the completed petition. Almost five years later, the act passed and was signed into law by President Joe Biden on June 17, 2021.

“I was so happy, I could have done a holy dance!” Lee says.

The crown jewel for her work is the \$70 million state-of-the-art National Juneteenth Museum slated to break ground in Fort Worth later this year. The 50,000-square-foot cultural center is billed as “the epicenter for the preservation of Juneteenth history.”

“Dr. Lee’s advocacy is the foundation on which the museum was established,” says Jarred Howard, the museum’s CEO. “We’re thrilled to collaborate with Dr. Lee and are committed to expanding her extraordinary legacy through the creation of a world-class learning center.”

Though she isn’t moving quite as much now, Lee’s family is gladly taking the baton to keep her legacy going. Her granddaughters are active board members for Lee’s non-



RENDERING COURTESY NATIONAL JUNETEENTH MUSEUM

National Juneteenth Museum

Destined for Fort Worth’s Historic Southside, plans include:

- 10,000 square feet of immersive exhibit space
- A 250-seat theater for lectures, performances and other events
- A business incubator and coworking space
- A food hall featuring culturally diverse cuisine
- The National Juneteenth Plaza, a public courtyard and green space

profit foundation, Citizens Concerned with Human Dignity. The organization assists marginalized families in need of shelter, food, employment, healthcare and education.

“It’ll take more than one person to fill her shoes,” Roland says, “so it will truly be a family effort. She still has a lot of fire, but it’s time for us to do the heavy lifting.”

Lee’s fire has always been about teaching and the fertile minds of young folks, and that flame burns as brightly as ever, sparked by her successful Juneteenth campaigns.

“I want the young people to realize how important Black history is and for them to embrace it, know their history and pass it on,” she says. “The road to true freedom is long, but I’ve walked it my whole life.” ■



TCP Enter online to win two signed illustrated children’s books about Opal Lee’s life.



ENTER ONLINE



J.O. WAS HERE

The history of this
Hill Country vista
goes right through
a century-old
Julian Onderdonk
painting

BY JOHN R. MILLARD

The west prong of the Medina River arises in Bandera County and flows eastward, fed by underground springs amid steep, canyon-carved terrain northwest of San Antonio. The flow traces a serpentine path through oak and cedar groves, rocky outcrops, and grassy slopes before joining the north prong near the town of Medina.

In 1915, this area was still a wild frontier—sparsely settled, with vast ranches dominating the landscape. The Medina Lake dam, completed in 1912, altered downstream flows, but the upper prongs retained their pristine character: clear waters, rocky riverbeds, and dense cedar and live oak groves.

It was beautiful country. I know this because Julian Onderdonk stopped here in 1915, set up an easel and canvas, and got to painting—and I can prove it.

It all started with a chance discovery: a digital image of an Onderdonk oil painting called *Gulf Clouds in the Hills on the West Prong of the Medina River* instantly caught my eye—not just for its beauty but for its uncanny resemblance to our land.

“Debra,” I called out to my wife, “you won’t believe it, but this is our property.”



I had just hiked those ridges that morning, stood on that same bluff and looked down at that same striated rock in the riverbed. The landscape in the painting wasn't just similar—it was ours.

What started as a curious observation turned into a historical investigation—one that led me through Texas archives, family lore and conversations with art experts, historians and ranchers. The deeper I dug, the more the story grew. Not just one painting but possibly four were painted by Onderdonk during a 1915 visit to what was then known as the Williams Ranch, now part of our West Prong Ranch.

We acquired the property in January 2024—one of seven tracts carved from the historic Garrison Ranch, originally established in the late 1800s. Like many historic properties, the ranch evolved over time—its boundaries reshaped by sales, inheritances and a legal dispute—but the same beauty remains.

John R. Millard was stunned to discover that a 1915 Julian Onderdonk painting, above, portrays a view he enjoys on his Bandera County property, opposite. It's undeniable, Millard says.

Gulf Clouds in the Hills on the West Prong of the Medina River

1915

Oil on panel

Lusher Art Collection

This painting demonstrates the complex geographic identity of San Antonio's countryside. The title and fluffy white clouds indicate the region's proximity to the Gulf Coast. Green hills, characteristic of Central and South Texas, form the horizon. The west prong, illustrated here, is one of two main sections of the Medina River. The nearly dry river exposes the limestone bed, and there is just enough water to reflect the blue sky.

The Man With the Brush

Often called the “Father of Texas Art,” Onderdonk left an indelible mark on American impressionism with his radiant Hill Country portrayals. Born in San Antonio in 1882, he trained under his father, artist Robert Jenkins Onderdonk, and later under William Merritt Chase in New York, honing his eye for light and texture.

Returning to Texas in 1909, Onderdonk fused Chase’s plein air, or open air, philosophy of painting outdoors with the rugged splendor of his homeland.

Onderdonk’s works—vibrant with color, delicately executed and alive with natural beauty—earned acclaim during his lifetime and reverence after his death in 1922.

Today his paintings command high prices: *Blue Bonnet Field, Early Morning, San Antonio Texas* sold for \$515,000 in 2013. Two other pieces sold for \$317,000 and \$281,000 at that same auction in Dallas. His works have been on display in all



of Texas’ major art museums, and several paintings even hung in the Oval Office when George W. Bush was president.

Each of the four 1915 paintings features terrain elements that resemble areas on or near our property—with live oaks, horizon lines and familiar contours we can still observe today. While there’s no direct evidence or documentation of such an excursion, the visual similarities raise the possibility they were painted during a multiday journey by mule into this remote region.

I hiked back out to the bend in the river and took a photo. From that vantage point,

the similarities were undeniable. The limestone bluffs, the curve of the hills, the river’s arc and the distinctive limestone formations in the riverbed all aligned with striking precision—like fingerprints.

It was a match. Onderdonk’s *Gulf Clouds in the Hills on the West Prong of the Medina River* portrays the very terrain we

now call home—capturing its distinctive topography with remarkable accuracy.

Collector of the Clouds

But for this discovery to be taken seriously, it needed more than compelling visual similarities; it needed validation from people who know Onderdonk best.

Art dealer Harry Halff is the foremost authority on Onderdonk

and author of the artist’s catalogue raisonné—the definitive scholarly resource documenting the artist’s body of work.

“There is no doubt in my mind that the painting’s location is on your ranch,” Halff wrote in an email after reviewing the photographic comparisons and supporting documentation. “This may be one of the rare Onderdonk landscapes still visually tied to a named site today.”

Ted Lusher agreed with that assessment. He’s a respected collector of Texas art and history whose personal archive includes rare artifacts of Texas and Onderdonk’s original *Gulf Clouds in the Hills* itself.

“There’s no question in my mind,” he wrote of the similarities to our land. “The alignment of terrain and artistic detail is too precise to be coincidental.”

In 1915, traveling from San Antonio to Bandera County—about 50 miles away to the northwest—was challenging. With FM 337 not established until 1945, Onderdonk would have traveled over steep dirt trails and caliche paths, common in rural Texas at the time.

Automobiles like the Ford Model T had existed since 1908 but were impractical in the Hill Country’s rough conditions, especially for an artist of modest means. Instead, Onderdonk

“

For us, this land has become something rare—a kind of living time machine. The terrain remains so untouched, the features so distinctive, that the gap between today and 1915 seems to vanish.

”



OPPOSITE, FROM TOP
A 1901 portrait of
Onderdonk, one of
Texas' artistic masters,
by William Merritt
Chase. Millard stands
with Daisy Jane on the
property he bought
with his wife in 2024.
He considers their
ranch a living gallery.

RIGHT Millard's research
into Onderdonk
suggests *Windmill
on Williams Ranch*
was also painted on
his property in 1915.



JULIAN ONDERDONK

likely used horse-drawn transport, such as wagons or buggies for flatter areas, and possibly mules for the steeper terrain.

Half notes that Onderdonk was “not averse to long hikes in the country,” often walking out into the hills armed with his easel, canvas and paints.

While Half has not found any direct references to mule travel, he considers it “entirely plausible” that Onderdonk may have ridden by mule into more remote terrain.

The Muleman Next Door

That brings us to Paul Garrison III, our neighbor and a skilled mule skinner.

Garrison's family has lived and ranched on this land for five generations, and he carries forward the family legacy as the owner of Garrison Mulemanship and Training, a program known far and wide for cultivating the unique partnership between mules and their handlers.

Garrison and I discussed how Onderdonk might have reached this rugged, steep land more than a century ago. “There's no way he got there by car,” he said. “You'd need a good mule—maybe two. This is classic mule country.”

Before the Garrison family—and long before us—the land was known as the Williams Ranch. One of its earliest first-hand accounts comes from Samuel H. Sutton, who was born in 1850 and moved here in 1876.

One memory stood out for Sutton, writing for *Frontier Times Magazine* in 1928: He and his wife were washing clothes at the confluence of Cazey Creek and the west prong of the Medina River when they were surprised by Native Americans on a bluff above them. Sutton grabbed his rifle, his heart pounding. The moment passed without violence, but the tension and terrain left a mark on him.

His description of the bluff and the wash spot corresponds closely to the same curve and elevation where *Gulf Clouds in the Hills* was likely painted. It's fascinating to think that within a few decades, this same bluff and river could have

been the setting for a settler's tense moment and an artist's quiet observation.

Preserving the View

One of the most remarkable aspects of this story is how little the land has changed, and Debra and I are determined to keep it that way. We've intentionally avoided building in areas that would disrupt the natural setting and have left existing trails undisturbed.

For us, this land has become something rare—a kind of living time machine. The terrain remains so untouched, the features so distinctive, that the gap between today and 1915 seems to vanish.

Visitors notice it, too. When we show them the digital image of the painting beside the actual view, there's often a long pause, followed by some variation of: “This place hasn't changed at all.”

In a constantly evolving world, finding proof that a landscape has stayed so consistent is unusual. The land reflects the same beauty Onderdonk captured, and now, more than a century later, we can see it just as he did.

As landowners, we're stewards of something much greater than ourselves. Our ranch is more than just acreage. It's a living gallery—one that requires no velvet ropes, no security guards and no admission fee. Just boots, curiosity and a willingness to see.

We didn't set out to uncover a hidden chapter in Texas art history. But once we realized what we were standing on, it became clear: This land belongs to history. To Onderdonk. To Sutton. To the Garrisons. And to everyone who's ever paused to marvel at the way clouds move across the hills.

Gulf Clouds in the Hills isn't just oil on canvas. It's evidence. That Onderdonk stood here. That he saw what we see. And that he found it beautiful enough to preserve forever.

We're honored to be part of that continuum. ■

Our Bone-ified Best Blade

This knife says you're no one to mess with



"It's a beautiful knife with a great blade and a sure grip"

— William B. Wilmington, NC

My friend Sergio is a mixed martial arts fighter. His shoulders are broad. His muscles have muscles. He's not the kind of person you want to be on the wrong side of.

This manly man has a saying about being tough: You should either know how to fight or look like you do.

The message is simple enough. People spoiling for a fight usually don't pick the biggest guy in the bar. If you look like someone who shouldn't be messed with, you likely won't be. With our Blue Bone Bowie Knife on your hip, that's exactly the message you'll send.

As beautiful as it is functional, this knife is 10" overall and features a high-quality 420 surgical stainless steel blade with a serrated spine. The handle is constructed of genuine natural bone with redwood spacers. On the handle you'll find design work that's carved by hand, a testament to its craftsmanship.

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SLITHER SENSE

Mostly harmless and widely misunderstood, snakes quietly patrol the Bluebonnet region doing important work as both predator and prey. Here are seven species you're most likely to encounter — and what to know about them.



Drake Rangel, a Texas Parks & Wildlife biologist in Fayette County, holds Dottie, a 3-foot Great Plains rat snake.

Photo by Sarah Beal

By Andrew Logan

Last summer, Mike Beech, a Central Texas wildlife control specialist, was called to a home in Bastrop after a family spotted an unfamiliar serpent in their backyard. By the time he arrived, nerves were frayed and the family's young children were waiting in the house.

Beech already had a good idea of what he'd find.

The homeowners sent him a photo, so Beech believed the long, sleek snake was a coachwhip, a nonvenomous species harmless to people. As he poked through the backyard garden, the snake bolted over his boot and zipped between the homeowner's legs. "He leaps about as high as the fence line," Beech said.

Beech dove forward, caught the coachwhip by the tail, and secured it barehanded. Crisis averted.

The children were released from the house, and Beech let them touch the snake. He explained that while healthy respect for these animals is important, the kids shouldn't grow up fearing them. Beech relocated the coachwhip far from the yard, where it could continue its quiet rodent-hunting life.

Snakes are stitched into the everyday fabric of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area — and the rest of Central Texas. They surface along barbed wire fences, tuck themselves beneath woodpiles and make the occasional appearance in manicured backyards. While some species pose a risk to pets and people, most are harmless, and all play an essential role in our local ecology.

Despite that, they are one of nature's most unfairly maligned neighbors. Learning how these important creatures live and behave can ease unnecessary fear and help people coexist with them more wisely.

More than 80 snake species live in Texas, and as many as 40 of them call Central Texas home. "Texas blows everybody out of the water when it comes to snake diversity," said Paul Crump, a herpetologist with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. The abundance comes from the state's diverse terrain and unique climate.

Bluebonnet's service area sits at an ecological crossroads, where the Edwards Plateau fades into the Blackland Prairie, and the East Texas woodlands meet the Post Oak Savannah, with drier country to the south. "That habitat diversity is what drives snake diversity," Crump said. In addition, Central Texas' mild winters and long warm seasons help: Snakes, being cold-blooded, aren't forced to exist underground as long as in colder regions. That makes human-snake interactions more likely.

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DO'S AND DON'TS AROUND BLUEBONNET-AREA SNAKES

Do

- Give snakes space and leave them alone.
- Back away if you see one and give it room to escape.
- Wear tall boots and long pants in tall grass.
- Watch where you place your hands and feet.
- Supervise children outdoors.
- Teach children not to touch snakes.
- Keep yards and barns free of debris that attracts rodents.
- Keep dogs on a leash in areas where snakes might be present.
- Maintain control and awareness of where pets are exploring.

Don't

- Panic if you encounter a snake.
- Leave food sources that could attract prey animals.
- Put your bare feet or bare hands in areas you can't see.
- Try to handle a snake you can't identify.



BITTEN BY A SNAKE? HERE'S WHAT TO DO

Most snakebites do not happen because a snake is aggressive; they are the result of human interaction, such as stepping too close, reaching into a hidden space or attempting to kill a snake. While snakebites are uncommon, know what to do if one occurs:

- Stay calm and get to a hospital as soon as possible.
- Understand that the risk from snakebites is often overstated. Very few people die of snake bites in the United States.
- Don't cut the bite or try to suck out the venom.
- Don't apply a tourniquet or ice.
- Clean the bite with soap and water.
- If possible, note the description of the snake for medical personnel.

SNAKES YOU'RE LIKELY TO SEE

The Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area is home to dozens of snake species. Here are some of the most common.

Illustrations by Joe Stafford



WESTERN RAT SNAKE OR TEXAS RAT SNAKE

(Pantherophis obsoletus)

Venomous? No

Identification: One of the longest snakes in Texas, reaching 3½ to 6 feet; adults usually have dark gray or black blotches (juveniles are brown) on their backs that are irregularly shaped or hexagonal, and smaller blotches on their sides; they also have a white chin and throat.

Habitat: Forests, wooded river bottoms, rocky hillsides. Excellent climbers; often found around areas near humans: trees, chicken coops or barns.

Diet & ecological role: Eats rodents, birds, eggs and occasionally lizards or frogs. Major controller of rodent populations. Helps limit agricultural and structural pests. Prey for larger predators.

From the experts: "Often called chicken snakes since they are commonly found eating chicken eggs out of coops. They are adept climbers and mainly eat mice, rats or birds."

— *Toby Hibbitts, herpetologist and professor at Texas A&M University*



COACHWHIP

(Masticophis flagellum)

Venomous? No

Identification: This species generally reaches 4 to 5½ feet in length. It is considered one of the fastest snakes in the area, capable of speeds up to 4 mph; slender, light tan or yellowish brown in color; scales that look braided or woven; round eyes.

Habitat: Dry, open areas, including grasslands and rocky hillsides.

Diet & ecological role:

Eats rodents, other snakes, lizards, insects and eggs. Helps control populations of lizards, rodents and even other snakes, including venomous species.

From the experts: "Large, fast snakes that have great vision and search for their prey during the day." — *Toby Hibbitts*





WESTERN RIBBON SNAKE

(Thamnophis proximus)

Venomous? No

Identification: Typically 20 to 30 inches long with three bright yellow stripes against a dark brown or black background color, a yellow dot on the head and a long tail. Very fast and alert.

Habitat: Wide range of habitats, typically not far from water.

Diet & ecological role: Significant predator of amphibians, but also small fish and invertebrates. Helps connect aquatic and terrestrial food webs. Prey for larger predators.

From the experts: "These guys are super-fast and excellent swimmers. Interestingly enough, they give live birth!"

— Drake Rangel, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department biologist for Fayette County



BROAD-BANDED COPPERHEAD

(Agkistrodon laticinctus)

Venomous? Yes

Identification: Typically 20 to 30 inches long; light brown or tan with wide or hourglass-shaped bands. Copper-colored head. Vertical pupils and heat-sensing pits, located between the eye and nostril on each side.

Habitat: Woodlands, rocky slopes, forest edges, river bottoms.

Diet & ecological role: Eats rodents, lizards, frogs and large insects (especially juveniles). Controls small mammal and insect populations. Important prey for king snakes and birds of prey.

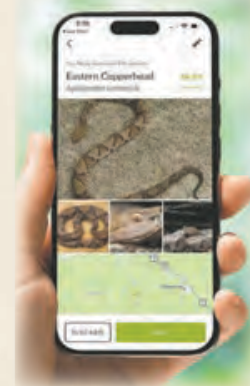
From the experts: "Regarding copperheads, I always love to point out the ways we've managed to use components of their venom for medicine to include treatments for ailments such as cancer, heart problems and blood conditions." — Drake Rangel

WHERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SNAKES

iNaturalist: Free mobile app and website that helps people identify plants and animals by sharing photos with a community of naturalists and scientists. — *Seek by iNaturalist:* Uses image recognition to identify plants and animals instantly. No account required, safe for children.

SnakeSnap! Subscription-based mobile app designed to identify snakes from photos and provide safety information. Some versions of the app use AI to identify snakes automatically, while others rely on a panel of human experts who review submissions and send back an identification.

Facebook groups: Central Texas Snake ID, Texas Snake Identification.



By uploading a photo to the iNaturalist app, users can quickly identify snakes and learn whether a species is venomous or harmless.



WHEN SNAKES CAUSE POWER OUTAGES

Snakes are part of the Central Texas landscape — and on occasion, their curiosity can bring them close to electrical infrastructure. Because snakes are natural climbers, they can enter substations or electrical equipment and come into contact with energized equipment, which can cause a short circuit and trigger a power outage.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative designs its system with wildlife in mind. Substations are equipped with snake-resistant fencing and other barriers to keep animals out. Crews also perform frequent inspections and continuous monitoring to identify potential problems early and help prevent snake-related outages before they occur.

The milk snake is a nonvenomous species, often mistaken for a coral snake, that lives in a variety of habitats, including woods, rocky areas and sometimes barns, where they help control rodent populations.

Photo courtesy of Maegan Lanham, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department



Continued from Page 17

In the Bluebonnet region, snakes occupy one of the ecosystem's most consequential — and least appreciated — jobs, functioning as both hunters and hunted in a natural system that depends on balance. As predators, they quietly keep populations in check, consuming everything from rodents and insects to amphibians. They are uniquely suited for the task. With their slender and flexible physique, snakes can slip into narrow cracks and other tight spaces that other hunters can't follow. Rat snakes have adapted seamlessly to rural life. Drawn to agricultural buildings where rodents feast on animal feed, rat snakes, typically 3½ to 6 feet long, are known to provide a kind of pest control that predates barn cats.

Snakes are also an essential food source. Hawks and owls snatch them from above, while coyotes, bobcats and skunks hunt them on the ground. That two-way exchange keeps the web of life in balance. "If you remove any given piece of the puzzle that keeps [prey species] populations in check, their population is allowed to grow past what the carrying capacity of the landscape could be," said Drake Rangel, a wildlife biologist for Fayette County with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. That can lead to habitat degradation and the spread of disease, he said.

Let's face it: We can sing their ecological praises, but snakes usually conjure bad feelings among people. "When we're talking about snakes, the first that come to mind for most people are the venomous ones," Rangel said.

That fear far exceeds the risk, especially in Central Texas, where most snake species are nonvenomous.

Even the venomous ones aren't looking for trouble. One of the biggest misconceptions about snakes is that they are aggressive, experts say, but they strike only when they feel threatened. "Snakes are as afraid of you as you are of them," said Toby Hibbitts, a herpetologist and professor at Texas A&M University. "If you give them space and leave them alone, they're going to go on their way. They're not going to chase you."

For Donald Miller, a Bluebonnet member living on 20 wooded acres in Burton in Washington County, that understanding took time. At first, the snakes he saw unsettled him. If he crossed paths with a rattlesnake, he killed it. Over the years, however, his attitude softened, especially as he became more accustomed to seeing snakes on his land. "We used to see coachwhips mating right outside our window," he said. "That's how common they were."

Miller, 80, describes snakes as "beautiful, endlessly fascinating to observe, and critical to a healthy environment." His shift in perspective is one that biologists say often comes after spending time observing how the land and wildlife are woven together. "I wouldn't kill any snake now," Miller said. "This old adage about the only good snake is a dead snake is just wrong."

You don't have to be a backyard herpetologist to live safely alongside snakes, but learning about the few venomous species native to the area can help reduce danger. Out of all the snake species here, "really only four, maybe five are actually venomous," Rangel said. People have long leaned on visual characteristics to identify threatening snakes: triangular heads, slit pupils and skin patterns. Many of those cues can be helpful,

but none are foolproof. Even the distinctive color pattern of coral snakes can be misleading when genetics produce rare mutations. "With nature, there're just always exceptions," Rangel said.

The technology in your pocket can help close the gap between fear and understanding. Rangel regularly points to the app iNaturalist, which lets users photograph a snake and get identification help from a network of professionals and experienced amateurs. "It's a really good way to learn what's around you," he said, noting that he uses it when something stumps him.

Even when venomous snakes are present, their danger is often overstated. About 7,000 to 8,000 people are bitten by venomous snakes in the United States each year, and roughly five die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Serious injuries can occur, but the odds of being bitten are low. "You're more likely to be bitten by 20 different dogs than you are to be bitten by one snake," Crump said.

Experts agree that if you find a snake on your property, the best response is often to leave it alone and give it time to move on. If you're unsure of the species, step back and keep your distance. If you can, take a photo and contact a local pest control professional. Above all, don't escalate the situation by trying to scare it away.

Lately, Miller has seen fewer snakes on his property than in past years. A herpetologist told him it's likely just the natural ebb and flow of wildlife. Miller hopes that's true. He does know this: Fear shrinks with familiarity, respect grows with understanding and wonder can expand your appreciation. "The more awe you have for nature," he said, "the happier you'll be."

WESTERN DIAMONDBACK RATTLESNAKE

(*Crotalus atrox*)

Venomous? Yes

Identification: Averages 3 ½ to 4 ½ feet long, can reach 7 feet; two parallel pale stripes separated by a darker stripe extending diagonally across the cheeks to the eye; brown diamond-shaped markings down the center of its back; tails have alternating black-and-white bands and can rattle more than 60 times per second as a defensive display.

Habitat: Flatlands, prairies, rocky hills and low mountains.

Diet & ecological role: Eats rodents, rabbits and birds. Important prey for coyotes, foxes, bobcats, hawks and Texas Indigo snakes.

From the experts: “Out of all the venomous snakes around, I consider rattlesnakes to be the most polite. They are one of a few snakes with an audible sound letting you know that they are there.” — *Drake Rangel*



PLAIN-BELLIED WATERSNAKE

(*Nerodia erythrogaster*)

Venomous? No

Identification: Typically, 30 to 48 inches long; mostly brown to black with blotches, plain off-white, yellow or orange belly. Adults are often dark with faint or no pattern. Defensive when handled (flattening head and musking — the release of a strong-smelling fluid).

Habitat: Lakes, ponds, rivers, swamps, marshes.

Diet & ecological role: Eats fish, frogs, tadpoles, crayfish, invertebrates, carrion. Helps control fish and amphibian populations. Important prey for birds and mammals.

From the experts: “They are completely harmless to humans, but if harassed they will not only bite but also musk similar to a skunk! These guys are often mistaken for venomous cottonmouths almost purely due to their association with water. If you really look at them, short of being a dark-colored snake in water, they’re pretty different!” — *Drake Rangel*



BROWN SNAKE

(*Storeria dekayi*)

Venomous? No

Identification: Usually 9 to 13 inches long; graying brown to dark brown coloring with a lighter band extending down the middle of the back; band’s outer edges are usually lined with a row of evenly spaced small dark spots.

Habitat: Prefers wet, shaded places that offer ground cover, such as river and creek floodplains and their slopes, swamps, freshwater marshes, damp woods and even water-filled ditches.

Diet & ecological role: Eats earthworms, snails and slugs. Prey to birds, larger snakes, frogs, toads, weasels and domestic cats.

From the experts: “These snakes eat small invertebrates and are often found in leaf litter.”

— *Toby Hibbitts*





Bluebonnet to compete at 30th Texas Lineman's Rodeo

BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE is sending a senior journeyman lineworker team, three journeyman lineworker teams, 12 apprentice lineworkers, 12 competition judges and a barbecue team to the Texas Lineman's Rodeo at Nolte Island Park near Seguin on July 18.

The rodeo tests the skills that lineworkers rely on daily, from climbing poles to repairing equipment. Other challenges include a dexterous pole climb while carrying a raw egg without breaking it and a pole-top rescue of a life-sized mannequin, simulating the rescue of an injured coworker. Judges evaluate speed, technique and adherence to safety standards, highlighting the precision and preparation required in real-world linework.

Beyond the competition, the rodeo celebrates the electric utility community. Bluebonnet teams, joined by family and friends, will cheer on their peers.

The public is invited to watch the events along the Guadalupe River and see firsthand the skill and dedication of lineworkers. Learn more at tla.org, and get live event updates on Bluebonnet's social media.



Journeymen Ty Duesterheft and John Zamora from Maxwell change out power line equipment during the 2025 Texas Lineman's Rodeo.



Kyle Kasper of Giddings pulls rope up to his team as they work to change out power line equipment on top of a pole at the 2025 Texas Lineman's Rodeo. Journeymen lineworkers compete in teams. — Photos by Sarah Beal



Logan Lancaster from Giddings climbs a utility pole, aiming to go up and down as quickly as possible without breaking an egg held in a bag in his mouth in the 2025 Texas Lineman's Rodeo.

OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Friday, June 19, for Juneteenth. If your power goes out, you can report it by texting OUT to 44141, online at bluebonnet.coop, on the MyBluebonnet mobile app or by 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).

Are you ready for hurricane season?

Atlantic storm season runs June 1–Nov. 30.
For more resources, visit bluebonnet.coop/hurricanes.

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Texas: Forever in Your Heart



1. Heart of Texas Women's Hoodie

3. Personalized Heart of Texas Women's Denim Jacket



Hoodie and tote feature a silver-tone Texas charm



2. Heart of Texas Quilted Tote



Denim Jacket Personalized FREE with your name or initials

1. Heart of Texas Women's Hoodie

This cozy ivory hoodie is expertly crafted of an easy-care cotton blend knit and features a detailed image of a cowgirl boot and hat next to the embroidered saying, "You Can Take The Girl Out Of Texas, But You Can't Take The Texas Out Of The Girl." Additional details include fun embroidered accents, soft contrasting taupe jersey knit-lined hood, front hip pockets, full front zipper, knit cuffs and a straight hem for an extra comfortable fit. A silver-tone zipper pull shaped like the State of Texas with a heart cutout completes this classic country girl design. Imported. Available in women's sizes S-3X. *Item price: \$99.99, payable in 3 easy installments of \$33.33 each (plus a total of \$19.99 s + s*) Add \$10 for sizes 1X-3X*

2. Heart of Texas Quilted Tote

This Texas-inspired quilted tote features classic country styling with a sentiment every Texas girl knows by heart. Framed in a bold red bandana print, the front and back feature a cowgirl boot and hat alongside the saying, "You Can Take The Girl Out Of Texas, But You Can't Take The Texas Out Of The Girl." Crafted of soft yet durable high-quality quilted fabric, this tote features a roomy interior with one zippered pocket and two slip pockets, along with a zippered closure. A silver-tone charm showcasing the silhouette of Texas with a heart cutout adds a perfect finishing touch to this versatile dual-handle tote. Imported. *Item price: \$79.99, payable in 3 easy installments of \$26.66 each (plus a total of \$19.99 s + s*)*

3. Personalized Heart of Texas Women's Denim Jacket

Beautifully crafted of durable, medium-wash cotton-blend stretch denim, this jacket features a bold outline of the Lone Star State with bandana-inspired accents beneath a classic Western yoke—finished with the sentiment, "Forever a Texas Girl." A gold embroidered heart and white embroidered accents add to the look. The front of the jacket is personalized FREE with your monogram or full name (max 12 characters). Additional design details for this flattering and roomy jacket include two flap chest pockets with silver-tone button closures, two hip pockets, an adjustable hem and cuffs and a full button-front closure. Imported. Available in women's sizes S-3X. *Item price: \$149.99, payable in 4 easy installments of \$37.50 each (plus a total of \$19.99 s+s*) Add \$10 for sizes 1X-3X*

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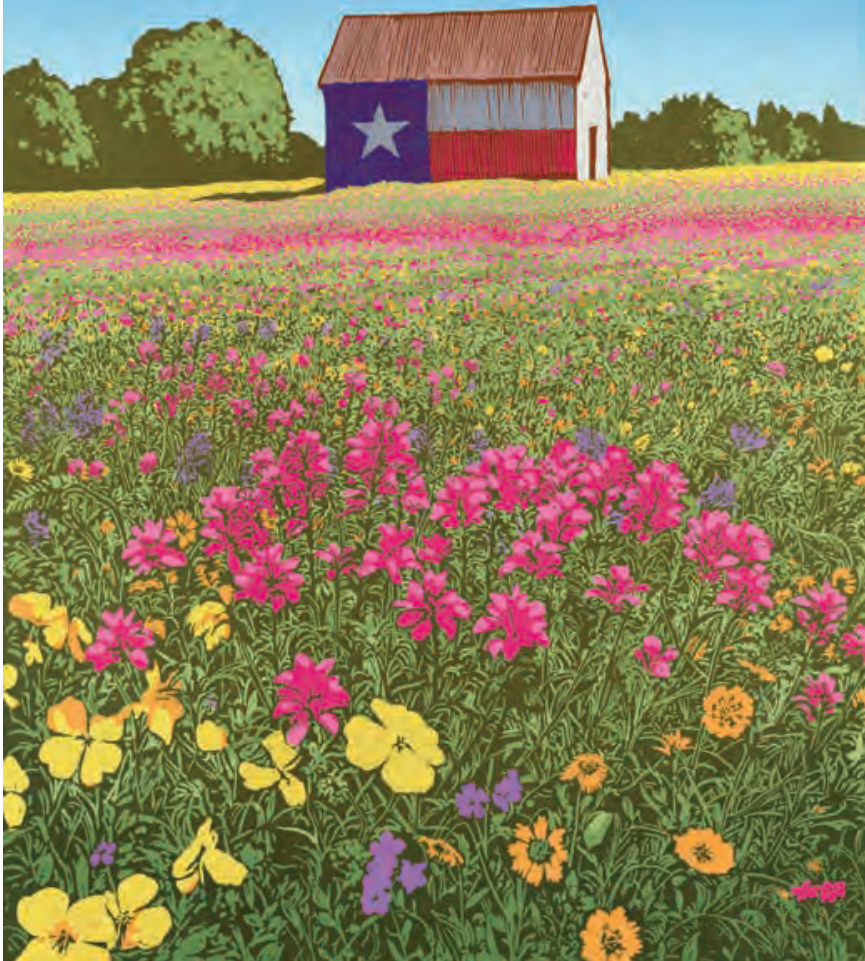
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E54801



Go the Other Way

Eastern Central Texas' hill country also has plenty of wildflowers, rolling hills and history

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY CHRIS WORMELL

A GREAT MANY TEXANS set off for the Hill Country to enjoy the splendor of the wildflowers over the past couple of months. The blooms light up the hills and roadsides with carpets of vibrant color.

But I want to suggest that you consider the other hill country, composed of a gentler, less dramatic topography—one that also offers wildflowers galore and winding roads but has the advantage of being far less traveled.

You start in the small eastern Central Texas hamlet of Clay, between Brenham and Bryan, on FM 50, heading south. Here, you will encounter the first hill rising off the flatlands into a changing ecosystem. You can see the gentle rise sweep across

the land like a stationary wave, from left to right.

Once you get into Independence, which changed its name from Cole's Settlement around 1836 to honor Texas' freedom from Mexico, take a right on FM 390 and stay on that road almost all the way to Burton.

This is a famous scenic drive that passes through the old ghost town of Gay Hill. Wildflowers are often bountiful here. From Burton, continue on U.S. Highway 290 for a few miles and pick up State Highway 237 to Round Top.

Round Top was part of Stephen F. Austin's original colony. The town took its name from an octagonal tower

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



constructed there in stagecoach days. Since the 1960s it's been known as a mecca for antique lovers. What I appreciate most about the road from Round Top to La Grange are the white fences that curve along emerald green pastures.

Once you get into La Grange on State Highway 159, you'll take a left on U.S. Highway 77, climb the big hill and head south out of town, crossing the Colorado River. La Grange is probably best known for the Chicken Ranch brothel, which ZZ Top and reporter Marvin Zindler made famous in the 1970s—or perhaps infamous. It's long gone, of course.

Just 4 miles down that road, you'll take a right on County Road 2436. Look to your left and, quite soon, you'll see the largest lawn mower graveyard you've ever seen. That's Keith's Lawnmower Repair. I'm not sure it's a good advertisement for Keith's skills, but maybe it's an endorsement of his genius as a seller of new mowers.

This road dead-ends into FM 609, where you'll take a left. Here, the hills get bigger and the wildflowers more robust.

Watch for a shed painted in the colors of the Texas flag, off to the left. It's magnificently situated among wildflowers—as if the shed is posing for you.

It won't be long before you will arrive in Flatonia, which isn't particularly flat (it was named for pioneer settler F.W. Flato). In Flatonia, pick up State Highway 95 headed south toward Shiner. On this stretch, you'll enjoy more rural roads, gentle hills and wildflowers, including panoramic views off to the west.

End your drive with a Shiner Bock at the oldest independent brewery in Texas. After a two-hour drive through wildflower country, you've earned a bock or two. ■

The Art of the Sandwich

Warm your heart with a meal dressed in layers

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

All my favorite things—brisket, butter, Texas toast and cheese— together in perfectly delicious harmony makes for one happy señorita. Whenever my husband cooks up a brisket, I always tuck away some in the freezer to whip up these sandwiches. Pair this sandwich with a glass of wine, an icy cold beer or a frozen margarita.

Brisket Grilled Cheese Sandwich

4 tablespoons (½ stick) butter, softened
4 slices thick-sliced white bread (often labeled Texas toast)
8 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, grated or sliced
16 ounces diced, cooked brisket, room temperature

1. Butter one side of each slice of bread.
2. On the unbuttered side of 2 bread slices, layer half the cheddar, brisket and other half of cheddar. Top with two remaining bread slices, butter side out, to make sandwiches.
3. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook sandwiches 3–4 minutes on each side, or until both sides are golden brown.
4. Remove sandwiches from skillet, slice in half and serve warm.

SERVES 2

TCP Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at sweetlifebake.com, where she features a recipe for Mini Chorizo con Papa y Huevo Breakfast Sandwiches.





Grilled Strawnana Hazelnut Sandwich

LISA CASIMIR
COSERV

Grab a few napkins and get ready to sink your teeth into the sweetest twist on the classic PB&J. I love a peanut butter sammy, but the combination of berries and banana with chocolate hazelnut is everything I didn't know I needed!

- 1/3 cup chocolate hazelnut spread, such as Nutella**
- 4 slices sourdough bread**
- 1 cup strawberries, thinly sliced**
- 2 bananas, thinly sliced**
- 2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) butter**

1. Spread hazelnut spread on one side of each slice of sourdough. Top two slices with strawberries. Top the other two slices with bananas.
2. Stack bread to make two sandwiches, pairing one strawberry-topped slice with one banana-topped slice, and evenly spread butter on each side of sandwiches.
3. Heat a skillet over medium-high heat. Cook sandwiches, covered, 3 minutes on each side, or until bread is lightly toasted.
4. Slice in half and serve warm.

SERVES 2

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 >



\$500 WINNER

Muffuletta

BETTY HERZIK
FAYETTE EC



A briny olive spread combines with a smorgasbord of cold cuts and cheese to create a mouth-watering BIG bite of a sandwich, and I am in love. The food processor does all the heavy lifting in this recipe, then the sandwich gets wrapped in foil and baked until warm. I cannot wait to make this sandwich again and again.

- 1 jar giardiniera (16 ounces), drained**
- 1/2 of 10-ounce jar pimiento-stuffed Spanish queen olives, drained**
- 1/2 of 10-ounce jar sliced Kalamata olives, drained**

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 loaf ciabatta bread, sliced horizontally**
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano**
- 8 ounces sliced Black Forest ham**
- 4 ounces sliced hard salami**
- 4 ounces sliced mortadella**
- 8 ounces sliced provolone cheese**

COOK'S TIP: The sandwich may be refrigerated overnight (wrapped in aluminum foil). If doing this, take it out of the refrigerator about 45 minutes before baking. Increase the baking time to 20–22 minutes.

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a food processor, combine giardiniera, olives and oil and pulse until a uniform mixture forms. Brush both cut sides of bread with vinegar and sprinkle with oregano.
2. Place bottom half of the loaf on a piece of aluminum foil large enough to wrap around the entire sandwich. Layer meats and provolone on bread. Top with olive mixture. Place top half of bread on sandwich and wrap foil around sandwich.
3. Place wrapped sandwich on a baking sheet and bake 15–17 minutes, until thoroughly heated. Remove foil, slice into individual portions and serve.

SERVES 6

TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

CRANBERRY HARVEST DUE JUN 10

Cranberries can add a tart fall touch to pastries, salads, drinks and desserts. Come November we'll share the best from Co-op Country and award \$500 for the top recipe.

UPCOMING: HOLIDAY TRADITIONS DUE JUL 10



ENTER
ONLINE

Bridget's Sandwiches

LYNETT RATCHFORD
BLUEBONNET EC

These easy sandwiches have it all: sweet slices of ham, gooey Swiss cheese, and rolls that stay soft and fluffy on the inside with a perfectly toasted top. The secret is marinating them overnight in a savory butter sauce. They are delicious and a great dish for making in advance.

- 24 Hawaiian sweet rolls**
- 16 ounces sliced ham**
- 16 ounces sliced Swiss cheese**
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter**
- ½ teaspoon poppy seeds**
- 1 tablespoon minced onion**
- ½ teaspoon steak sauce**
- ½ tablespoon yellow mustard**

1. Slice rolls in half and arrange bottom halves in a baking dish. Layer with ham and Swiss. Place top halves of the rolls over cheese.
2. In a saucepan over medium-high heat,



melt butter. Add poppy seeds, onion, steak sauce and mustard and cook 1 minute. Pour mixture over sandwiches, spreading evenly.

3. Cover baking dish with aluminum foil and refrigerate overnight.
4. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and bake sandwiches, still covered by foil, 10 minutes. Remove foil and cook 10 minutes uncovered. Serve warm.

SERVES 6

Hacks for Your Stacks

Great sandwiches are all about high-quality ingredients and technique. Here are some secrets from my kitchen.

USE THOSE LEFTOVERS

Last night's shredded or roasted chicken or pork loin transform into a tasty lunch.

NO MAYO, NO PROBLEM

Pesto, ranch dip, hummus or sour cream with hot sauce can easily fill in for mayonnaise.

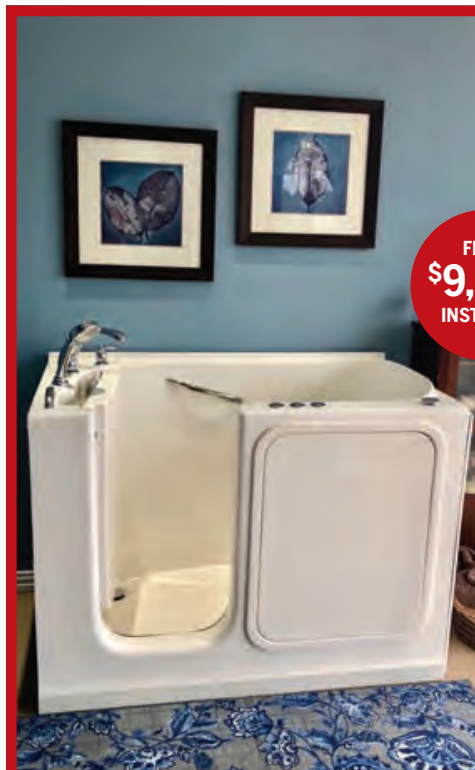
SEASON YOUR TOMATOES

Please! A little salt and pepper go a long way. And slice them with a serrated knife for the cleanest cut.

DON'T HOLD THE HERBS

Make your sandwich pop with a sprinkle of fresh dill, thyme or basil.

—Vianney Rodriguez



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COURTESY CASEY CHAPMAN ROSS

Play Time on the Prairie

The 'Fort Griffin Fandangle' is a spectacle like no other

BY CHET GARNER

I ARRIVED IN ALBANY, northeast of Abilene, just as the summer heat began to loosen its grip and the sky softened to a dusty pastel. I took my seat in the open-air Prairie Theater with 1,000 other folks who had all made the pilgrimage to witness the oldest outdoor musical in the state: the *Fort Griffin Fandangle*. The place was buzzing with anticipation, and I could see hundreds of costumed performers waiting in the ranks as saddled horses trotted offstage.

This was Albany's Super Bowl, and it was almost game time. Every year, a cast of 250 performers, horses, longhorns and a robotic snake rehearse for months in preparation for the last two weeks in June, when *Fandangle* takes the stage. The shows are June 19–20 and 26–27 this year.

The tradition goes back to 1938, when Robert Nail Jr., a high school teacher and amateur playwright, penned a musical about the history of Shackelford County. Nearly 90 years later, it's still going strong.

For the next few hours, I watched neighbors become pioneers, soldiers, ranchers and Comanche warriors, telling their collective story through songs, dance and a few gunfights. The narration carried us through settlement, struggle and celebration, but the real magic came from the sheer number of people involved—kids, parents, grandparents—sometimes three generations sharing the same spotlight.

There's something incredibly charming about knowing the singing cowboy or cancan dancer could be the local custodian, lawyer or barista. It was meaningful when it needed to be and at times completely ridiculous.

As the last song rang out across the prairie and the cast took their final bows, I felt like I had witnessed something deeply personal for Albany but also important for everyone. To quote its creator, Mr. Nail, "You can never be who you're supposed to be until you know who you've been." ■

ABOVE A cast of 200-plus stages the *Fort Griffin Fandangle* in Albany, continuing a tradition that goes back to 1938.

TCP Watch the video on our website and see all of Chet's Explorations 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.

JUNE

10

Snyder [10–13] West Texas Western Swing Festival, (325) 573-3558, snyderchamber.org

11

Abilene [11–14] Children's Art + Literacy Festival, (325) 677-1161, abilenecalf.com

13

Fredericksburg Luckenbach School Open House, (830) 685-3321, historicschools.org

Jacksonville Tomato Fest, (903) 586-2217, jacksonvilletexas.com

Mason Hot Dog & Hot Rod Night, (325) 347-5758, mason.tx.org

Seguin [13–July 10] Red, White and Blue Art Show, (830) 305-0472, seguinartleague.com

Grapevine [13–August 30] Dinosaur Quest, (817) 410-3185, grapevinetexasusa.com

17

Fairfield Tea With Miss Texas, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

18

Corsicana [18–21, 25–28] The Drowning Girls, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

20

Dallas Showtime Saturday: Hot Toast Music Company, (972) 702-7100, galleriadallas.com

Garland Juneteenth Celebration, (972) 205-2749, visitgarlandtx.com

Sherman Juneteenth Celebration, (469) 715-7471, bit.ly/shermanjuneteenth

23

Fort Worth [23-28] The Notebook, (817) 212-4280, basshall.com

25

Levelland [25-27] Golden Spread Classic, (806) 759-1102, goldenspreadclassic.com

27

Van Freedom Boom, (903) 963-7216, vantx.gov

JULY

3

Eagle Lake Freedom Festival, (979) 234-2640, coeltx.net

Fairfield Fireworks at the Fairgrounds, (903) 389-5792, fairfieldtexaschamber.com

Palestine [3-4] America 250: A Star-Spangled Jubilee, 1-800-659-3484, visitpalestine.com

Snyder [3-4] July 4th Celebration, (325) 573-3558, snyderchamber.org

4

Corsicana Freedom Fest, (903) 654-4850, visitcorsicana.com

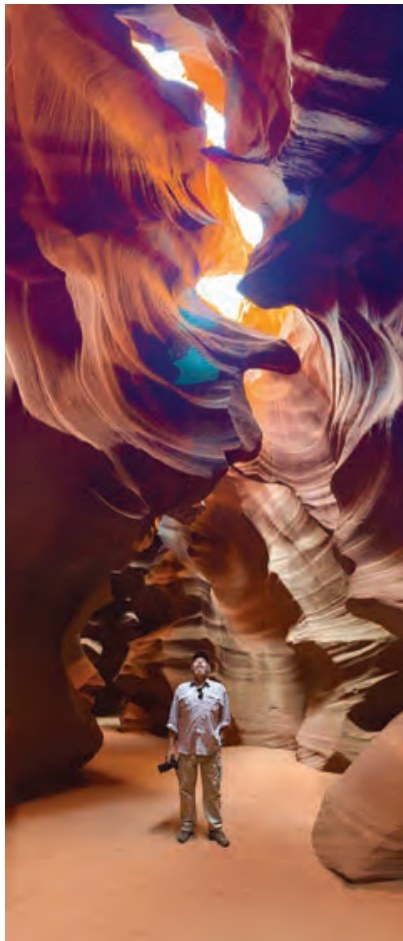
Giddings Firemen's July 4th Celebration, (979) 542-3455, giddingstx.com

Lakehills Independence Day Parade, (830) 612-1034, bit.ly/post0410bbq

Point Blank America 250, (281) 757-0682, usa250-pb.com

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Upper Antelope Canyon, fine art giclée print, 2025, 12" x 19", Bobby Greeson

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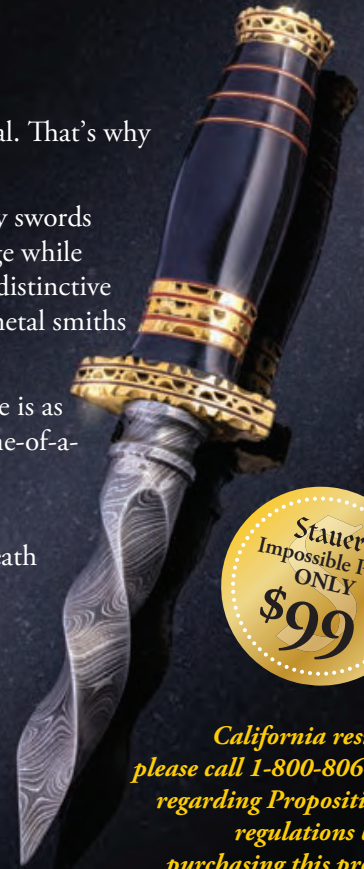
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1 RAY BEDNAR
BLUEBONNET EC

A painted bunting bathing.

2 FRANKI SALDIVAR
J-A-C EC

"I was able to photograph bears in Alaska in the fall of 2022."

3 LAUREN MCCLAIN
PENTEX ENERGY

"Wild and free, this 4-year-old lives life to the fullest."

4 PAUL GARCIA
MEDINA EC

"I just happened to catch this cardinal taking a bath in my home's birdbath."



Upcoming Contests

- TAILGATING** DUE JUN 10
- RIDE THE RAILS** DUE JUL 10
- CHRISTMAS FAILS** DUE AUG 10



ENTER ONLINE

TCP See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Making a Splash photos from readers.



Papa Hits His Stride

Fatherhood becomes grand when you get a second go

BY MARK TROTH

ILLUSTRATION BY
URAN DUO

GENERATION GAPS CAN BE measured in years but also in opinions and outlooks.

And as parents continue a decades-long trend of having children later in life, I wonder what will become of the growing gap between grandchildren and their grandparents. After all, a 60-year age difference between a Baby Boomer and his grandkids (I was a child of the 1960s) is bound to create more difficulty in finding common ground.

My dad was a hardworking, principled man of few words and a strong code of ethics. I didn't challenge him often. Serious father-son conversations usually assured a quiet peace. Though as he aged, Dad mellowed, especially with my children. And now that I'm the next generational Papa, it all makes perfect sense to me.

After retiring in 2023, my wife, Mary, and I relocated to Washington County—just an hour commute to the grandkids. We touch base daily and get together often, but the most special times are when they visit us in Chappell Hill for holidays or long weekends.

With these extended stays, I can play the grandfather role 24/7 and share my pearls of wisdom, old jokes and timeless stories that are, of course, always new to them. My son and daughter just roll their eyes.

Not unlike my dad, I bring a renewed patience and tolerance to my grandkids that may have been a bit lacking with my own children. As a father, work pressure, financial obligations and just plain life often got in the way.

Now, we are second in line with regard to child-raising responsibility. Mary and I assist, advise, support, nourish, teach and console—but rarely mandate.

Ten years now into full grandparent mode, my elder wisdom serves me well. I'm the peacemaker between siblings and cousins, the answerer to boundless questions, the blocks and puzzles play partner on the floor (getting back up is the hard part), the safety foot on the Kubota pedal while they steer, the fishing partner who takes the perch off the hook, the positive "get 'em next time" coach, a second—perhaps more seasoned and sympathetic—ear when they're troubled, and any other role that needs filling.

Yet I must be cautious to always support and respect my son's and daughter's parental initiatives.

If there is a generational gap with our grandchildren, Mary and I have bridged it with a circle of life and love. It is a second chance for Papa and Mimi to get it right.

It's been said, "Dearer than our children are the children of our children." Is there anything more grand than that? ■



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