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Crawfish and good times at Repka’s in Brookshire.

Crape Murder  As healthy trees are hacked in the prime of their lives, an expert pleads: “Stop the madness!”
Story by Sheryl Smith-Rodgers | Illustration by Michael Koelsch

A Tale of Texas Crawfish  Tasty crustaceans create a feasting frenzy every spring.
Story and photos by Eric W. Pohl

ONLINE
TexasCoopPower.com
Find these stories online if they don’t appear in your edition of the magazine.

Texas USA
On Board the Elissa
By Joey Held

Observations
A Texan at Iwo Jima
By Gene Fowler

NEXT MONTH
Soul Music of South Texas Conjunto coaxes a unique sound and subculture from accordions and 12-string guitars.

ON THE COVER  For many Texans, a crawfish boil marks more than the arrival of spring. Photo by Eric W. Pohl

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Clip-and–Save Recipes

Being in my 20s, I know that I am in the minority of your readership, but that also makes me the future of your readership. I read your articles monthly, but I only ever save the recipes, just like my mother and my mother’s mother before her. I clip them out and keep them in my homemade recipe book/binder/scrapbook.

KASEY MENN | BRYAN | BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

In October, the McQueeney VFD was the recipient of a Power-Up Grant of $20,000 for the purchase of lifesaving extrication equipment. This is one of the many ways in which GVEC has helped our department to better serve our community.

Marilyn Marshall | New Braunfels Guadalupe Valley EC

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

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

Kasey Menn, Bryan, Bryan Texas Utilities

Keeping in Touch

I am 84 and rely on good reading material to keep in touch with “all.”

Seldom have I enjoyed such fine articles as your November issue. I began with interesting Letters, then the woman behind Wreaths Across America and the magnificent photos accompanying the one-of-a-kind artists. Then comes my favorite subject—history.

Brenna Quebbemann | Blanco
Pedernales EC and Ceca

Startling Conclusion

The star on the coin looks nothing like the lone star on the flag [A Star Is Born, December 2019]. There were stars for centuries on flags, shields and emblems of nations. Our Texas founding fathers . . . considered Texas a “lone star”—alone as a region fighting the tyrannical dictatorship of Santa Anna.

To try to stretch so far to connect these patriots to an insignificant star on a coin minted in 1817 is a thin presumption and certainly not clear. The Long Expedition in 1819, usually given credibility for being the first image of the lone star, is proven history.

Coy Prather | Montalba
Trinity Valley EC

Made in Texas

It is great that you are celebrating the makers in our areas [In the Making, November 2019]. Nice photos and nice story.

Travis Froehlich | Bastrop
Bluebonnet EC

So many of us artisans here in Texas! . . . My husband and I have been making soap for the past 17 years using the milk from our award-winning Nubian dairy goats.

Caroline Lawson | via Facebook
Navasota Valley EC

Ryan Drapela [above] is an awesome young man. He works hard to be the best craftsman he can be.

Mark Woods | via Facebook

Hamil to the Rescue

President Richard Nixon’s failure to thwart REA was a huge success for rural electrification nationwide [Nixon’s Attack on Co-ops, December 2019]. Pictured behind Nixon was REA administrator Dave Hamil, a dear friend of mine.

Hamil almost single-handedly organized national leadership to save co-ops. Nixon was forced to sign legislation that restored federally funded loans and even greater financial health to co-ops.

Bill Muldoon | Kerrville
Central Texas EC

Co-ops and VFDs

I applaud your recognition of the critical importance and needs of volunteer fire departments in the communities they serve [Putting Others First, October 2019]. There are several volunteer fire departments served by our local co-op, Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative, including the McQueeney Volunteer Fire Department.

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Guadalupe Valley EC
HAPPENINGS

Chopin and Friends

Classical music lovers are in for a treat when distinguished Canadian pianist Ryo Yanagitani performs CHOPIN AND FRIENDS: ROMANTIC GENIUS at the Cailloux Theater in KERRVILLE on FEBRUARY 27.

Frédéric Chopin was a 19th-century Polish composer and virtuoso pianist who was close friends with French composer Hector Berlioz and sometimes friend, sometimes rival of Franz Liszt. The concert will feature pieces by all three and one by Johann Sebastian Bach, one of Chopin’s greatest influences.

“This concert is all about showmanship,” says Eugene Dowdy, conductor and artistic director for Symphony of the Hills, host of the event. “Ryo is a wonderful showman as a performer, super energetic. And even Chopin, himself a famous piano performer, also hung out with other showy composers like Hector Berlioz—composer of a piece named Symphony Fantastique, by the way. Who writes a symphony and names it that?”

INFO ► (830) 792-7469, symphonyofthehills.org

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

PIONEERING M.D.

National Women Physicians Day is February 3. The date marks the birthday of Elizabeth Blackwell in 1821. When Blackwell graduated from New York’s Geneva Medical College in 1849, she became the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States.

In Texas, 22,550 of the state’s 64,602 physicians—about one-third—are women, according to a March 2019 report by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

LIFESTYLE

Cut It Out!

Have you witnessed crape murder—the horrific and drastic pruning of innocent crape myrtles? Or seen the gnarled, knotty scars left by previous crimes?

Read Crape Murder on Page 8, then tell us about your experience by emailing letters@TexasCoopPower.com or posting on our Facebook page. Include your name, co-op and city. (We won’t turn you in to the pruning police.)
“There is no history about which there is so much ignorance as this great movement for the establishment of equal political rights for women. I hope the twentieth century will see the triumph of our cause.”

—SUSAN B. ANTHONY, in a letter to the editor of the Chicago Tribune, December 20, 1900. Anthony was born 200 years ago, February 15, 1820.

Desolate Skies

The New York Times, reporting on an analysis in the journal Science, said in September that there are 2.9 billion fewer birds in the United States and Canada than there were in 1970. While the study was not designed to determine the cause of the 29% drop in population, scientists suggest likely culprits are habitat loss and pesticides.

FINISH THIS SENTENCE

My most unforgettable first date was . . .

Last month we asked readers to finish a sentence that we started. Your snappy answers are still coming in, and we’ll share them next month. Meanwhile, amid thoughts of romance and Valentine’s Day, how would you finish the sentence above?

Your answers can be silly, serious, deep or superficial. Post your responses on our Facebook page or email them to letters@TexasCoopPower.com. Please include your name, city and co-op.

TCP CONTEST ✶ $100 RECIPES: HOT OFF THE GRILL Have a smokin’ hot favorite meal you cook on the coals? Enter your recipe online.

BY THE NUMBERS

5,200

That’s the number of choking deaths in the U.S. in 2017, according to the National Safety Council. Surgeon Henry Heimlich, who in the 1970s invented a technique used to help choking victims dislodge an obstruction from their airways, was born 100 years ago—February 3, 1920, in Delaware. The Heimlich maneuver is credited with saving thousands of lives.

Did you know?

In 2016, at the age of 96, Heimlich himself used his technique for the first time to save the life of a woman choking at his retirement home in Cincinnati.
EVERY FEBRUARY, horticulturist Greg Grant dreads the sight of tree trunks topped by sawed-off limbs. The annual chain saw massacre generally targets only one kind of tree: crape myrtles. "I'm never going to get used to that horrifically wrong way of pruning them," huffs Grant, a Texas A&M Agri-Life Extension agent for Smith County. "Someone's got to stop the madness."

That madness is known as "crape murder." No one's sure how or why the excessive shearing got started, though Grant, a member of Deep East Texas Electric Cooperative, has some theories. Despite efforts to counter it, the crime against nature continues.

Crape myrtles have long been loved in the South as ornamental shrubs and trees for their peeling bark, prolific blooms and colorful fall foliage. Their tolerance of hot, dry climates makes them especially suited for Texas landscapes.

AS HEALTHY TREES are hacked in the prime of their lives, an expert pleads: "STOP THE MADNESS!"

In part, their name refers to the flowers' crinkly crepe paper appearance. However, crape myrtles, which are native to India and southeast Asia, are not true myrtle trees, which bear white, star-shaped flowers. Instead, crape myrtle blooms—which range from white to pink, red and lavender—look more like lilacs, hence its nickname, "Lilac of the South." Today, more than 110 crape myrtle varieties range in size from 3 feet tall to more than 30 feet.

Their earliest cultivation traces back to the Chinese gardens of the Tang dynasty, which ruled from 618 to 907 A.D. In 1786, French botanist André Michaux planted crape myrtles in his gardens in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1799, the ship George Berkeley ferried plants and seeds from India, including crape myrtles, to George Washington for his Mount Vernon plantation in Virginia. Thomas Jefferson also planted them at Monticello, his home in Virginia. The tree's popularity spread across the South.

Marilda Maxey, wife of Confederate Gen. Samuel Bell Maxey, is believed to have brought the first crape myrtles to Texas in 1857, when the couple moved from Kentucky to Lamar County.

A decade later, she tended a formal garden, which showcased crape myrtles, at their new Italian villa-style home in Paris, Texas, now the Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site. Paris residents planted crape myrtles after fire destroyed almost half the town in 1916. They planted more for the state's centennial, in 1936.

In 1997, the 75th Texas Legislature declared the crape myrtle as the official state shrub. (Texas purple sage was deemed the official state native shrub in 2005.) It also designated Paris as the state's official Crape Myrtle City and Lamar County as Crape Myrtle County Capital. Not to leave anyone out, the Legislature also named Waxahachie as the Crape Myrtle Capital of Texas and Brazos County as an official Crape Myrtle County. McKinney, billed as America's Crape Myrtle City, boasts some 65,000 crape myrtles across the city and in its 7-acre World Collection Park.

Despite its official standing, not even Paris is immune to crape murder. “It’s an ongoing issue here,” sighs Billie Paskin, former president of the Lamar County Master Gardeners and a Lamar Electric member. “We talk to people, and they still cut...
off their crape myrtles.”

Likewise, Grant—who’s introduced 49 plants, including two crape myrtle hybrids, to the nursery trade—regularly writes about the foibles of crape murder. “I’m not the crape myrtle police,” Grant says. “People can do whatever they want with their trees. But it’s the No. 1 horticultural phenomenon that you see, and there’s not a single word in any horticultural publication that condones the practice.”

Grant theorizes that the severe style of pruning originated in Europe, where upper branches of some trees were pollarded—cut back to the trunk—to provide fuel. “Perhaps the practice came with the Spanish, who brought it with them to Mexico,” he says. “From Mexico, it spread across the South.”

These days, motives for crape murder vary, depending on who’s wielding the saw. “Homeowners tell me they cut off their crape myrtles because they’re too tall,” Grant says. “So it’s important that people know what size crape myrtle they want and then buy the right one for the site. Don’t plant one that can grow 30 feet high under a utility line.”

Crape murder disfigures the shrubs, spurs growth of more suckers (new shoots) at a tree’s base and decreases a tree’s cold hardiness. Grant also suspects that pruning wounds and new growth attract crape myrtle bark scale, an introduced pest that’s spread across most of the Southeast. Sooty black mold and white, feltlike encrustations on higher limbs indicate a likely infestation. Though not a death sentence, the scale can turn healthy trees into eyesores and reduce their vigor by about one-third.

Bottom line: Crape murder costs money, wastes time and adds debris to landfills. It’s dangerous, too—chain saws and ladders don’t mix. Left alone, crape myrtles grow into graceful sculptures worthy of admiration.

“The only pruning they need is removal of dead wood, branches that cross and suckers from the base,” Grant says. “The prettiest ones I’ve seen have never been touched. And I mean never.”

Sheryl Smith-Rodgers of Blanco blogs about her gardening adventures at sherylsmithrodgers.blogspot.com.
A TALE OF TEXAS CRAWFISH
CRAWFISH. CRAWDADS. MUDBUGS. Whatever you call them, they swim at the heart of a Southern tradition that’s as much about eating the tasty freshwater crustaceans in a messy jubilee of divine spiciness as it is about bringing friends, family—and even strangers—together.

From out-of-the-way eateries and exuberant festivals to backyard shindigs and community celebrations, mudbug-loving Texans happily pull up a seat at a communal table and peel tails. Steam and aromatic spices fill the air as piping hot, bright-red crawfish tumble from giant pots onto paper-covered tables.

Then it’s on! Time to twist off the tails and pull out the sweet, tender lobsterlike tail meat. The more adventurous devourers, keeping with time-honored crawfish tradition, suck the rich, flavorful yellow “fat” (it’s actually a digestive organ called the hepatopancreas) from the head. Aficionados insist this is the best part.

Crawfish season varies depending on whom you ask, but it is usually in full swing by the start of Lent in late February, with the peak for size and quality covering March, April and May. Seasonal specialty restaurants like the Crawfish Shack in Crosby attract crawfish-crazed patrons by the dozens.

“The first day we open up for the year, we’ll have 60 cars in line just to get to-go food,” says owner Dan Meaux. “Some people are waiting two hours.” The Crawfish Shack has erupted in popularity in the past few years, making it one of the top crawfish spots in the country.

“As of the last two years, we cook more crawfish than anyone in the country,” Meaux says. He credits the explosive growth to the backyard party atmosphere and never compromising on quality.

Mudbug-themed festivals feature live music, parades, pageants, carnival rides and literal tons of crawfish. In 2017, Guinness World Records recognized the Bigass Crawfish Bash in La Marque for the most crawfish prepared in eight hours: more than 58,000 pounds.

Across Texas, every crawfish chef and backyard boiler has a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14
What started as a 1940s icehouse and convenience store, Repka’s, a member of San Bernard Electric Cooperative, serves Cajun-style cuisine year-round. If you blink, you’ll miss the nondescript building even though it is packed during crawfish season. Wood-paneled walls boast bar swag and autographed headshots of famous diners, including country music star Tim McGraw. Pool tables, vintage arcade games and a jukebox add to the dive bar vibe, and patron-inscribed dollar bills adorn the ceiling. Plan on trying fried gator, crawfish étouffée and homemade pork cracklings.

One could argue the Crawfish Shack is Texas’ most popular BYOB boiling pot restaurant. During peak season, loyal patrons lug beer-filled coolers and happily endure 200-person lines to get their hands on Dan Meaux’s savory mudbugs. During the season (typically January–June), the Crawfish Shack serves more than 6,000 pounds of crawfish daily. The open-air, red steel building exudes a garage-party-meets-sports-bar energy characterized by football memorabilia on the walls and sports on big-screen TVs. Get ready for boiled crawfish, shrimp, snow crab and sausage with corn, potatoes and mushrooms.

With lakeside dining on a large deck and fresh-daily crawfish from their farm, Pinchers is a cut above your average crawfish shack. Just off U.S. Highway 59 South, the restaurant’s conspicuous yellow facade and

THE BEST CRAWFISH

BROOKSHIRE
REPKA’S GROCERY
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CROSBY
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EL CAMPO
PINCHERS BOIL’N POT RESTAURANT
With lakeside dining on a large deck and fresh-daily crawfish from their farm, Pinchers is a cut above your average crawfish shack. Just off U.S. Highway 59 South, the restaurant’s conspicuous yellow facade and

THE TAIL TRAIL: WHERE TO FIND

THE BEST CRAWFISH

BROOKSHIRE
REPKA’S GROCERY
What started as a 1940s icehouse and convenience store, Repka’s, a member of San Bernard Electric Cooperative, serves Cajun-style cuisine year-round. If you blink, you’ll miss the nondescript building even though it is packed during crawfish season. Wood-paneled walls boast bar swag and autographed headshots of famous diners, including country music star Tim McGraw. Pool tables, vintage arcade games and a jukebox add to the dive bar vibe, and patron-inscribed dollar bills adorn the ceiling. Plan on trying fried gator, crawfish étouffée and homemade pork cracklings.

CROSBY
CRAWFISH SHACK
One could argue the Crawfish Shack is Texas’ most popular BYOB boiling pot restaurant. During peak season, loyal patrons lug beer-filled coolers and happily endure 200-person lines to get their hands on Dan Meaux’s savory mudbugs. During the season (typically January–June), the Crawfish Shack serves more than 6,000 pounds of crawfish daily. The open-air, red steel building exudes a garage-party-meets-sports-bar energy characterized by football memorabilia on the walls and sports on big-screen TVs. Get ready for boiled crawfish, shrimp, snow crab and sausage with corn, potatoes and mushrooms.

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sparkling blue lake beckons passersby to a trifecta eatery, fuel station and RV park. Visitors are greeted by a life-size shark and a large sign inviting them to “EAT TAIL.” The novelty lake, complete with ducks, geese and light-up palm trees, sprawls across the restaurant’s front. Patrons can walk the adjacent pier, feed the catfish and koi, or watch as the staff bags the purged crawfish.

BYOB. For those who like to get saucy, JuJu’s offers three dipping options: red sauce (ketchup and spices), pink sauce (ketchup, mayo and spices) and melted butter.

**GALVESTON**
**BENNO’S ON THE BEACH**
On the island’s far east end, Benno’s serves fresh Cajun seafood on an outdoor patio with unencumbered postcard views of the Gulf of Mexico. Sea gulls and pelicans soar on the briny breeze while diners enjoy crawfish, shrimp po’boys, grilled oysters and deep-fried Cajun crabs.

**GROVES**
**LARRY’S FRENCH MARKET & CAJUN RESTAURANT**
There’s nothing like Cajun food and live Cajun music to spice up an evening in the Golden Triangle—an area known for its Cajun influence and anchored by Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange. Tables covered by checkered cloth define the front half of Larry’s. Walls are clad with vintage photos of local fishermen and mounted trophy fish. The restaurant’s back half enshrines a dance floor featuring live music under a neon glow. Reserve a table on the dance floor and order crawfish in season or step up to the year-round Cajun seafood buffet groaning with fried seafood, frog legs, boudin, étouffée and barbecued crab.

**PORT ARANSAS**
**THE BOILING POT**
Strings of colored lights, neon beer logos and loads of kitsch create a partylike setting in this lively establishment celebrating 35 years. Every surface, from the corrugated steel exterior to the inside walls and ceilings, is adorned with graffiti, art and caricatures. Hungry diners don white plastic bibs, smash open crab legs with wooden mallets and polish off loads of Cajun seafood, family-style. It has a sizable beer cooler offering more selections than typical seafood joints. One block from the beach, the fishing pier and marina are also within walking distance.

**SANTA FE**
**POOK’S CRAWFISH HOLE**
In addition to boiled crawfish, this BYOB shack, about 20 miles west of Galveston, offers deep-fried boudin balls, crawfish pie and gumbo. Expect Pook’s to be packed with patrons at wooden octagonal tables peeling crawfish or cracking open huge snow crab legs while listening to live music.
Radley calls his operation Pinchers Crawfish Farm, and on one sunny afternoon, he readied his flat-bottomed aluminum boat for harvesting mudbugs. He navigated the specially designed craft through the muddy water with help from a hydraulic, cleat-studded wheel that pushed along the slushy bottom.

Radley hoisted each pyramid-shaped, crawfish-filled trap from the water and emptied the catch into a sorting area in front of his cockpit. As he went, he rebaited each trap with commercial crawfish pellets and put it back into the water to capture more.

As he sorted and cleaned his harvest, Radley removed debris and tossed the smaller mudbugs back so they could grow larger. With a full load, he motored back to his nearby seafood restaurant, Pinchers Boil’n Pot. The crawfish are submerged in fresh water for 24 hours to purge them of internal impurities. After that, they get weighed and are ready for their starring role in the restaurant.

**GETTING THE MUDBUGS** The first chapters of crawfish scripture were written in Louisiana’s Atchafalaya Basin, where wild harvests began in the 1880s. By the 1950s, cold storage and the introduction of wire crawfish traps boosted harvest volume. Crawfish farmers found they could raise an excellent crop in flooded rice fields and produce consistently larger crops year over year.

That farming tradition continues with folks like Craig Radley, who converted 50 acres of rice fields near El Campo, in Wharton County Electric Cooperative’s service area, into a swampy crawfish heaven. Radley calls his operation Pinchers Crawfish Farm, and on one sunny afternoon, he readied his flat-bottomed aluminum boat for harvesting mudbugs. He navigated the specially designed craft through the muddy water with help from a hydraulic, cleat-studded wheel that pushed along the slushy bottom.

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Writer and photographer Eric W. Pohl, a member of Pedernales EC, lives in Dripping Springs.
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WHILE THE THREAT OF CYBERATTACKS ON THE electric grid gets a lot of attention these days, physical damage from storms or critters is still much more likely to disrupt power.

In fact, there are many physical threats to our power delivery system that San Bernard Electric Cooperative works hard to deflect on a daily basis. From weather events (such as ice storms, high winds and flooding) to criminal activity (including copper theft and transformers taking gunfire), it takes a proactive approach to consistently deliver reliable service to our members. Even something as small as a squirrel can damage our system’s infrastructure and cause power outages.

If the lights do go out, we are ready to restore power as quickly and as safely as possible. Here are three key ways SBEC works to keep your power as reliable as possible:

1. Being part of the community. Electric co-ops know our communities. We live and work in the neighborhoods and towns we serve, which is why you may know many of our board members and employees.

We know that emergencies can happen at any time and that relationships are important in urgently responding to unplanned events or in preparing for more predictable events, including winter storms or summer flooding. In the rare event of a major outage, our network of sister co-ops is ready to pitch in quickly and help us get power restored. That’s because we’re part of one large cooperative community, and Cooperation Among Cooperatives is a guiding principle for co-ops everywhere.

2. Planning, preparing and practicing. We test disaster and business continuity plans regularly and take pride in being prepared at all times. Plans not only focus on how to prevent outages but also how to respond and recover in the event of an incident. Maintenance work such as vegetation management and pole inspections may seem routine but is strategically performed to proactively reduce power disruptions. Trees that are too close to power lines can cause major damage and outages during a storm.

3. Coordinating with stakeholders. SBEC places a lot of importance on collaboration with fellow cooperatives, industry partners and government agencies. We work closely with the rest of the electric utility industry, our regional grid operator, the departments of Homeland Security and Energy, and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on matters of critical infrastructure protection, which include sharing information about potential threats and working together to avoid disruptions.

You can help us in this endeavor to keep electricity flowing by:

► Reporting suspicious activity. Be mindful of unusual situations and immediately report them to SBEC or local authorities. For example, if you see noncooperative personnel near a substation, please report it. If you see something that doesn’t seem right, let us know so that it can be investigated.

► Checking for damage. If you see tree branches or other vegetation growing too closely to power lines or utility poles, please contact us so we can keep the lines clear to provide the most reliable service.

Although the electric grid is incredibly resilient and can withstand many physical impacts, it’s also a dynamic infrastructure that requires constant attention. To power your lives, your electric co-op is vigilant in ensuring grid protection from physical and cyber threats.

Until next time, take care.
SBEC Employees Take on New Roles

JARED JANICEK, ENERGY SERVICE ANALYST
Janicek was named San Bernard Electric Cooperative’s energy services analyst in February 2019 after working in the cooperative’s vegetation control department since 2003.

Janicek started out as a general helper and worked his way up to vegetation control leader. He worked with a variety of tree contractors to help maintain SBEC’s right-of-way reclear program, collaborated with our geographic information systems analyst to map easements into our mapping software and oversaw our right-of-way spray program.

With his new position come new responsibilities, and Janicek has spent a great deal of time training under our business group manager and CFO, Mike Ables. His new position requires a full understanding of the wholesale power market and how it affects SBEC’s wholesale portfolio. A big piece of our portfolio is managing SBEC’s portion of the Sky Global Power Plant, which is a natural gas-fired generation resource located in Colorado County. Janicek is responsible for staying current with all facets of the ERCOT energy market: pricing, regulatory and environmental.

“I really do look forward to continuing to grow into my new role here at SBEC and discovering new ways to provide our members with the highest quality electric service at the lowest cost possible,” Janicek said.

When he is not working, he enjoys spending time with his family and good friends and woodworking when he has the opportunity.

Janicek and his wife, Cortney, live in Sealy. Together they enjoy their time with their children, Anna, Jack, Campbell and his daughter Jillian.

MATT NOVISKIE, TECHNICAL SERVICE SUPERVISOR
Noviskie accepted the position of technical service supervisor in August. He started at SBEC as a lineman before moving to the technical service department several years ago.

In his new position, Noviskie oversees the technical service department and helps maintain SBEC’s 16 substations and distribution breakers, regulators, capacitors and metering.

He also now manages the fleet department at all four branch locations. And even though his role at the cooperative has changed over the past 17 years, he looks forward to continuing to serve our members to the best of his ability in his new role.

When he is not at the cooperative, Noviskie enjoys spending time with his wife Brianna, daughter Whitley and son Wyatt. He and his family have a homestead filled with chickens and lots of dogs—two inside dogs, Minnie and Sophie, and nine hunting dogs. Noviskie also enjoys running around Texas and catching wild hogs, hunting, and fishing the lakes and coast.
San Bernard EC Recognizes Employees

San Bernard Electric Cooperative held its employee award ceremony December 7 in conjunction with its Christmas party at the Austin County Fair Association Convention Center in Bellville.

Several employees received awards to mark their years of service to the cooperative. Cody Valenta, Letty Canales, Karen Klausmeyer, Josh Schoenborn, Craig Wick and Bruce Dittert received their five-year service awards. Lari Samford and Nimcy Rodriguez received awards for 10 years of service. John Spiess, Gerald Jones, Sam Grigar, Shawn Bard, Paul Martinez and Travis Herbrig were honored with 15-year service awards, and Bubba Phillips was recognized for 20 years of service. Wanda Brast and Denise Behlen received 30-year service awards, and Gene Schramm was honored with a 40-year award. John Allen received his five-year director award, and Board President Bruce Pilcik received his 25-year director award.

Pilcik and General Manager Billy Marricle acknowledged these employees by presenting each with an award. Congratulations to all the employees for their dedication over the years to San Bernard EC!

Presenters and recipients of service awards are, from left:

- Five-year awards: Bruce Pilcik, Cody Valenta, Josh Schoenborn, Letty Canales and Billy Marricle.
- Five-year director award: Bruce Pilcik, John Allen and Billy Marricle.
- 10-year awards: Bruce Pilcik, Nimcy Rodriguez, Lari Samford and Billy Marricle.
- 15-year awards: Bruce Pilcik, Paul Martinez, Travis Herbrig, Sam Grigar, Shawn Bard, Billy Marricle and John Spiess.
- 25-year director award: Bruce Pilcik and Billy Marricle.
- 30-year awards: Bruce Pilcik, Wanda Brast and Billy Marricle.
WHAT’S ON THAT POLE?

This illustration shows the basic equipment found on electric utility poles. The equipment varies according to the location and the service they provide.

**PRIMARY WIRES**
Primary wires carry 7,200 volts of electricity from a substation. That voltage is 60 times higher than the voltage that runs through your home’s electrical outlets!

**SURGE ARRESTORS**
These protect the transformer from lightning strikes.

**NEUTRAL WIRE**
The neutral wire acts as a line back to the substation and is tied to the ground, balancing the electricity on the system.

**SECONDARY SERVICE DROP**
Carries 120/240 volts of electricity to consumers’ homes. It has two “hot” wires from the transformer and a bare “neutral” wire that’s connected to the ground wire on the pole.

**GROUND WIRE**
The ground wire connects to the neutral wire to complete the circuit inside the transformer. It also directs electricity from lightning safely into the earth.

**TELEPHONE, CABLE TV AND FIBER WIRES**
These are typically the lowest wires on the pole.

**NEVER NAIL POSTERS OR OTHER ITEMS TO UTILITY POLES. THESE CREATE A SAFETY HAZARD FOR LINEMEN.**

San Bernard Electric Co-op

ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN BINKLEY
FOR SALE

HORSE TRAILER—2010 S&H Duster horse trailer, two-horse, slant, 6’x14’x’7, tack room, rubber floor mats, removable custom ramp, $5,000. Call Brandon at (979) 251-2969.

GERMAN SHEPHERD—Male, up to date on all vaccines, dewormed, 10 months old, he stays around children, asking $200. Call or text (979) 270-0516.

COMMERCIAL MOWER—John Deere WH48A full hydrostat walk behind, 120 hours, new cost $6,300, will sell for $3,500. Call (979) 992-2607.

WOODEN CIGAR STORE INDIAN—$1,000. Call (281) 731-1736.

METAL DESK—3’x5’ for shop or garage. Call (979) 877-7257.

VARIOUS—Two large, old iron hay rake wheels, $1,000 each or both for $1,500; 150-year-old ribbon barbed wire, 500 ft., $200; cured, 12 cut cedar logs, 8–10 ft., $1,000 each or both for $1,500; two large, old iron hay rake wheels, $1,000 each or both for $1,500; two large, old iron hay rake wheels, $1,000 each or both for $1,500; two large, old iron hay rake wheels, $1,000 each or both for $1,500.


ANGUS CATTLE—Six registered Angus cows with calves; one registered Angus bull calf, 15 months old, excellent genetics. Call (936) 581-3115.

CATTLE—Top quality breed pairs of heifers and young cows. Call (979) 865-3804.

HUNTERS EAR CORN—Call (713) 823-3434.

AIRPLANE PROPELLER—Wood, 9’4”, one piece. Call (979) 484-2276.

VEHICLES—Challenger RV, 2008, 34 ft., four slide outs, king-size bed; 2012 Kubota garden tractor with tiller, shredder and front loader, model BX2360RY; 2004 Kawasaki Mule. All prices negotiable. Call (361) 798-3059.

COINS—Four rolls of 1940 “S” wheat pennies, one roll 1943 steel wheat pennies, two rolls war “V” nickels (1900–1912). Call (979) 877-7254.

PAINT—High-quality exterior paint, all color coded to Behr (Comfy Beige) Satin. Three gallons Sherwin Williams Emerald; 4 gallons Behr Premium Ultra, 1 gallon Behr Premium Ultra oil-based paint; all 8 gallons, $250. Also, aluminum pickup topper, 8 ft., $150. Call (979) 865-5725.

TOW DOLLY—Like new, less than 5,000 miles, $500. Call (281) 515-7438.

ANTIQUES AND VINTAGE ITEMS—Three head Hamilton Beach milkshake mixer with three metal cans, $545; ball wicker rocking chair, $325; two-seat childrens school desk, $295; wood chicks crate carrier, $150; farm corn sheller, $295. Call (281) 639-4049.

FURNITURE—Oak roll-top desk, reproduction, 46x54x29, comes in four sections, top, two sides and privacy panel, storage, seven pockets and drawers in top, two standard and one file drawer per side, very good condition, $250. Child’s highchair, mid-1950s or earlier wood reproduction (tray swings overhead), excellent condition, $75. Retro ’60s sewing machine cabinet, drop lead side that lifts up to use for cutting, etc., storage for machine plus two drawers, oak finish in good condition, $50. Call (979) 865-8442.


LOWREY PALLADIUM ORGAN—Excellent, like-new condition. Equipped to record and/or play CDs and 3-inch discs. Bench with tufted seat and back. Drawers on both ends of bench. Accessories: original manual, microphone, karaoke, ear buds for silent play, five blank CDs, four 3” discs, two dozen-plus published Lowrey Music books and training books, computer screen with 750 prerecorded songs and background accompaniment, can record your own music. Dimensions: 4 ft. H by 55 in. W by 42 in. D. Owners are moving and cannot take organ. Valued at $10,000, asking $8,500. Call (979) 942-9021 or (979) 732-1872.

CEDAR WARDROBE—Purchased in early 1950s with two doors, 6’x36”x’21”D. Call (979) 877-7257.

MOVING SALE—Seven registered Angus cows, fall calving, calving ease. One registered Angus bull calf, 12 months old, excellent genetics. Spreader-seeder with point hookup, like new, $400. Lincoln arc welder with long leads, $350. Lyfe Tyme barbecue pit, 40”x’16”, make offer. Call (936) 581-3115.

VARIOUS—Small chest freezer, $40; electric double oven stove, $50; sliding mirrored closet door, $15. New Ulm. Call (409) 960-4578.

TWO BURIAL PLOTS—At Memorial Forest Cemetery off I-10 and Eldridge. Two side-by-side burial plots surrounded by large shady trees. Located in section 1, lot 121, spaces 7 and 8. Each valued at $8,495. Will sell both for $8,500, a 50% savings! We moved from Houston and must sell. Call (281) 375-8394.

MOBILE HOME—14’x56’ mobile home in Sheridan, 2 bedroom, 1 1/2 bath. Great shape, remodeled with 200-amp breaker box, PEX plumbing. All appliances included: w/d, refrigerator, stove, cent. heat/AC. Will make a great weekend home or deer camp cabin. Contact larry132rs@gmail.com for pictures. Leave callback number.

WANTED

PIGEONS—Preferably nonferal breed. Call (979) 733-2455.

ANTIQUES—Want to buy old/antique gas pumps, guns and brass cash register. Please call Richard Noack at (979) 865-3098.
DOUBLE-WIDE MOBILE HOME—Small to medium square footage, will move. Call (979) 877-7257.

ELECTRIC PEA SHELLER—Call (713) 724-5090.

TRACTOR PTO-DRIVEN CEMENT MIXER—Call (979) 865-8820.

LAND PLANE—6-ft.-wide land plane with three-point hitch, adjustable scarifies and angled grading blades adjustable for depth, pitch and blade wear. Call (979) 865-8820.

FREE WILD HOG REMOVAL—Use dogs, experienced, will travel. Call (832) 715-1130.

LAUNDRY ISN’T A TASK THAT MANY PEOPLE RELISH. BUT IF THE PROCESS CAN BE tweaked to save money, conserve electricity and prolong the life of your clothes, some minor adjustments may be worth your time. Here are some suggestions from Consumer Reports.

Opt for cold water. Hot water is only needed for laundering oily stains, cloth diapers, and sheets and towels used by a family member who has been sick.

Use high-efficiency detergent for front-loaders, high-efficiency top-loaders and where otherwise recommended by the machine’s manufacturer. Conventional detergents create more suds, which can cause the washer to repeatedly rinse laundry, wasting water and time.

Increase the spin speed to extract more water from your laundry, reducing dryer time. Shake clothes out before transferring them from the washer to the dryer to avoid wrinkles.

Clean the dryer’s lint screen before every load. This improves air circulation and prevents fires. Dryer sheets can leave a film on the filter, so if you use them, scrub the filter with a brush monthly.

Clean the dryer’s moisture sensors. Dryer sheets can leave residue on the sensors that affects their ability to gauge how dry laundry is. Check the owner’s manual for instructions on how to clean them.

Dry similar items together. Don’t mix heavy cottons with lightweight fabrics. Wash and dry towels and sheets separately, for example.

Use the automatic cycle instead of timed drying. If the moisture sensors are working properly, the automatic cycle avoids overdrying, which shortens the life span of clothes and can shrink them.

And for the least expensive, most efficient method, dry your laundry on a clothesline or use a drying rack indoors. This approach takes a bit more time but is gentler on your clothing, keeping it nicer looking for longer—a savings in itself.
YOU MAY THINK ENERGY EFFICIENCY UPGRADES REQUIRE A great deal of time and expense, but that’s not always the case. If you’re interested in making your home more efficient but don’t want to break the bank, there are several do-it-yourself projects you can tackle to increase energy savings. Let’s take a look at three inexpensive upgrades that can save energy throughout the year.

**Trim Dryer Vent Hose**

**Level of difficulty:** easy.

**Supplies needed:** tin snips, gloves, measuring tape and masking tape.

**Estimated cost:** about $25 depending on the supplies you already have.

If your dryer vent hose is too long, your dryer is working harder than it has to and using more energy than necessary. The vent hose should be long enough for you to pull the dryer out a couple feet from the wall and should form a line—it should not have a lot of slack, twists or curves. A shorter, unobstructed vent hose increases the efficiency of your dryer, allows for faster drying and reduces the buildup of lint, which is a potential fire hazard.

Simply measure, mark and trim the hose to the desired length, then reattach the hose to your dryer and exterior vent.

**Seal Air Leaks**

**Level of difficulty:** moderate.

**Supplies needed:** caulk and caulk gun, weatherstripping, gloves, putty knife, and paper towels.

**Estimated cost:** $25–$50 depending on the materials you purchase.

Sealing air leaks in your home can help you save 10%–20% on heating and cooling bills. Apply caulk around windows, doors, electrical wiring and plumbing to seal in conditioned air. You should also add weatherstripping around exterior doors, which can keep out drafts and help you control energy costs. Types of caulking and weatherstripping materials vary; ask your local hardware or home store for assistance if you’re unsure about the supplies you need. For more information, the U.S. Department of Energy provides step-by-step instructions for caulking and weatherstripping online at bit.ly/howtoseal.

**Insulate Attic Stairs Opening**

**Level of difficulty:** moderate.

**Supplies needed:** rigid foam board, faced blanket insulation, tape for foam board, measuring tape, utility knife, caulk and caulk gun, and plywood.

**Estimated cost:** $50–$100.

A properly insulated attic is one of the best ways to optimize energy savings and comfort in your home, but many homeowners don’t consider insulating the attic stairs or the opening to their attic space. Even a well-insulated attic can leak air through the stairs opening. Luckily, there’s an easy fix.

An insulated cover box can seal and insulate the attic stairs opening. You can build your own insulated cover box or purchase a prebuilt box or kit from a local home improvement store for about $60. If you decide to build your own, check out step-by-step instructions from the Department of Energy online at bit.ly/atticstairscover. If your attic opening is located in a garage that you do not heat and cool, this upgrade will not be as effective.
Ways To Make Your Home Safer

IF YOU HAVE SMALL CHILDREN, MAKE SURE UNUSED WALL OUTLETS HAVE SAFETY coverings. Unprotected wall outlets can be a hazard. Also:

▸ Check that outlets and wall switches are cool to the touch. Unusual warmth may indicate unsafe wiring and should be checked by an electrician.
▸ Ensure all outlets and switches are working properly. Faulty equipment may mean unsafe wiring.
▸ All outlets and switches should have faceplates. Exposed wiring is a shock hazard.
▸ Check that extension cords are correctly rated for the amount of electricity they are going to carry and are approved by a reputable safety standards organization.
▸ Screw lightbulbs in securely. Loose bulbs may cause a fire or shock.
▸ Check all electric cords for visible damage. Frayed cords can be dangerous.
▸ To avoid excessive wear and cord damage, ensure that cords don’t run under rugs and don’t have furniture resting on them.
▸ Do not nail or staple electric cords in place. Cord damage can result in a fire and shock hazard—and extension cords should only be used for temporary purposes.
▸ If you have wet hands or are standing on a wet surface or in water, don’t touch or use any electrical device.
▸ Small appliances (hair dryers, toasters, etc.) should be unplugged when not in use. Unattended, connected appliances create an unnecessary risk.
▸ Keep all appliance cords away from hot surfaces (toasters, range tops, ovens, etc.). Cords can be damaged by excessive heat.
▸ Check that all appliances and electric equipment are located away from the sink and bath. Appliances can kill if they come into contact with water.
▸ In kitchens, bathrooms and anywhere there is water nearby, standard outlets should be replaced with ground-fault circuit interrupters. GFCIs provide shock protection by quickly cutting off the circuit and preventing injury.
▸ Never insert any metal object, such as a fork, into an appliance.
▸ Make sure you’re using the correct wattage and proper kind of lightbulb in all lighting fixtures. The wrong type of bulb can lead to overheating or fire.
▸ Never leave space heaters unattended when in use.

Test Your Power Line Safety Knowledge

TRUE OR FALSE? POWER LINES ARE insulated for contact.

False. While power lines may have a covering to protect against weather, they are not insulated for contact. Birds can sit on power lines unhurt because they don’t represent a path to the ground. You and your ladder do.

TRUE OR FALSE? I should keep myself and any equipment I’m using at least 10 feet away from any power lines.

True. You don’t need to contact a power line to be in danger; electricity can jump, or arc, from a power line to a person who gets too close. The best insulator is lots of space. You should keep yourself and any equipment you’re using a minimum of 10 feet away from power lines, but far greater distances are recommended.

TRUE OR FALSE? I can be electrocuted by a power line even if I am wearing gloves and rubber boots.

True. Work gloves and rubber boots offer no protection against contact with a power line. Once again, space—and lots of it—is the best insulator.
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On Board the Elissa

Sailing the historic tall ship out of Galveston is a hands-on experience

BY JOEY HELD

In the late 19th century, a cargo ship like the Elissa, now the Galveston-based official tall ship of Texas, sailed with a crew of fewer than 20. The Elissa hosts a sail training program that draws groups of up to 120 for six-hour training cruises.

In its permanent home at Galveston’s Pier 21, the Elissa is maintained year-round by certified volunteer crew members who upgrade their skills by working the annual cruises. Others interested in learning the techniques required to sail the ship can take part by invitation.

Last spring, I accepted an invitation to join the group aboard the Elissa. Launched in 1877 in Aberdeen, Scotland, the three-masted, iron-hulled Elissa is one of just three ships of its kind in the world. Its 19 sails cover more than a quarter acre; and from the tip of the stern’s boom to the tip of the boom on the bow (spared length), it measures 205 feet.

The crew that helps maintain the Elissa (40 members of our group) undertakes the seven-month course and spends 130 hours with the Galveston Historical Foundation, training on board and taking proficiency exams. The volunteers put in almost a million dollars’ worth of labor annually, according to port captain Mark Scibinico.

Mast captain Todd Grove offered a tutorial on technique and the meaning of basic commands. For example, stop pulling on ropes when you hear, “That’s well on the halyard.” I jumped at the chance to pull one of the ship's 183 lines.

“Every single rope and sail work together,” says crew member David Bowers of Galveston. “You really have to stop and listen to the people bark these orders to understand what they’re saying.”

“It was amazing to watch all that manpower, watching them quickly climb up the masts,” says Ashley Shaw, a passenger from Birmingham, Alabama. “Not knowing the lingo made me appreciate their work even more.”

On our cruise, there was plenty of opportunity to explore the ship. I mostly hung out on the main deck admiring the teamwork. As we sailed down the Galveston Channel, Grove pointed out a small buoy in the distance. When we passed it, we would be sailing the Gulf of Mexico.

That buoy also signified rougher waters. The trick for avoiding seasickness is to look at the horizon, but that’s not easy on a cloudy day. While conversing with a passenger, I felt my stomach rumble, as I sometimes experienced as a child. Back then, my mother was prepared with Dramamine or BioBands to combat motion sickness. I had neither.

During orientation, we were told to let loose over the edge if we felt nauseated. The only request? Do it downwind. As I neared the ship’s edge, I glanced at volunteer Aaron Stephens.

“Is this a good spot to throw up?” I asked.

“Yeah, not too bad,” Stephens said.

I leaned over the edge while he brought me some crackers and an apple. Eating was the last thing on my mind, but he’d seen this before. “It sounds counter-intuitive, but if you get sick, keep eating
and drinking,” Stephens said.

About halfway through the voyage, trainees unfurled the sails so we could head back toward Galveston. Despite my queasy stomach, I marveled at the sight. Volunteers scaled the rigging, navigated narrow walkways, leaped from one platform to another, untied ropes and let the sails fly. Commands bounced across the deck, and the passengers ceased talking and watched in awe.

After we reversed course, my seasickness returned. I went to my familiar spot but soon felt a tap on my shoulder.

“When you're able, can you move to the other side?” a volunteer asked. She reminded me I was now facing upwind. I groggily thanked her and went across the deck.

Even though my stomach was dancing, I loved the trip. Between the tall sails, the crew working together and hearing stories from the passengers, a ride on the Elissa is an exceptional experience.

Captain John Svendsen commends the volunteers for their work. “All the living history comes to life only with people,” he says. “This ship is a static piece of iron, rope and canvas without people.”

The visitors came from all walks of life, with their sunscreen, long sleeves and closed-toe shoes, to sail the Elissa. “That was really neat,” Shaw says. “You see older generations next to teenage kids, and they're all so nice and friendly. They've got some great stories to share.”

Writer Joey Held looks forward to more rope-pulling adventures—though next time he sets sail, he'll remember his Dramamine.
The high school seniors on the 1942 Weslaco Panthers football team formed a bond even stronger than most brothers of the gridiron. All eight of the young men finished their final year of high school in one semester so they could enlist in the Marines and fight for Uncle Sam in World War II. All but one survived the global conflict.

That Marine, Harlon Block, appears in one of the most reproduced images in history, the raising of the American flag on Mount Suribachi on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima on February 23, 1945. The photograph by The Associated Press’ Joe Rosenthal won a Pulitzer Prize, but because Block’s back was to the camera—he’s crouching on the far right—he was at first misidentified by military authorities as another Marine.

When Harlon’s mother, Belle Block, saw the photograph on the front page of the Weslaco Mid-Valley News on February 25, she exclaimed, “That’s Harlon!” Her intuition was affirmed in 1946, when Ira Hayes, a surviving flag raiser, visited Harlon’s father, Ed Block, in Weslaco and told him that his son was indeed in the photograph. Ed Block wrote his congressman, and an investigation confirmed the identity. Hayes, a member of the Pima tribe, is
further immortalized in the Peter La Farge song The Ballad of Ira Hayes, recorded by Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan and others.

Block died in combat on Iwo Jima, just six days after the flag raising. He was 21. Block was first buried in the 5th Marine Division Cemetery at Mount Suribachi, then he was reinterred in Weslaco in 1949. He was reburied a second time in 1995, on the grounds of the Marine Military Academy in Harlingen, beside the academy’s Iwo Jima Monument.

According to the son of one of Block’s high school teammates, all seven of the surviving football players served as pallbearers at both of his reinterments.

Writer and author Gene Fowler specializes in art and history.
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Meat and Greet

Two of Texas’ legendary pitmasters meet for the first time

On an overheated Saturday in early October, I drove Roy Perez, the venerable pitmaster at Kreuz Market in Lockhart, and Kreuz Market owner Keith Schmidt to Snow’s BBQ in Lexington. Snow’s, a tiny barbecue joint in a tiny town, is often mentioned as one of the best barbecue destinations in the state. Of course, Kreuz Market vies for the same title and has been a legendary barbecue purveyor for more than a century.

Roy is the first pitmaster I photographed nearly 25 years ago. Since then, as I created images for two photography books on Texas barbecue, I’ve had the honor to make more pictures of Roy along with photographs of dozens more folks who do the hot, hard work of making Texas barbecue the best in the world.

Even though Roy remains one of my favorite subjects, I will admit that in the past six years, a rival for my lens’s attention has charmed me through several sessions. She is a grand woman named Tootsie Tomanetz, who handles much of the cooking in the early hours of every Saturday in Lexington. Now in her 80s, Tootsie’s fame rivals that of Roy. But neither one lets the acclaim go to their head.

Tootsie arrives at Snow’s well before sunup each Saturday and works through lunchtime, exhibiting her natural work ethic as well as a genuine love of people and the pit skills she has honed over decades.

I had set the goal to deliver Roy to Snow’s for lunch, so he could meet his fellow barbecue icon, Miss Tootsie. Roy is not widely traveled but agreed to go along.

Once Roy, Keith and I arrived in Lexington, we were greeted by Snow’s owner, Kerry Bexley. We enjoyed a brilliant sampling of Snow’s smoked goodies.

After lunch, we took a few minutes to capture this image of two barbecue legends who will live forever in the barbecue museum that exists only in my mind.

Wyatt McSpadden’s two photography books on Texas barbecue are Texas BBQ and Texas BBQ: Small Town to Downtown.

WEB EXTRAS

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I moved to Texas 14 years ago and was surprised at first by the amount of fresh, local produce available. Eager to expand my cooking horizons, I embraced all of it in my cooking. On my recipe blog, Stetted, I look to everything that Texas has to offer each season, from summer peaches to winter citrus.

When it comes to desserts, my family gravitates toward anything with fruit—my kids are especially fond of strawberry shortcake any time of year. But when strawberries aren’t in season, I look to other ingredients.

Meyer lemons are perfect for celebratory desserts because they are sweeter and less acidic than standard lemons. This Meyer Lemon Meringue Pie is suitable for all tastes, including the littlest valentines in your house. Gingersnaps are used in the crust for a contrasting kick, but you can swap in graham crackers.

Megan Myers, Food Editor

**Meyer Lemon Meringue Pie**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Mix together gingersnaps, melted butter and ¼ cup sugar until well combined. Press mixture into a 9-inch pie dish, using the bottom of a measuring cup or glass to press down, making sure to keep the crust even. Bake crust 10 minutes, then set aside.
3. In a small saucepan over medium...
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

heat, whisk together 1 cup sugar, flour, cornstarch, salt, water and lemon juice, and cook until dissolved.

4. Beat egg yolks in a small bowl, then slowly whisk in ¼ cup of the warm sugar mixture. Once combined, slowly whisk egg mixture into the saucepan.

5. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook about 5 minutes, whisking constantly, until mixture is thick and coats the back of a spoon. Pour filling into prepared crust.

6. In the bowl of a stand mixer, beat egg whites until frothy. Turn mixer to high and pour in remaining ⅓ cup of sugar. Beat until stiff peaks form.

7. Spoon meringue onto pie filling, spreading to the edges of the crust to prevent shrinkage. Return the pie to the oven and bake 10–15 minutes, until meringue is lightly browned. Let cool completely before serving. ► Serves 8.

COOK'S TIP
Meringue pie is best served as soon as it has cooled but can be stored in the refrigerator. Meringue may release moisture (weep) after being exposed to humidity.

Follow along with Megan Myers and her adventures in the kitchen at stetted.com.

Oma’s Dreamy Coconut Pie

1. Prebake pie crust and set aside. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

2. Spread ½ cup coconut flakes evenly on a baking sheet. Place sheet in oven 8–10 minutes or until coconut begins to toast. Remove from oven to cool and set aside.

3. Pour coconut milk and half-and-half into a medium-size bowl. Add egg yolks and whisk together. Set aside.

4. Combine sugar, cornstarch and salt in a medium-size saucepan. Whisk egg mixture into pan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the custard thickens and boils, about 15 minutes. Boil 1 minute. Remove from heat and stir in remaining untoasted coconut flakes, butter, vanilla and 1 teaspoon coconut extract.

5. Pour filling into pie crust and refrigerate until cool.


COOK’S TIP A graham cracker pie crust works well, too.

Pecan Pie Muffins

SHARI MCVILLIAMS | UNITED COOPERATIVE SERVICES

1 cup chopped pecans
1 cup brown sugar
½ cup flour
⅛ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon salt
⅛ cup (1 stick) butter, melted
2 eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium-size bowl, stir together pecans, brown sugar, flour, baking powder and salt.

2. Add melted butter, eggs and vanilla to bowl and stir to mix well.

3. Spoon batter into a foil-lined muffin pan. (Batter will stick to regular paper muffin cups.) Fill each cup about ⅔ full. Bake 20–25 minutes. ► Makes 12 muffins.

COOK’S TIP These will not rise much and the finished product will be flat on top.
**Valentine Stack**

MARION EVONIUK  |  PEDERNALES EC

**FILLING**

1. **FILLING**: Add the mascarpone, cream cheese and vanilla into a medium-size glass mixing bowl. Beat with a hand mixer on medium speed until soft and creamy, about 1–2 minutes.

2. Into a small, microwave-safe bowl, add the 2 tablespoons whipping cream and microwave on high 25 seconds. Add the white chocolate and stir until creamy. If necessary, microwave an additional 15–20 seconds to melt chocolate. Immediately add to the cream cheese mixture and beat on medium speed until incorporated, 15–20 seconds.

3. Add the powdered sugar and remaining cup of whipping cream and continue beating an additional 1–2 minutes until mixture is thick and creamy. Do not beat on high or overmix—the mascarpone can separate. Gently fold in 1½ cups raspberries and set aside.

**PANCAKES**

4. **PANCAKES**: In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. Add the eggs, milk, vegetable oil, and vanilla, and whisk to combine. Pour over dry ingredients and, using a large spoon, stir briefly to just incorporate. There will be lumps of dry ingredients. Set aside 10 minutes.

6. If using a griddle to prepare pancakes, preheat it to 350 degrees. Gently stir pancake batter just until combined. Pour 1 tablespoon oil onto griddle or into nonstick pan over medium-high heat and spread it evenly, then pour ½-cup portions of the batter onto the griddle or pan and cook until golden brown, about 2 minutes on each side. Remove pancakes onto a large platter and cover with foil to keep warm.

7. To serve, place one pancake onto a serving platter and spread it with ⅓–½ cup of the filling. Place another pancake on top and continue layering the filling and pancakes until you've used up the pancakes. Top with remaining filling and garnish with remaining raspberries. Serve immediately.  Serves 4–6.

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SHARPENING MY HISTORY

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**Texas Co-op Power**

February 2020
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Power

We know the power of a good country song, and rocker Huey Lewis knows the power of love—but we wondered how power moves Texans. Here are some of the ways. GRACE FULTZ

WEB EXTRAS ► See Focus on Texas on our website for more photos from readers.

► DANNY PICKENS, Cherokee County EC: “A Ferris wheel at the East Texas Fair is powered up for fun.”

► LAUREN MCCLAIN, PenTex Energy: “Abigail McClain, 6, shows Mom how a pushup is done.”

► JACQUELINE ACUFF, Nueces EC: “Lightning shows the power of nature right in my backyard.”

► MARK HUSFELD, Navasota Valley EC: Near a substation in Navasota after a thunderstorm.

► JIM BROWDER, HILCO EC: “A woodpecker inspects a HILCO power line.”

UPCOMING CONTESTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JUNE</th>
<th>STATE PARKS</th>
<th>DUE FEBRUARY 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JULY</td>
<td>EXPLORATION</td>
<td>DUE MARCH 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUGUST</td>
<td>ON THE WATER</td>
<td>DUE APRIL 10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enter online at TexasCoopPower.com/Contests.
Pick of the Month
Michael Carbonaro Magic Show

Victoria February 15
(361) 788-9271, visdfoundation.org

Michael Carbonaro is known for his hidden-camera magic. His illusions, along with his absurd, matter-of-fact explanations, leave audiences bewildered. Proceeds from this show support the Victoria Independent School District.

February

7
Alpine [7–9, 14–16] Nat Turner in Jerusalem,
(432) 837-8218, sulross.edu/theatre

Fredericksburg [7–23] Wine Lovers Celebration,
(872) 216-9463, texaswinetrail.com

8
Avoca Swedish Smorgasbord,
(325) 668-2796

Lufkin The Choir of Man,
(936) 633-5454, angelinaarts.org

9
Bandera St. Stanislaus Church Faith Heritage Dinner,
(830) 460-4712, ststanislausbandera.com

14
Luckenbach [14–15] Hug-In and Valentine Ball,
(830) 997-3224, luckenbachtexas.com

Port Lavaca [14–15] South Texas Square & Round Dance Association February Frenzy,
(361) 575-2665, stsrda.org

15
Fredericksburg Cave Creek School Open House,
(830) 990-1017, historicshools.org

Richardson Mu Delta Alpha Changemaker Award Dinner,
(469) 712-7716, mudeltaalpha.org/events

Pick of the Month
Michael Carbonaro Magic Show

Victoria February 15
(361) 788-9271, visdfoundation.org

Michael Carbonaro is known for his hidden-camera magic. His illusions, along with his absurd, matter-of-fact explanations, leave audiences bewildered. Proceeds from this show support the Victoria Independent School District.

Tell us about somebody who improves the quality of life in your community. Email your nomination to people@texascooppower.com. Include the person’s name, co-op affiliation and a short description of his or her work in the community. Featured nominees will receive a $100 donation for their cause.

ALTHEA CONRADO
knits more than 3,000 hours annually to make blankets for hospice patients.

POWER OF OUR PEOPLE | JANUARY 2020

Nominate someone today!

TexasCoopPower $100 WINNER

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Submit Your Event!

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

**February 27–29**

**Brownsville** [27–29] Sombrero Festival, (956) 550-9682, sombrerofestival.com

**28**

**Luckenbach** Barbara Leatherwood Fight for the Cure Concert for Ovarian Cancer, (254) 833-2444, luckenbachtexas.com

**New Braunfels** [27–29] Troutfest Texas 2020, (830) 964-3455, grtu.org/troutfest

**March 6**

**Marble Falls** [6–7] Austin Square and Round Dance Association Square thru the Wildflowers, (830) 613-9054, asrda.org

**9**

**Crockett** Jeanne Robertson, (936) 544-4276, pwfaa.org

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Whether it’s hats, trucks or hair, we Texans expect things to be big. So when I saw a building in Wichita Falls advertised as the world’s littlest skyscraper, it piqued my interest in a Texas-sized way.

I was amazed at the revitalization in downtown Wichita Falls, which includes a craft brewery, a farmers market and a fancy chocolatier. At the northern edge of downtown, I found my destination: the Newby-McMahon Building.

From the street, the building looked like a well-kept, historic single-story structure. A glance down the alley identified the addition of a thin, four-story tower—like an elevator shaft built for floors never completed. The tower looks strange, but the story of its origin is even stranger.

To unravel the mystery, I walked into the building that now houses Hello Again, a consignment shop whose owner encourages visitors to climb the world’s littlest skyscraper. I found the thin staircase with a sign directing me upward. Even though I felt like I had stepped into a large closet, I was actually inside the skyscraper. It measures only 9 feet by 12 feet. I climbed three flights of stairs and arrived at the top floor museum that recounts an epic tale of swindling, greed and manipulation.

The story began in 1918, when the oil boom hit nearby Burkburnett. The town was rocked by overnight success, but most of the deals took shape in Wichita Falls, which was desperate for office space. J.D. McMahon proposed a solution that included what he described as the business opportunity of a lifetime. McMahon pitched the city’s residents on a skyscraper that would be 480 feet high—the tallest in Texas and rivaling the tallest in the world. Investors were eager, and McMahon raised $200,000 (well over $3 million in today’s money).

Construction started and questions soon followed. The building was not as “Texas-sized” as promised. Instead of the monumental structure the investors expected, they received a skinny tower with no elevator or stairs. The investors were enraged and sued McMahon for fraud.

When the judge reviewed the approved blueprints, he found that everything was in order and that the building was being built exactly according to plan. The final plan was laid out and approved—in inches instead of feet. So, instead of getting the 480-foot skyscraper investors had dreamed of, builders erected a 480-inch embarrassment. McMahon had executed the con of the century by simply adding an apostrophe. Turns out that when people see dollar signs, they tend to overlook punctuation.

The angry investors wanted to tear the building down immediately, but before the demolition took place, a nationally syndicated newspaper column called Ripley’s Believe It or Not dubbed the ill-conceived project the world’s littlest skyscraper. That publicity quickly transformed the eyesore into an international tourist attraction.

I stood at the top of the diminutive structure that now sits in the shadow of taller buildings and wondered how this skyscraper, if it had been built to expectations, might have changed the trajectory of Wichita Falls. Would it now sit abandoned? Or would Wichita Falls have become a city more like Dallas? The world will never know. But what is certain is how much fun it is to climb the world’s littlest skyscraper and take in one of the littlest views in Texas.

Chet Garner shares his Texplorations as the host of The Daytripper on PBS.

WEB EXTRAS | Read this story on our website to see Chet’s video of his visit to the world’s littlest skyscraper.
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