

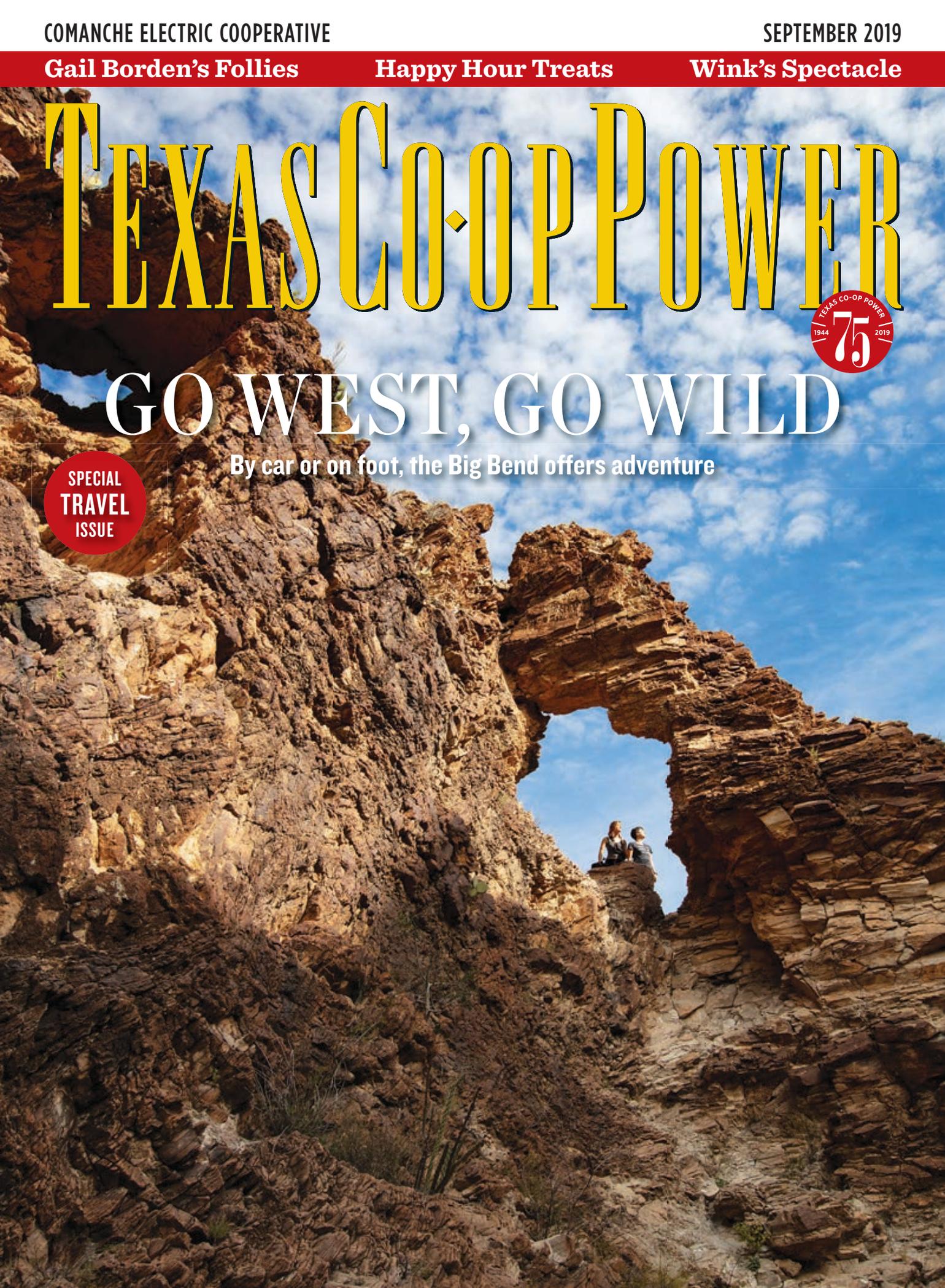
# TEXAS CO-OP POWER



## GO WEST, GO WILD

By car or on foot, the Big Bend offers adventure

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TRAVEL  
ISSUE





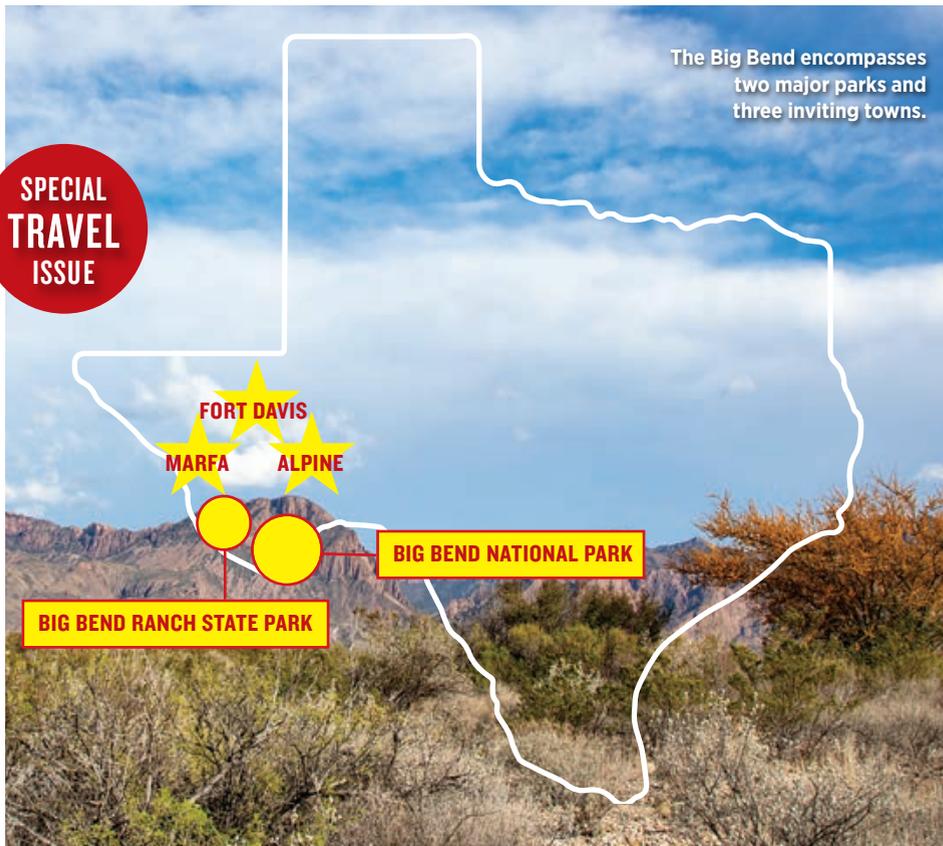
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The Big Bend encompasses two major parks and three inviting towns.

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By Lonny Taylor

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**Putting Others First** Volunteer fire departments, with strong co-op ties, sustain rural life.



MAP BACKGROUND: E. DAN KLEPPER. OUTLINE: ILLPOS | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. FIRETRUCK: ROB WILSON | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

**ON THE COVER** *Hikers at a natural arch above the Upper Burro Mesa Pour-Off Trail in Big Bend National Park.* Photo by E. Dan Klepper

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## Touching Texas Soil

When I went to my brother's funeral in Norway, I took a zip-close bag of soil from my yard in College Station [*Native Soil*, July 2019]. To make sure I wasn't going to introduce foreign enzymes or insects, I sterilized the soil in the oven.

Before the service, my sister and I sprinkled the soil into the open grave. We were comforted in knowing that even that far from home, his body rested on Texas soil.

JEAN W. MCDERMOTT | COLLEGE STATION  
BRYAN TEXAS UTILITIES

I did this! Lived in Oklahoma when my first kid was born. Had a bag of dirt from my hometown and one from Dad's hometown. The nurse wasn't happy about dirt in her operating room (C-section)!

SUZIE BATES CLARK | VIA FACEBOOK

Love, love, love this story. Wish I had thought of it in 1986 when my daughter was born in Boston. Fortunately, she's in Austin now, and my grandson, Owen, is a bona fide Texan.

CASSANDRA CAMP | AUSTIN  
PEDERNALES EC

## Geronimo and History

My mother grew up at Fort Sam Houston as my grandpa was in the Army. My grandpa was fond of telling tall tales, and one of our family favorites was when



## Far From Texas

I wish I'd had a bag of soil when my second daughter had to be born so far from home [*Native Soil*, July 2019]. While my first daughter, Katie, got to be born in Houston and live there for a year, my second, Jeanne, was born in New York. Then the poor tyke couldn't touch Texas soil till she was 14 months old, when we got off the plane in Corpus Christi.

ANNE STEVENSON | CORTEZ, COLORADO | PEDERNALES EC



he told all of his kids that he captured Geronimo [*Geronimo in San Antonio*, July 2019]. They proudly marched to school to tell their friends and teachers. Imagine their disappointment when they found out it wasn't possible: My grandpa was born in 1902, well after Geronimo had left the Quadrangle.

DEBORAH PAGE | BURNET  
PEDERNALES EC

Native Americans have been mistreated more than any other group of people in the history of this country. Their lands were stolen by the U.S. government and given for free to settlers. Thank you for the article. We must never forget what was done to the Native Americans.

ROBERTA MCLAUGHLIN | LORENA  
HEART OF TEXAS EC

## Wonderful Pigs

I love pigs, so my daddy bought a pot-bellied pig for me and my husband in 1992 [*This Little Piggy*, May 2019]. Yes, he

did grow to about 250-300 pounds, but he was wonderful.

It breaks my heart that people don't really understand what they are doing when obtaining an animal. Thankfully, there are people like the ones in your story who bless these intelligent, wonderful animals.

JO ANN AND TERRY ELY | LUBBOCK  
SOUTH PLAINS EC

## Texas Tech Studies

Tech has a history of interesting degree offerings in hospitality careers. This one is cooler yet [*Grown Locally*, July 2019].

KEVIN STAHNKE | VIA FACEBOOK

## Slice of Life

Giving a knife to someone as a gift signifies a desire to cut the relationship [*Bad Moon Waning*, June 2019]. Don't know if that qualifies as a superstition or an unspoken gesture.

LISA KEENAN | VIA FACEBOOK

## Another Drive-In

Was sorry to see that there was

no mention of the great drive-in located on FM 2920 in Hockley [*Drive In, Chill Out*, June 2019].

C. MARTIN | BELLVILLE  
SAN BERNARD EC

**Editor's note:** We couldn't mention every Texas drive-in theater in our story. We did, however, put together a map of drive-ins across the state, which includes Hockley's Showboat Drive-In. See the map at [TexasCoopPower.com](http://TexasCoopPower.com).

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



Texas Co-op Power

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Dorothy Bray is third from right.

**WEB EXTRAS**  
► Find more happenings online.

## HAPPENINGS

# Fighting Kidney Disease

Dorothy Bray has been hit hard by polycystic kidney disease, a genetic disorder that causes the growth of fluid-filled cysts. She has undergone two kidney transplants and watched her father and two older siblings die of the disease. Her son, daughter and a granddaughter also have PKD.

So Bray, a longtime member of Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative, passionately volunteers for the annual **SAN ANTONIO WALK FOR PKD**, which this year is **SEPTEMBER 14**.

“I feel so blessed to live in an age of medical advancement that makes it possible for someone like me to survive much longer than people like my dad ever had a chance to,” says Bray, 72.

**INFO** ► (210) 414-6614, [walkforpkd.org/sanantonio](http://walkforpkd.org/sanantonio)

## ALMANAC

**75 YEARS AGO:** Navy pilot George H.W. Bush was hit by anti-aircraft fire during a World War II bombing run on Chichi Jima, a Japanese island. Before bailing out into the Pacific Ocean on September 2, 1944, he dropped his four 500-pound bombs on the target, a radio facility. He banged his head on his plane's tail after he ejected, and once in the water, jellyfish stings and swallowed seawater made him sick.



## BY THE NUMBERS

**Those are the odds of an amateur golfer making a hole-in-one.** A pro golfer has a much better chance—2,500-1. This month marks the 150th anniversary of the first known ace. Young Tom Morris hit a hole-in-one September 15, 1869, during the Open Championship in Scotland.

## ◀ LOOKING BACK AT TRAVEL THIS MONTH



**TRAVEL AROUND, over and into Texas has marked many milestones in the 75 years since Texas Co-op Power debuted in July 1944. Here are just a few:**

### 1940s

**1945** The Texas Aeronautics Act establishes the Texas Aeronautics Commission as a nonfederal public entity that oversees civilian flying.

**1947** The Spruce Goose, a creation of eccentric millionaire Howard Hughes of Houston and the largest wooden airplane ever constructed, makes its first and only flight.

### 1950s

**1950** The Los Ebanos Ferry, connecting Los Ebanos, Texas, to Ciudad Díaz Ordaz across the Rio Grande, is established. It is the last Coast Guard-licensed ferry in the U.S. to be powered by the tug of a rope.



### 1960s

**1963** The state creates the Texas Tourist Development Agency. By 1970, visitors to Texas would triple, totaling 21 million.



**1967** The first specialty license plate becomes available from the Texas Department of Transportation.

**1969** Houston Intercontinental Airport begins operations.

# Tackling Hunger in Eldorado

**WHEN BRENDA HARDESTY** moved from Austin to Eldorado about 13 years ago, the former social worker didn't know many people in the small town, about 45 miles south of San Angelo. But she eventually came to know Leigh Lloyd, the pastor at her church, First United Methodist, who worked with Hardesty to turn what was an emergency food closet in the church into a full-fledged pantry for those in need.

"Our community has a high rate of unemployment at various times and a high rate of poverty," Hardesty said, adding that stable jobs and reliable child care can be hard to come by in the oilfield town. "So we have a lot of people getting by on very little income."

The Eldorado Second Harvest Food Pantry provides monthly food distributions to more than 60 households, or about 130 people, in Schleicher County. Hardesty, a member of Southwest Texas Electric Cooperative, has coordinated food intake and distribution—the whole process—since the pantry began in August 2016. Lloyd has since moved to another church in another town, but Hardesty now has connections across the county.

"The people that hand out the boxes get a lot of joy from actually giving a box of food to somebody that needs it," Hardesty said. "Seeing how many people in our community are willing to pitch in and help people in need is a fulfilling part to me—to see that a lot of people care in this community and are willing to back it up with some work."

**INFO** ▶ [facebook.com/eldoradoservicecenter](https://www.facebook.com/eldoradoservicecenter)

**Brenda Hardesty at the Eldorado Second Harvest Food Pantry.**



**POWER OF OUR PEOPLE** recognizes co-op members who improve their community's quality of life. Nominate someone by emailing [people@texascooppower.com](mailto:people@texascooppower.com).



## 1970s

**1971** You are now free to move about the state. Southwest Airlines begins service to Dallas, San Antonio and Houston with \$20 one-way fares.

**1973** The Motorcycle Safety Foundation is established, with curriculum shaped in part by motorcyclists at Texas A&M.

**1974** The first commercial flight lands at DFW International, now the fourth busiest airport in the U.S.

## 1980s

**1982** The iconic Pennybacker Bridge over Lake Austin, with its unique untied arch suspension construction, opens in Austin.

**1986** Jeana Yeager, born in Fort Worth, co-pilots the first nonstop around-the-world flight over nine days.



## 1990s

**1995** Bernard Harris Jr. of Temple, payload commander aboard space shuttle Discovery, becomes the first African American to walk in space.

**1995** The Fred Hartman Bridge between Baytown and La Porte, built to withstand hurricane-force winds, replaces the Baytown Tunnel as a means to cross the Houston Ship Channel.

## LOOKING BACK AT OUTDOORS NEXT MONTH ▶

## 2000s



**2003** Space shuttle Columbia breaks up over Texas as it returns to Earth, killing the seven astronauts on board.

**2018** Mid-South Synergy launches electric vehicle charging stations in the co-op's territory.

# Big Bend's

**GOLDEN  
TRIANGLE**



**Story and photos by E. Dan Klepper**

**B**efore you begin a Big Bend adventure, bear one thing in mind: Once you arrive at your destination, you might not want to go home again.

It might be the dry, temperate afternoons and cool evening breezes that keep you here—especially in the summer months, when the rest of the state is sweltering. Or it might be the sensational vistas with their high desert grasslands; rugged, sky-island mountaintops; and miles of empty blacktop countering the traffic-packed freeways and crowded suburbs. Maybe it will be the challenging nature hikes, the one-of-a-kind artworks, the fine dining and luxury getaways, or the quirky vacation rentals. Or perhaps it will be something as simple as the unexpected stillness when you pause during your morning cup of locally roasted coffee and realize that the only things you can hear are birdsong and your own quiet

thoughts. But whatever ends up taking your breath away, rest assured you'll return, if not for good then at least for more.

Big Bend covers a considerable amount of territory. Although composed of only three counties—Jeff Davis, Presidio and Brewster—it encompasses more than 12,000 square miles. That's more area than Connecticut, Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Its vast size means a lot of driving. To minimize road time and maximize downtime, you may want to focus a trip around the Big Bend's "golden triangle"—Fort Davis, Marfa and Alpine. You'll sample everything Big Bend has to offer with the least amount of tire rotation. In fact, less than an hour separates one town from the next, yet each one offers something unique.

If traveling first to Fort Davis, the triangle's apex, you'll likely be driving south along Texas Highway 17, one of the prettiest routes in the state. You'll be cruising through the Davis Mountains, the second-highest range in Texas, and slowly gaining elevation with each bend in the road. The range is a result of volcanic activity that took place millions of years ago, making it ground zero for geology enthusiasts. Avid birders and wildlife watchers also favor



## Visit Fort Davis, Marfa and Alpine—lofty destinations that offer big skies, luxury and down-to-earth adventure



**Above:** Looking northeast into Alpine. **Left:** Stellina is a chic dining option in Marfa.

the range, particularly the upper elevations around Mount Livermore—at 8,378 feet above sea level, it’s the fifth-highest peak in Texas. Considered a “sky island” for its wetter, cooler, more diverse habitat than the elevations below it, Livermore offers a friendly environment for hundreds of species, including a variety of birds making their seasonal migration across North America. Much of the mountain is protected by the Nature Conservancy, which provides opportunities to visit its Davis Mountains Preserve on open-to-the-public days.

My own decision to move to the Big Bend, 20-plus years ago, occurred during one of the preserve’s open weekends in the late 1990s. Over the course of a 24-hour period, I hiked to the craggy peak of Livermore, took a dip in a rainwater tinaja—a natural pool, saw a Mexican spotted owl and sheltered in a ponderosa pine forest during a torrential rainstorm before camping under a canopy of starlight. “I want all of this right outside my own back door,” I thought to myself that night.



Fort Davis features an assortment of quaint, old-fashioned lodging, including the grande dame of them all—Hotel Limpia. Constructed from locally quarried stone in 1912, the Limpia features 21 rooms and 10 suites, an outdoor patio, indoor fine dining courtesy of the Blue Mountain Bistro, and a pool for you and your fellow “summer swallows” (as guests were known during the hotel’s early years). Or, for adventurers on a budget, try the Stone Village Tourist Camp with its creature comforts, a pool and the best deli market in town.

Once you’ve unpacked and relaxed, get out of

**Above: Al Campo in Marfa offers indoor and outdoor spots to chill—and stay warm. Below: El Cosmico, a campground and hotel in Marfa, has a quirky gift shop.**

this world with a visit to nearby McDonald Observatory. Check for sun flares through the observatory’s solar program, in which live, safe views of the sun are projected onto a giant auditorium screen. Then join a star party and see the stars the way the observatory’s researchers see them—up close and personal.

To continue, view some luminaries of the art world by heading to Marfa, where the internationally known Chinati Foundation houses works by Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Robert Irwin and Roni Horn—members of the American art canon. Designed specifically for the location, the works include *Things That Happen Again: For a Here and a There*, Horn’s hand-lathed identical copper forms; Irwin’s ethereal *untitled (dawn to dusk)*, an installation of scrimlike material that transforms the interior space as the light changes outside; Flavin’s colorful large-scale fluorescent light piece called *untitled (Marfa Project)*, installed in six Chinati buildings; and Judd’s *100 untitled works in mill aluminum*, in which each of the works retains the same outer dimensions but features unique interior dimensions. They are installed throughout two enormous former artillery sheds on the Chinati grounds.

Marfa offers visitors an opportunity to indulge at the town’s latest lodging addition, the elegant Hotel Saint George. The Saint George adds an international chic to the local character, providing stylishly appointed rooms and fine art throughout. The hotel also offers day passes to its Bar Nadar pool and grill, a fine place to swim and socialize.

If you feel a little more adventurous, set up a tent at El Cosmico, a 30-acre campground within walking distance of downtown. El Cosmico sponsors the annual Trans-Pecos Festival of Music + Love with its lineup of bands from all over the country. If tenting is not your thing, book one of El Cosmico’s luxury tepees, yurts or vintage travel trailers.





**A trek around Big Bend's golden triangle won't leave you struggling to fill your time. You'll have plenty to do, even if it's just sitting on a porch rocker sipping a favorite beverage and watching the sun drop.**

Then satisfy your hunger at Al Campo, Marfa's indoor-outdoor wine bar and bistro. With a relaxed atmosphere and uncomplicated menu, Al Campo offers rustic countryside cooking, inspired by Chilean and Argentinian cuisines, and a robust selection of wines and beers. Or score a meal at Stellina, where you can order small plates of queso fundido and seafood tostadas or fill up on enchiladas suizas or wild salmon Veracruz. Stellina, possibly the most popular eatery in Marfa, doesn't take reservations. Just walk in and you'll be seated on a first-come, first-served basis. If it's busy, relax. It's worth the wait.

**W**hen you're ready to leave the high life behind, head to Alpine and back down to earth. You'll find yourself in cowboy country, home to rodeo cowboys, cowboy poets and plain ol' hardworking ranch hands. Alpine, the largest of the three communities, is also home to Sul Ross State University, considered the frontier university of Texas. The campus is home to the Museum of the Big Bend, where visitors learn about the region's history, from its ancient geology to its 19th-century ranching culture. Changing exhibits complement an array of permanent displays designed to provide a comprehensive overview of Big Bend's unique character.

Explore history and then overnight in some with a room at Alpine's Holland Hotel, designed in 1928 by Henry Trost, the acclaimed Southwest architect. Trost designed the hotel in the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the period, and after decades of renovation and repair, its splendid lobby now reflects its original grandeur. The ground floor also features the Century Bar and Grill, a lively gathering spot for locals and guests.

Alpine offers year-round events for visitors, including the annual Trappings of Texas, an exhibition and sale of contemporary West-



**Top: Hikers atop Mount Livermore, northwest of Fort Davis. Above: Spurs from an annual Trappings of Texas exhibition at the Museum of the Big Bend in Alpine.**

ern art and custom cowboy gear; an entire professional baseball season featuring the homegrown Alpine Cowboys; and the Viva Big Bend Music Festival, with big-name head-

liners among the more than 50 bands that perform all over the region during the four-day fest.

A trek around Big Bend's golden triangle won't leave you struggling to fill your time. You'll have plenty to do, even if it's just sitting on a porch rocker sipping a favorite beverage and watching the sun drop. But consider this: The triangle comprises only the Big Bend's high country. A vast network of desert and mountains, national and state parks, river drives, hiking, lodging and dining await throughout the rest of the region. In other words, your adventures in the Big Bend have just begun.

**E. Dan Klepper** is a photographer, author and artist who lives in Marathon.

# Which

West Texas explorers have many answers to this enduring question

Story by **Joe Nick Patoski**

Photos by **E. Dan Klepper**

W

hat do you mean, which Big Bend? There's only one Big Bend!

That's true, geographically. The Big Bend is where the Rio Grande makes a 100-mile end-around of the Chisos Mountains on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. This Big Bend encompasses three majestic canyons—Santa Elena, Mariscal and Boquillas—all within the 801,000-acre Big Bend National Park. That's the Big Bend most folks have been talking about since the national park was established in 1944.

Now, Big Bend also refers to the neighboring Big Bend Ranch State Park, a 311,000-acre spread west of the national park that first opened to the public in 1991.

My first encounter with the national park was a visit at age 8, when I was immediately awed by the Chisos Mountains and

javelinas. Since then, I've paddled all three canyons as well as the Lower Canyons, hiked 80 miles from Rio Grande Village to the town of Lajitas and completed the 14-mile round trip to the South Rim with my family.

I started visiting Big Bend Ranch as soon as it became accessible. I've paddled Colorado Canyon, hiked 14 miles from the Lower Shutup to near Lajitas, bushwhacked to Madrid Falls and spotlighted scorpions with a black light while taking a desert survival course.

The state park is most definitely part of the geographic Big Bend. That was easy to see flying over the region in a Cessna named Brownie piloted by Marcos Paredes of Rio Aviation in Terlingua. The bending of the Rio Grande starts in Colorado Canyon, which forms the southern boundary of the state ranch, long before the river reaches the national park.



JOE NICK PATOSKI

But visitors, especially first-timers, still ask: Which Big Bend?

When asked, six people who know the region well, starting with Paredes, a retired river ranger for Big Bend National Park, had

# Big Bend?



some answers. “What separates the state park from the national park is live water,” he says. “That’s what stands out as you fly over this country. The cottonwood *bosques* and the live streams scattered throughout the arroyos and canyons of the state park are conspicuous and their absence is glaring as you come over the national park.”

Big Bend Ranch State Park is loaded with 118 springs, seeps, tinajas, and Texas’ second- and third-highest waterfalls. The national park has hot springs to soak in, 100 miles of the Rio Grande, a hidden waterfall and Ernst Tinaja—a natural pool, campsite and trail.

“The Chisos [Mountains] are a lot higher than anything in Big Bend Ranch,” explains John Karges, a conservation biologist. “On the other hand, the Big Bend Ranch has the Solitario.”

The Solitario is a volcanic dome, a mile across, that emerged from a collapsed caldera, a wholly unique feature that doesn’t dazzle like the Window in the Chisos or the mouth of Santa Elena Canyon in the national park until you see it from above.

Big Bend National Park is nearly three times the size of Big Bend Ranch and more developed, with paved, RV-friendly road-

**Big Bend National Park, opposite, with the Chisos Mountains, is considered more approachable than Big Bend Ranch State Park, with its sparse amenities.**

ways, big campgrounds, and a hotel and restaurant. The only paved road in the state park is River Road, FM 170, along the park’s southern boundary. State park campsites are primitive.

“You have to bring your own water and carry out your waste,” Karges says. “It’s a little more of a rugged experience.” The sole alternative to camping is a bed in the bunkhouse at Saucedo headquarters and use of its kitchen.

Karges says the national park is tailored for windshield tourists—the majority of first-timers, who tend to stick to their vehicles. “You spend a day or two driving to the highlights at both ends and the [Chisos] basin,” he says of tourists who seek out Santa Elena and Boquillas canyons. On the other hand, “Big Bend Ranch, you really have to want to go there.”

Photographer Crystal Allbright lives and works between the parks and takes advantage of each. “If I want to go on a multiday river trip in a designated wild and scenic area, I head for the national park,” she says. “For mountain biking trails and a few



MARCOS PAREDES

JOHN KARGES

CRYSTAL ALLBRIGHT

PAM LEBLANC

DON ALEXANDER

KARL FLOCKE

dog-friendly areas, it's the state park. If I have to choose hiking, camping or dark skies ... well, then I might have to flip a coin."

Writer Pam LeBlanc from Austin leans ranch, which she visited six times in 2018, including for several multiday bicycle treks. "They are entirely different worlds," she says. "I go to the national park for the South Rim. I can lay on my belly and peer down on a million miles of what looks like ruffled rhinoceros hide. Or I climb to my secret spot on Mesa de Anguila to take in the best view in the state. But when I feel scrappy and wild, like I need to get lost among the rocks and spiky things, I go to the state park. No one can find me there."

The desert, the remoteness and the heat can test visitors of either destination. Don Alexander, a Big Bend regular from Waco, observes that the popularity of the national park makes it difficult to find absolute solitude, which he says is "one of the highlights of the Chihuahuan Desert."

**B**ig Bend National Park attracts about 4 million visitors annually, peaking at around 8,000 daily. Big Bend Ranch State Park hosts fewer than 50,000 visitors, with 8,000 visiting the park itself, 28,000 stopping at the Barton Warnock Visitor Center in Lajitas and about 5,000 at the Fort Leaton State Historic Site at the western edge of the park, near Presidio.

times I have heard people comment that the state park is how they remember the national park being 'back in the day,'" he says.

Flocke nonetheless recommends experiencing the national park first. "This isn't out of any attempt to scare people away or to suggest that the state park is only for people who are worth their mettle," he says. "It is simply that the national park is much more approachable. The Chisos Mountains offer contrast of scenery for those who may not be wowed by desert expanses. There are more restrooms, more trash service, better trails, more ranger programs, convenience stores and restaurants. Intrepid hikers still have the opportunity to get off the beaten path, but no matter where you go, it seems like you are more likely to see people in the national park."

Then try the alternative. "The gravel road into the center of the state park is a portal that transports you to an entirely different time and place," Flocke says. "Something about that washboard road really disconnects you from the rest of the world. It lends a wilderness vibe to the park that is unlike anywhere else in Texas.

"First-timers, inexperienced family campers and RVers—go to the national park. Experienced family campers, backpackers, bikers, horseback riders and Jeepers—give the state park a try. Go there before it gets discovered."

One factor that complicates comparisons is that each park operates differently. "The national park is federal and has more mandates, doctrines and management protocols than the Big



**Karges says the national park is tailored for windshield tourists—the majority of first-timers, who tend to stick to their vehicles. On the other hand, "Big Bend Ranch, you really have to want to go there."**

Alexander's most recent Big Bend adventures have been with his 75-year-old brother-in-law, who has mobility issues and a fear of heights. "That means 2-mile hikes with rocky scrambles, such as Upper Burro Mesa in the national park, are out," he says.

Alexander found the state park campgrounds at Lower Madera Canyon and Grassy Banks, just off FM 170, to be less crowded than those at the national park but susceptible to sounds of passing traffic. He says they found "perfect desert silence" camping near Big Bend Ranch's Saucedo headquarters, after driving 27 miles of rough gravel road to the center of the ranch.

Karl Flocke's idea of the ultimate Big Bend experience is "solo hiking through a remote canyon, rounding a bend to the next expansive view and wondering if I'm the first modern man to stand in this spot," he says. "While the answer is most likely 'no,' I find it much easier to entertain these kind of thoughts at the state park."

As a former law enforcement ranger at Big Bend Ranch, Flocke, now a woodland ecologist for the Texas A&M Forest Service in Austin, may be biased. But it's not just him. "I can't recall how many

Bend Ranch State Park," explains Bonnie McKinney, wildlife coordinator at El Carmen Land and Conservation Company adjacent to the national park and a onetime Texas Parks and Wildlife Department employee. "They have similar rules and regulations, particularly pertaining to artifacts and historic sites, but differ on wildlife and land management," McKinney explains. "Most national parks let nature take its course. Big Bend National Park doesn't create water sites for wildlife. Big Bend Ranch has built water sites in remote areas for wildlife."

Maybe the best answer to "Which Big Bend?" depends on which way you plan to enjoy exploring the region. Will you be driving through or staying a while? Does the next adventure involve a long hike in the desert or in the mountains, a short one-mile hike from the road, off-road bicycling or four-wheel drive, or a canyon paddle on the river? With all these options, the answer to "Which Big Bend?" really is "Both."

Writer **Joe Nick Patoski** lives outside Wimberley and is a member of Pedernales Electric Cooperative.

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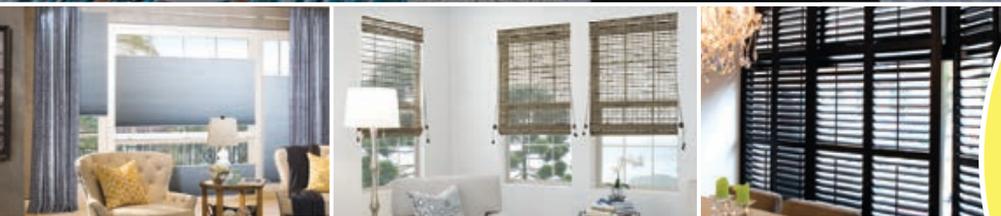
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**IT'S A NEW SCHOOL YEAR, AND KIDS OF ALL AGES ARE STARTING** a fresh year of learning. From kindergarten through college, students attend school to gain knowledge to prepare them for the future. In a similar vein, Comanche Electric Cooperative is continually learning to incorporate new technologies that improve electric service, reliability and safety—enhancing quality of life for the members we serve.

Innovations in technology and energy sources are fueling demand for more options. On the consumer front, people are looking for more ways to manage their energy use with smart technologies. Consumers expect more convenient payment

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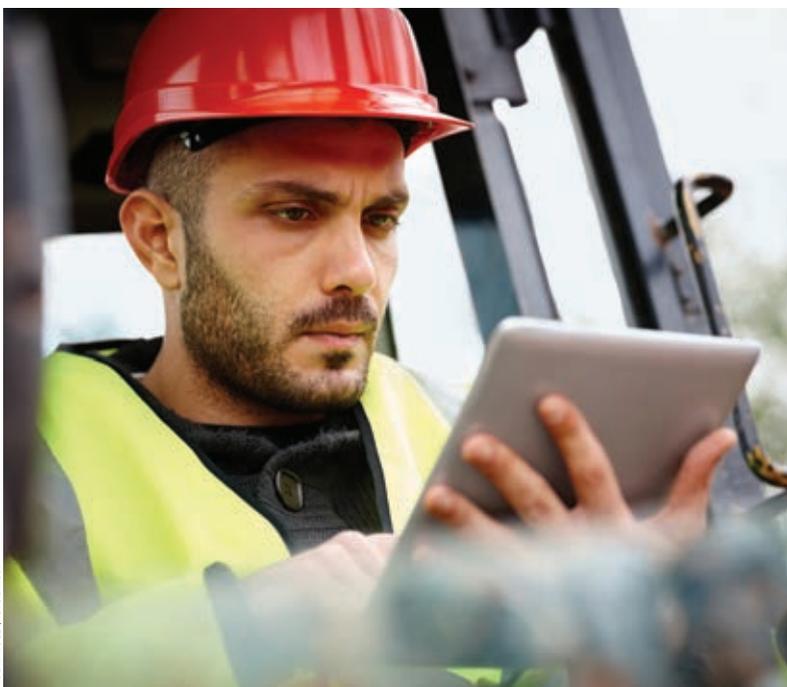
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Whether it's examining green energy options or exploring how emerging technologies can better serve our members, for CECA, our schooling never ends. We continue to learn from our members about their priorities, and we will continue to research issues so that we can better serve you, now and in the future.





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Once again, we will have live entertainment, food, a health fair and prize drawings as well as tours of the new building. Look for details and an invitation in next month's *Texas Co-op Power*. We look forward to seeing you there!

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# Happy Labor Day

CECA will be closed Monday, September 2, in observance of the holiday.



# 20 Years and Counting: The Comanche County 4-H Horse Camp

*Equine experience makes horseback riding accessible—but it takes a lot of work*

## HORSES ARE ONE OF NATURE'S MOST MAJESTIC

creatures. They possess a legendary beauty and grace, especially when compared to other beasts of their size. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who doesn't marvel at their magnificence as they gallop, mane and tail flying, head tossing, limbs and body moving with a liteness that few other creatures display. They often captivate children, but unfortunately, whether due to expense or logistics, horseback riding is a luxury that many children do not have the opportunity to experience.

But where there's a will, there's a way, and for 45 youths in 2019, that way was the Comanche County 4-H Horse Camp. The 20-year-old camp with very modest beginnings has transformed over the decades, growing into one of the most organized horse camps in Central Texas.

The camp traces its roots to 1989, when a small group—Ronnie and Rachel Hilliard, Jim and David-die Lester, Shayla and Glen McDonald, Kristi and Randy Taylor, and Deidre Daniel—attended a camp in Centerville County and decided they wanted to offer a similar one for local kids at an affordable price. Their first attempt was held at the Hilliard's home just outside of Comanche and was attended by the children of the group's members.

Pleased with the result, the group decided to offer a horse camp again the next summer, when they could open it up to more kids. This time, they branched out and engaged with



Glen Hodges gives instruction on horsemanship to Sophia, A.J. and Rowdy.

Texas A&M University, who sent trainers to assist the kids at the Comanche Rodeo Arena.

Two years and several kids later, the camp's organizers moved the event to Stephenville, where they were able to utilize Tarleton State University's arena and dorms to provide a more camplike experience. However, the Tarleton arena was capable of accommodating only 30 horses, and they soon outgrew that venue. The next step was to move the camp to Circle T Arena in Hamilton, but the cost of tuition still kept many kids from attending, and the group was soon back at the drawing board, searching for a new venue.

Perhaps through divine intervention, Mary Ratliff, a long-time volunteer for the camp, came into contact with Kenny and Jo Hague through a chance meeting. The Hagues are owners of Crooked Creek Ranch, a beautiful and sprawling site outside of Hamilton with a covered arena and two bunkhouses. Ratliff ventured to ask the Hagues if they would consider donating the use of the ranch's arena for their horse camp, and the couple enthusiastically agreed. Six years later, the camp is still operated at Crooked Creek, and this July, organizers celebrated their 20th year with 45 kids.

Each morning starts off with a sunrise trail ride, followed by breakfast and drill practice. Campers are divided into groups based on ability: beginner, intermediate and advanced.



Rachel Hilliard, the driving force behind the camp, instructs Sienna on how to handle the reins.



A favorite activity of many campers is getting to actually work with cattle. Pepe Briseno donates the steers every year, “which is a huge thing,” said Hilliard, “because that’s expensive if we had to lease those steers for a week.”

The rest of the day is spent learning horsemanship, including commands, showmanship, walk and trot with transitions, side pass, back and rollbacks. The camp’s participants also do some English riding, barrel racing, pole bending and calf roping.

Even while participating in the fun of barrel racing, pole bending and calf roping, the campers are building basic skills.

“We are teaching them responsibility as they go without them even knowing, which is fun,” Didi Tomlinson said. She started out as a camper and advanced through the years to become a team leader. This year, she aged out of the 4-H system but still attended camp as a helper in the cook station.

As the older kids become more responsible as riders, they progress toward becoming team teaching captains. Teams are composed of 10–12 kids, and captains are tasked with ensuring their charges muck their stalls, feed their horses and get to class on time—as well as getting the campers up in the morning and to bed by lights out.

“You’re pretty much their parent while they are at camp,” Tomlinson said. Each team competes for a buckle at the end of camp, so leaders and campers take this business seriously.

Teams earn points based on skill level, equine knowledge, a fun skit at the camp’s end and several other factors.

Of the original group of organizers, Rachel Hilliard, David-die Lester, and Kristi and Randy Taylor are still involved after 20 years, with Hilliard the driving force.

“I guess over time camp has been more than just horse camp to me,” Hilliard said. “The horses are the vehicle, but it’s a lot about being challenged and meeting those challenges, and setting some goals and reaching them, and feeling successful and confident, and getting past those scary things.”

There is no minimum age or skill level for campers. If they can sit on a horse, they are welcome to participate. However, for the younger participants, parents are required to stay at the camp. The youngest camper so far has been 5-year-old Aubry Hidrago, who has been coming to the camp since she was 2.

“She had just turned 2 her first year, and she stayed on horseback all day,” Hilliard said. “She introduces herself as Aubry Cowgirl. So she’s just like everybody’s little girl.” This year’s youngest camper was 4-year-old Brazos Bean. Bean is a second-generation camper, as are several other attendees.



Teams compete each year to win a buckle. But win or lose, it’s fun and games for every team.

No horse? No problem! Horses can be expensive creatures and require some effort to care for. Many kids don't have the luxury of owning one. Fortunately, there are understanding and generous horse owners who will loan their horses for a week to allow campers the opportunity to experience something they likely would not have been able to otherwise.

The camp organizers request that campers' parents give advance notice if their child will require a loaner horse, as it takes time to locate one that suits the individual camper. They also suggest that campers make time to ride the horse a few times before coming to camp so that horse and rider are somewhat attuned to each other before campers delve deeply into learning horsemanship.

"A lot of kids have this idea that they're going to go to horse camp, and it's going to be amazing, and the horse is going to be perfect, and everything is going to go their way," Hilliard said. "They don't know that it's hard. It's hard to get the horse to do what you want it to do all the time."

Hilliard sent out a special thank-you to all who have taken time to volunteer over the years to make the camp happen. "It has taken an army of volunteers," she said. "And we thank every junior rodeo sponsor because that money allows us to put on the camp!"

The camp typically begins on the Sunday of the July 4th week, but that's subject to change. To find out dates and times, follow the Comanche 4-H Rodeo Facebook page at [facebook.com/comanche4horse](https://www.facebook.com/comanche4horse). If you would like to donate funds or items to next year's camp, or would like to volunteer, send a request through Facebook or to Comanche 4-H Rodeo Club, 907 Elm St., Comanche, Texas 76442.

*"If you can control a thousand-pound animal and make it do what you want it to do, then you can take that skill and transfer it to pretty much anything in life."* —Rachel Hilliard



Pepper practices loping bareback on her horse, Salt.



It's a wrap! Participants in the 20th annual Comanche County 4-H Horse Camp pose for a final photo.



Some of the camp cooks are, from left, DiDi Tomlinson, Daviddie Lester, Irene Kerley, Cindi Wyckoff and Kristi Taylor.

**The Cooks**

No camp would be complete without the skill and patience of those who feed the masses. Daviddie Lester is the chief cook and bottle washer for Comanche County 4-H Horse Camp. Lester was one of the original organizers of the camp and has stayed with it through the years, eventually taking over the cooking duties from Mary Ratliff. “We couldn’t have camp without Daviddie,” said Hilliard.

Lester had a very able crew to assist her this year: Kristi and Randy Taylor, Mary Ratliff, Paula Kavanaugh, Irene Kerley, Rachel Hilliard, Chad and Chandra Lester, Didi Tomlinson, Cindi Wyckoff and others who pitched in cleaning up after meals, cutting up watermelon and sending cookies and brownies. “It truly takes an army,” said Lester when thanking her crew.

“They get real food,” said Irene Kerley, one of Lester’s volunteers. “Not just sandwiches.” They do keep plenty of peanut butter and jelly on hand for those picky eaters. Two years ago, they decided to go green and have the kids bring their own plate, cup and utensils, with CECA donating water canteens for the camper’s horses. That tradition continued this year, with Comanche County Medical Center donating the canteens.

Other generous community members who donated food include Pederson Farms, which donated bacon and sausage; Pepe Briseno, 30 dozen double-yoked eggs; Gary Davis, squash; Littlejohn Produce, tomatoes, lettuce and other produce; and Stephens Ferti-Tex, watermelons. “This has been the year of cucumbers,” said Lester. “Everyone donated cucumbers this year, and we’re learning lots of new ways to make [them].”



Brazos is the camp’s youngest participant at 4 years old.



Dakota practices the poles with horse Baby Coulter.



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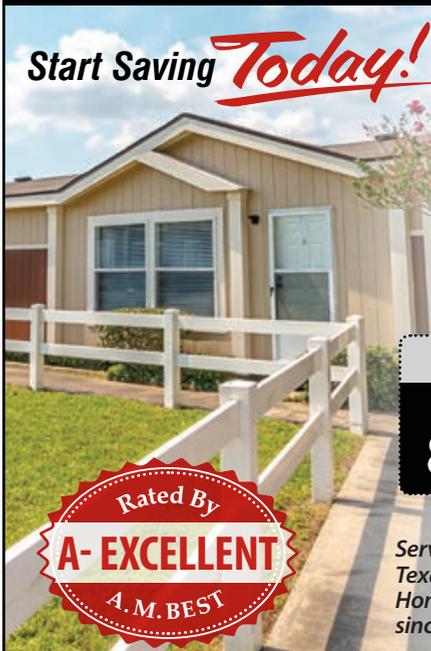
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# Gail Borden's Follies

The invention of canned condensed milk followed many failures, including the meat biscuit

BY MARTHA DEERING

GAIL BORDEN JR., AN INVETERATE INVENTOR with just a year and a half of formal schooling and not a scintilla of scientific training, discovered an ingenious method of condensing milk so it could be stored without refrigeration and safely shipped great distances. The 1856 invention reversed the dismal failure of his earlier discoveries.

In 1844, when he lived in Galveston, Borden lost his wife and 4-year-old son to yellow fever. Devastated, he reasoned that, because the disease raged in summer and receded after the first frost, a giant refrigerator could “keep patients for a week under a white frost” and cure them. No one volunteered to test the theory.

Another invention, a terraqueous machine, was supposed to navigate land and sea equally well. The wagon-sailboat combination, complete with mast, sail and wheels that served as paddles in the water, worked admirably when a horse pulled it across land. However, on its first voyage into the Gulf of Mexico, the contraption capsized and dumped its passengers into the surf.

Despite these spectacular failures, Borden was not a buffoon. Born in 1801 in Norwich, New York, he was a teacher and surveyor and was said to have been captain of the local militia before his move to Galveston. In Texas, he founded a newspaper, *The Telegraph and Texas Register*, and prepared the first topographical map of the state.

In 1849, a Borden invention called meat



biscuits promised wholesome, portable nutrition, and the biscuits won a gold medal at London's Great Exhibition in 1851. Borden explained that the nutritive portions of beef or another meat would be separated from the bones and other parts of the body by boiling. Next, the water holding the nutritious matters in solution would first be evaporated to extreme thickness and then made into a dough with firm wheat flour. This meaty dough would be rolled and cut into a biscuit shape, then baked at a moderate heat to achieve the appearance and firmness of crackers—so it would keep for years.

The chairman of jurors at the Great Exhibition called it “one of the most important discoveries of the age.” Borden set up a plant in Galveston to manufacture meat biscuits for a worldwide market. Borden planned to market them with a partner named Ashbel Smith.

“Dr. Smith, a gentleman of scientific reputation,” according to an 1850 article in *Scientific American*, “has communicated a paper on the subject to Prof. Bache, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science,” in which he

says, “I have several times eaten of the soup made of this meat biscuit. It has a fresh, lively, clean and thoroughly done or cooked flavor.”

In spite of favorable recommendations from Smith; Texas Ranger Rip Ford, who preferred to sweeten and fry the biscuits; and Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, who took a supply on two Arctic expeditions, the meat biscuit failed to win badly needed military contracts.

The Army deemed it “not only unpalatable, but [it] failed to appease the cravings of hunger, producing headache, nausea and great muscular depression.” By 1852, Borden, who had poured his fortune into the manufacture of meat biscuits, was bankrupt.

Just three years later, in 1855, he employed an oddly shaped copper vacuum pan to successfully condense milk. The dairy business boomed. Borden's Eagle Brand Condensed Milk saw many a starving soldier through the Civil War and escorted Gail Borden's bank balance back into the black.

**Martha Deering**, a member of Heart of Texas EC, lives near McGregor.



# PUBLISHERS CLEARING HOUSE



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## Happy Hours

THANKS TO THE LAUNCH OF THE FOOD Network and culinary celebrities like Martha Stewart, Emeril Lagasse and Wolfgang Puck, the 1990s ushered in an exciting decade of “gourmet” home cooking. Salsa surpassed ketchup as the country’s favorite condiment, miniature vegetables and grape tomatoes became salad staples, and instead of spaghetti, we proudly prepared fettucine, rigatoni, penne and other types of pasta. Recipes that showcase a specialty ingredient (like this Vidalia Onion Dip, which ran in March 1998), seem to say, “This is not your grandmother’s Lipton Onion Soup dip.”

PAULA DISBROWE, FOOD EDITOR

### Vidalia Onion Dip

- 2 large Vidalia or 1015 sweet onions, finely chopped
- 1½ cups shredded Parmesan cheese, divided use
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup sour cream
- ¼ cup fresh dill, lightly chopped (or 2½ teaspoons dried dill), divided use
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon prepared horseradish
- Pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, as desired

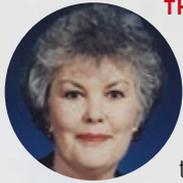
1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.
  2. Place onions, 1 cup Parmesan, mayonnaise, sour cream, 3 tablespoons dill (or 2 teaspoons dried), parsley, horseradish and red pepper flakes in a mixing bowl and use a spatula to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper, then transfer the mixture to a deep-dish 10-inch pie dish. Sprinkle the top evenly with the remaining ½ cup of Parmesan and remaining dill.
  3. Bake 40–45 minutes until lightly browned. Serve with chips or crackers.
- Serves 4–6.

**COOK’S TIP** To create a crispier top, bake the dip in a 9-by-13-inch casserole and finish it under the broiler.

BACKGROUND: MARCIN JUCIA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; DIP: IRINA ROSTONINA | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

# Retro Recipes

## Happy Hours



### THIS MONTH'S RECIPE CONTEST WINNER

MILLIE KIRCHOFF | NUECES EC

"These are great for family gatherings or parties," says Kirchoff, who has five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. "We have fresh tomatoes often, so those were the inspiration for the recipe. I've tried these with different fillings, but this is the way my family likes them." With their flaky crust and savory filling, we like them, too!

### Bacon and Tomato Minicups

- 1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled
- 2 medium tomatoes, chopped
- 1 bunch green onions, chopped
- 1 cup finely shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 8-count tube (16 ounces) flaky buttermilk biscuits

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Mix bacon, tomatoes, green onions, cheese and mayonnaise in a bowl.

3. Apply cooking spray to mini-muffin pans. Cut each raw biscuit into fourths and roll each into a ball. Flatten partial biscuits between 2 sheets of waxed paper with a rolling pin. Gently form each piece of dough into a minimuffin cup.
4. Fill with bacon and tomato mixture. Bake 12 minutes. ▶ Makes 32 minicups.

**COOK'S TIP** For a zestier flavor, add Mrs. Dash and/or cayenne pepper, to taste.

### Texas Rattlesnake Eggs

BETH GERHARDT | GUADALUPE VALLEY EC

"I've been making these Rattlesnake Eggs for over 30 years," says Gerhardt. "It's my most requested appetizer. I take these 'eggs' to parade-watching parties, Super Bowl parties or any get-together. Just a warning—they will disappear quickly!"

- 24 medium-size fresh jalapeño peppers
- 8 mozzarella cheese sticks
- 2 cups buttermilk baking mix
- 1 pound hot pork breakfast sausage
- 1 pound grated cheddar cheese
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt

1. Line a cookie sheet with parchment or aluminum foil.
2. Remove the stems and seeds of the jalapeños, keeping each whole.
3. Cut the cheese sticks into thirds and stuff a cheese piece into each pepper. Set aside.
4. Preheat oven to 325 degrees.
5. Using a stand mixer, combine the baking mix, pork sausage, cheese and spices; mix until it forms into a stiff dough. Form dough into 24 rounded balls of equal size using a cookie scoop or heaping tablespoon. Take one piece of dough, flatten it and shape it around one stuffed jalapeño to completely seal it inside. Continue to form the dough pieces around each pepper until all are covered.
6. Place the "eggs" on the prepared baking sheet and bake 30–40 minutes, or until lightly browned. ▶ Makes 24 appetizers.

**COOK'S TIP** Wear disposable gloves when deseeding the peppers.

### Grilled Onion Mushroom Cheeseburger Dip

MARIAN EVONIUK | PEDERNALES EC

Evoniuk loves caramelized onions and mushrooms, and she knows almost everyone loves cheeseburgers, so she decided to create a dip with all those flavors. "It's like a cheeseburger with onions and mushrooms in a bowl and maybe just a little easier to eat," she says.

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 sweet onion, coarsely chopped
- 2 cups (8 ounces) cremini mushrooms, coarsely chopped



IF YOUR RECIPE IS FEATURED,  
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### \$100 Recipe Contest

February's recipe contest topic is **Forget Chocolate, My Sweetie Likes...** Not everyone is wild about chocolate. What unexpected treat do you make for your valentine? The deadline is **September 10**.

ENTER ONLINE at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests); MAIL to 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701; FAX to (512) 763-3401. Include your name, address and phone number, plus your co-op and the name of the contest you are entering.

- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon dried dill
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 tub (7.5 ounces) chive and onion cream cheese spread
- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 baguette, cut into ½-inch slices and toasted

1. Melt butter in a large nonstick skillet. Add onion, cover and cook on low heat about 30 minutes or until onion begins to caramelize.
2. Add the mushrooms, garlic, salt, pepper and dill. Raise heat to medium, cover and cook 10 minutes. Uncover and continue cooking until any remaining liquid from the mushrooms has evaporated, about 7–10 minutes. Remove from heat and transfer to a large glass mixing bowl. Set aside.
3. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

## Happy Hour in Just Minutes

The recipes on these pages require some shopping and forethought. But what do you do when a happy hour breaks out unexpectedly? Friends drop over, wine corks are loosened, and you need something to munch on. You may be able to find what you need in your pantry, fridge and freezer.

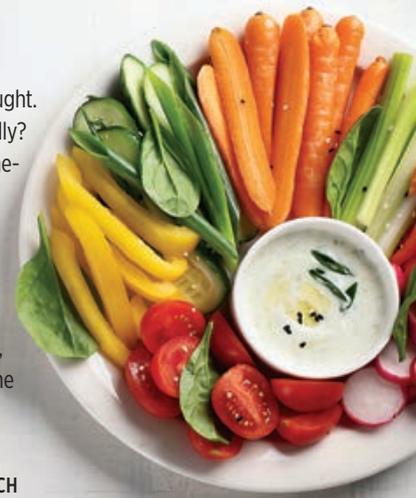
**Make up a quick relish tray** with any pickles, olives, peppers or other marinated vegetables you might have. **Cut vegetables** from the crisper drawer into sticks or bite-size pieces and serve

with any creamy dressing you have on hand.

**Raid the pantry** for crackers, cut sandwich cheese from the fridge and slice an apple.

**Voilà!** Instant party!

—SHANNON OELRICH



4. Crumble ground beef into the same skillet. Cover and cook over medium heat until beef is cooked through. Drain juices and transfer meat to the same bowl as the onion-mushroom mixture.
5. Add the cream cheese spread, mayonnaise, sour cream and Parmesan to meat mixture. Mix well and transfer to an 8-by-8-inch (or similar) oven-safe baking dish.

6. Bake until top is light brown and bubbly, about 20–30 minutes. Remove and serve hot with toasted baguette slices. ▶ Serves 12–14.

### WEB EXTRAS

▶ Read these recipes on our website to see the original Vidalia Onion Dip recipe from March 1998.

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# Texas Vacation

WHETHER BOATING, HIKING, swimming, fishing, making s'mores by firelight or checking in to a swanky hotel, Texans really know how to cut loose! Won't you join us? Lord willing and the creek don't rise, we roll out at first light. **GRACE FULTZ**

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



◀ **TANYA MURPHY**, Pedernales EC: Murphy's granddaughter enjoys her pool with spraying water. Her cow friends seem to want to join her.



▲ **DAVID LARGENT**, HILCO EC: The Light-house formation at Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

▼ **VALLERY ORR**, Houston County EC: The iconic Gulf Glider at Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier.



▲ **VICTORIA JOHNSON**, Sam Houston EC: Dancer at the 50th annual Alabama-Coushatta Powwow in Livingston.

▼ **MICHAEL CULOTTA**, Cherokee County EC: Surf fishing at Sea Rim State Park in Sabine Pass.



## UPCOMING CONTESTS

JANUARY FENCES	DUE SEPTEMBER 10
FEBRUARY POWER	DUE OCTOBER 10
MARCH FIRST RIDE	DUE NOVEMBER 10

All entries must include name, address, daytime phone and co-op affiliation, plus the contest topic and a brief description of your photo.

**ONLINE:** Submit highest-resolution digital images at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](http://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).  
**MAIL:** Focus on Texas, 1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor, Austin, TX 78701. A stamped, self-addressed envelope must be included if you want your entry returned (approximately six weeks). Please do not submit irreplaceable photographs—send a copy or duplicate. We do not accept entries via email. We regret that *Texas Co-op Power* cannot be responsible for photos that are lost in the mail or not received by the deadline.

## Pick of the Month Texas Arts & Crafts Fair

**Ingram** September 28-29

(830) 367-5121, txartsandcraftsfair.com

Renowned Southwestern artist Amado Peña returns to his Texas roots as the featured heritage artist at the fair. Peña, a Laredo native who now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, got his start at the Texas State Arts & Crafts Fair almost 50 years ago. He is among dozens of artists whose works will be on display.



PEÑA: COURTESY ANNIE COBURN | FAB SENIOR TRAVEL. CANOES: BROCREATIVE | SHUTTERSTOCK.COM. PLANE: FRANK PETERS | STOCK.ADOBE.COM

## September

7

**Beaumont Neches River Rally**, (409) 543-7967, bigthicket.org

**Goliad The Calm Before the Storm**, (361) 645-3752, texasarmy.org

**Henderson Alive & Kicking Art Show**, (903) 475-2604, facebook.com/aliveandkickingartshow

**Mansfield Music Alley**, (817) 728-3382, mansfieldmusicalley.com

8

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

12

**Little Elm [12-15] Autumn Fest**, (972) 731-3296, littleelm.org

13

**Caldwell [13-14] Creative Memories Quilt Guild Quilt Show**, (512) 567-5020

September 7  
Beaumont  
Neches River Rally



14

**Buda Hornet Races**, (512) 376-8089, athleteguild.com

**Lakehills American Legion Centennial**, (830) 751-3711, alpost410.com

**Sanger SELLabration**, (940) 458-7702, sangertexas.com

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**Medina** [14-21] **QuiltFest**, (830) 589-2825, medinacommunitylibrary.us

## 20

**Sulphur Springs** [20-21] **Lone Star Heritage Quilt Guild Quilt Show**, (903) 235-5700, sulphurspringstxquilts.com

**Grandview** [20-22] **Antique Alley Texas**, (817) 666-5024, antiquealleytexas.com

**Plano** [20-22] **Balloon Festival**, (972) 867-7566, planoballoonfest.org

## 21

**Anson Party in the Park**, (325) 823-3259

**Bonham Farming Heritage Day**, (903) 583-5558, thc.texas.gov

**Bulverde Jubilee**, (210) 213-4319, bulverdejubilee.com

**Hallettsville Rock It, Don't Knock It Benefit Playday**, (361) 578-8182, theridingtherapycenter.org

**Pontotoc Pontotoc Ranch Fire Department BBQ & Cake Auction**, (325) 251-6670

**Terrell Flights of Our Fathers Air Show & Fly-In**, (972) 551-1122, bftsmuseum.org

**Victoria Conquer Chiari Walk Across America**, (361) 648-8948, conquerchiari.org

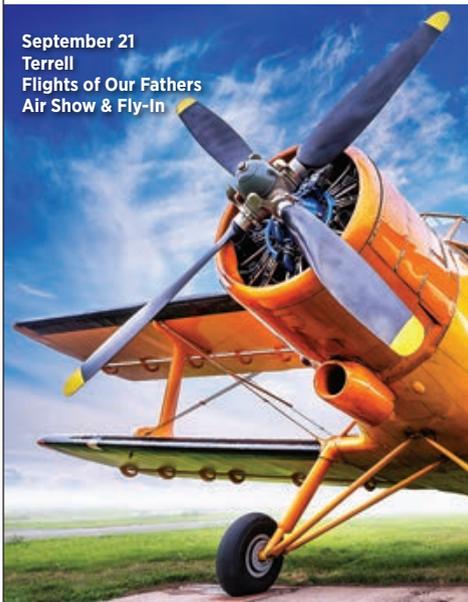
## 27

**Louise** [27-28] **Louise/Hillje BBQ Cook-Off & Fall Festival**, (979) 541-7056

**Trinity** [27-28] **Community Fair**, (936) 661-6138

**Lockhart** [27-29] **Western Swing & BBQ Festival**, (512) 745-0659, lockhartfest.com

September 21  
Terrell  
Flights of Our Fathers  
Air Show & Fly-In



**Round Rock** [27-29] **Texas All British Car Days**, (512) 522-5461, txabcd.org

**Burton** [27-Oct. 5] **La Bahia Antique Show and Sale**, (979) 289-2684, labahiaantiques.com

## 28

**Dumas Museum Day**, (806) 935-3113, dumasmuseumandartcenter.org

**Flower Mound Fido Fest**, humanetomorrow.org/fidofest

**Mount Selman Bull Nettle Festival**, (903) 372-6607, facebook.com/bullnettlesfestival

## October

### 4

**Forney** [4-6] **St. Martin of Tours 108th Annual Carnival**, (972) 564-9114, stmartinforney.org

### Submit Your Event!

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

## AROUND TEXAS EVENT CALENDAR

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# Wink's Spectacle

A dot on the map in West Texas boasts keepsakes from Roy Orbison's career

WHAT DO WILLIE NELSON, JANIS JOPLIN, George Strait and Roy Orbison have in common? Besides being some of America's iconic musicians, all were born in small towns in Texas. From Joplin's Port Arthur to Strait's Poteet, Texans love their home-grown troubadours. I recently made the long drive to Wink to pay homage to Orbison, one of my favorite crooners.

Sandwiched between Kermit and Pyote, Wink is a town with a population under 1,000 and not a stoplight to its name. As they say, "If you Wink, you'll miss it." It's internationally known for nearby sink-holes, named "Wink Sinks," but its true claim to fame is that it was the childhood home of the *Oh, Pretty Woman* singer himself, Roy Kelton Orbison.

I Drove All Night to get to Wink (not really, but what a great song) and arrived to find a small building with a mural of Orbison and branded "MUSEUM." It was closed, but posted on the door was a number for a volunteer who was gracious enough to open the museum for me. Note to Orbison fans: If you plan to visit, call first and arrange a time.

My Orbison education began. It turns out the man in the mysterious glasses wasn't born in Wink but 350 miles away, in Vernon, in 1936. When Orbison was 6, his father gave him a guitar and changed his life. In 1946, the family moved to Wink, and by 1949, Orbison had formed the Wink Westerners, playing honky-tonks and getting local radio airtime. Orbison's 1954 Wink High School yearbook stated, "To lead a Western band is his after school wish."



**A Roy Orbison mural makes the museum devoted to him hard to miss.**

45s, including *Only the Lonely*, *Love Hurts* and *Crying*. There was a guitar played by Orbison but owned by a neighbor, who received it one Christmas morning and immediately took it to Orbison for tuning. Newspaper clippings sang of his worldwide success; one quoted Elvis Presley calling Orbison "quite possibly the greatest singer in the world."

I was impressed with it all. However, I had yet to see the *pièce de résistance*. As I stared at items in one of the cases, the volunteer asked if I'd like to see the glasses. I assumed she was talking about the dark-rimmed, purple-hued glasses in the case. I said "sure," and she explained that these were Orbison's last pair of prescription sunglasses worn at his last concert, in 1988. "Folks love trying them on," she said. My jaw dropped.

I slowly slid them on my nose and immediately thought, "I can't see anything." Contrary to popular opinion, Orbison wasn't blind, but he did have poor

Every inch of the museum, maybe 20 feet wide and 15 feet deep, was full of memorabilia. There were

eyesight and needed the Coke-bottle glasses. The dark glasses became his signature look when he was on tour with the Beatles in 1963 and forgot his regular glasses on a plane. He wore his sunglasses onstage and never looked back. Donning his glasses was like trying on one of Elvis' jumpsuits or one of Dolly Parton's wigs.

The glasses could easily be in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame but are here for folks to try on in Wink. How crazy is that? I nervously handed them back and let out a sigh of relief knowing I wouldn't be responsible for dropping a priceless artifact.

I had walked into the museum a true Roy Orbison fan and left even more so. His unique voice was unmatched. My experience proves what all Texans know—that big things can come from small towns. It also proves that when traveling the back roads of Texas, one can never be sure what one might find. Sometimes reality is even better than what you discover *In Dreams*.

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 Roy Orbison Museum in Wink.

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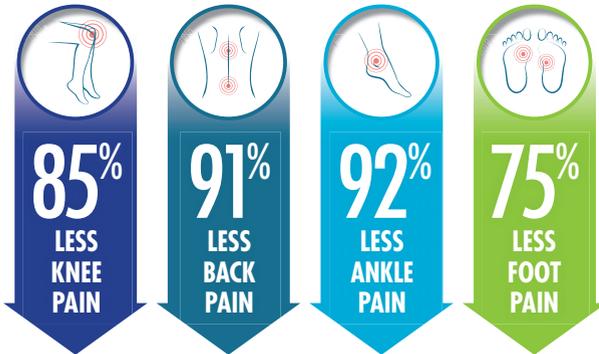


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