

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative celebrates its 80th anniversary in 2019. Throughout the year, we will look back at our history — and ahead to our future — in this magazine, on our social media, on our website, at the co-op's Annual Meeting, in our Member Service Centers and in other ways. Keep an eye out for contests and requests for memories. Want to share a story about Bluebonnet, or electricity, back in the early days? Email us at lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop or call 512-925-5621.

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's 80th anniversary celebration starts with a look back at Central Texas in 1939

By Clayton Stromberger and Denise Gamino

If you were born at least fourscore and seven or so years ago, and grew up in these parts, you may remember what it was like in 1939.

No one was in a huge rush back then. The highway speed limit was 45 mph — lower for trucks. More than half the state was rural. Kids in the country rode a horse to confirmation class. Air conditioning meant opening a window or sitting on the front porch with a hand-held fan from church. Screen time was for when the mosquitoes came back.

To communicate with faraway friends and family, you wrote long letters by hand and carefully saved the letters you received. To make a telephone call, you usually had to go through a switchboard operator — someone like German-born Selma “Grandma” Schwartz in Burton, who’d been on the job 29 years in her big wooden swivel chair and kept all the party lines straight with constant plugging and unplugging of cords and jacks. Folks read the local weekly news-

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John Crawford, born a slave on a Manor cotton plantation in Travis County, is immortalized in a book of more than 2,300 first-person slave narratives collected by a New Deal program and given to the Library of Congress in 1939. The oral histories of Crawford and other freed slaves reflect the dialect of that era. “Nobody ever larnt me my ABC’s and I didn’t git no chance at school,” Crawford told the Federal Writers’ Project in the late 1930s at age 81. He remembered being freed and said plantation owner Judge Thompson Rector Sr. was too emotional to speak to the gathered slaves because he “hated to lose his slaves, I reckon.” According to Crawford, Rector’s son-in-law said, “You folks am now free and can go where you wants to go.” Only two slave families stayed. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress



Bluebonnet line workers in the 1940s take a break from their hazardous and backbreaking work in Giddings, original home to the co-op’s headquarters. From left, William Proske, Walter Urban and Winslow Zwerneman. Bluebonnet photo



Selma “Grandma” Schwartz was an answering machine. In 1910, the same year this German-born mother of seven was widowed, she became the first telephone operator in Burton, running this communications command center. She worked the Burton Telephone Co.’s manual switchboard until 1940. Schwartz worked from a wooden swivel chair in a little clapboard building next to the Schwartz & Schwartz grocery store she built in 1922 at 400 N. Main St. Her sons Walter and Hugo ran the store. Rural residents with telephones shared party lines with 12 to 20 members. Eavesdropping happened — even when locals spoke German. And the telephone operator could always listen in, too. Schwartz had them at “Hello.” Photo courtesy of the family of Annie Maud



In 1891, the first basketball game was played with peach baskets and a soccer ball. A year later, the women at Smith College in New England were learning the new sport. In 1897, the first female teams were formed in high schools. Just over four decades later, these high school students in McMahan, a small community 10 miles east of Lockhart, were happily embracing the phenomenon of girls’ and women’s basketball — and winning a trophy. The population of McMahan gradually declined in the 1940s, and its schools were consolidated with the Lockhart Independent School District in 1949. Photo courtesy of Harry Annas Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin

80th
ANNIVERSARY

THE WAY WE LIVED

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paper page by page, and each issue had a section to keep you updated on the important comings and goings around town ("Miss Martha Woodson, of Texas University, Austin, was home last week-end." "Eben Price, of Waco, was a business visitor here Tuesday of this week.")

Somehow everyone survived without Twitter and cell phones.

At the country store, or the town café, people would stand or sit around and talk with neighbors and strangers about the weather or politics or how the Aggies were doing — and they were doing well, working their way to a 20-0 Thanksgiving Day drubbing of the Longhorns and, by season's end, the national title. On the radio, if you could afford one, you might listen to Jack Benny or Bob Wills or perhaps Fred Waring and his orchestra; everyone would gather around when it was time for one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats."

Kids buying comics at the town drugstore had new favorite characters to follow — Batman premiered in "Detective Comics" in May and "Superman No. 1" appeared in June.

The Great Depression, which had begun with the stock market crash a decade earlier, was slowly beginning to ebb and recede, and folks finally started to have a bit of pocket money. The minimum wage rose a nickel to 30 cents. Yams were two cents a pound at Dippel's Food Store in Caldwell; a 28-ounce jar of Pure Apple Butter was 17 cents. When going into town, men wore hats and often a jacket and tie. Women wore hats, too, and dresses — nothing too fancy, and sometimes made at home, but they were part of what was considered proper attire for Main Street in the communities within the Bluebonnet service area. There was a lively bustle on weekdays and often on Saturdays as well. And it was a treat on a Friday night to see a movie at the Strand in Bastrop, the Sterling in Giddings or the Baker in Lockhart (showing the first week of January, 1939: "The Dawn Patrol" with Errol Flynn).

The theaters were segregated, as were the schools, the water fountains and lunch counters. Slavery and the Civil War were still in the living memory of the area's oldest residents. Lifelong Travis County resident John Crawford, who was 81 in 1939, could still tell a visitor about his early days as a slave on a plantation in Manor. He was a child when word came of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, but back in 1939, he had detailed memories of the day more than seven decades earlier.

In 1939, shiny new automobiles enticed passers-by at small downtown dealerships or glided by with their large graceful curves and Art Deco grilles. They made the occasional surviving beat-up Model A look

F. C. Winkelmann immigrated to New York from Germany as a teen in 1890, caught a steamer to Galveston, and made his way to Brenham, where he worked for two years in a furniture factory. In 1894, he realized his dream of opening a photo studio. Winkelmann's Studio captured the civic life of the Brenham area for the next six decades, from births to funerals. It became a tradition for brides and grooms in Washington County to make the trip into town and stand in front of Winkelmann's camera. The couple at right is identified on the negative, taken in 1939, as Mr. and Mrs. Jose Ortega. Today the entire Winkelmann Collection of prints and negatives resides at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin — an invaluable window on the comings and goings of a community for almost a century. *Photos courtesy of Winkelmann Photo Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin*



Newspaperdom, a trade journal for newspapers in the early 1900s, was captivated by the kind of flatbed printing press owned by the Deutsches Volksblatt weekly in Giddings: "Any printer who sees the Monona Leverless will be quite certain to fall in love with it." The paper, founded in 1899, bought the press in 1907, and its "printer's devil" (a printing apprentice), Albert Miertschin, did indeed fall for it. Miertschin taught the press to speak three languages: German, English and Wendish. He was the only person in the country who could hand-set type in Wendish, which was spoken in Serbin, southwest of Giddings. The Deutsches Volksblatt was a German-language paper with a few columns in English and Wendish. In 1938, the paper was sold to Miertschin, above right with his trilingual Monona Leverless, and Theodore Preusser, left, who became editor. In 1940, they founded the English-language Giddings Star. Miertschin would set German type Monday through Wednesday, and English type on Thursday and Friday. The Deutsches Volksblatt shut down in 1949, and Miertschin and Preusser sold the Star in 1954. The fluent press became scrap metal. *Photo courtesy of the University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute of Texan Cultures*

Henry August "Hank" Hausmann, at left, of La Grange was a sure shot with a shotgun. He was the 1939 Texas State High Overall Champion, setting a world record for trapshooting. This Texas Trapshooting Hall of Famer won multiple state and national trapshooting contests. Locals paid to watch him shoot in 1934 to raise money for a Fayette County machine gun to defend against outlaws Bonnie and Clyde (who were fatally shot by police in Louisiana three weeks after La Grange got its weapon). Hausmann was a daredevil. At 20, he charged gullible locals 25 cents to watch him "fly" an E-M-F automobile off a 200-foot bluff above the Colorado River on April 24, 1916. He built a ramp for the car, but stood on the running board to steer and jumped off just before the car hurtled off the cliff. Refunds were requested. *Photo courtesy of Hank's grandson, Pete Hausmann*

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like a raggedy scarecrow in comparison. The new model Chevy pickups were touted in ads as “big, brawny,” with improved “Supremeline styling” and front windows you could crank open.

While filling up at Arbuckle Oil in Elgin, you might pull up alongside one of everyone’s favorite vehicles — the Blue Bell Creameries delivery truck, a refrigerated 1933 Chevy model that chugged up and down the country roads to deliver 5-gallon cans of “B.B. Ice Cream” to Lotta Cream counters in drugstores across the area. Lotta Cream booths — created in 1935 by Blue Bell General Manager E.F. Kruse to sell scoops inside local establishments — were your places to go for relief on a broiling summer weekend, all for a nickel a cone. On a typical Saturday in August, customers at the Lotta Cream #1 inside Mr. Schmid’s Savitall grocery store in Brenham consumed 110 gallons.

Life moved at a calm pace, but changes were just around the corner. In parts of Central Texas where the night had long been lit only with moon glow, candles and kerosene lamps, electricity was coming. The Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative (later renamed Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative) received a state charter to provide electricity to residents east of Austin in Washington, Fayette, Austin, Lee, Bastrop, Travis, Williamson, Caldwell, Hays and Guadalupe counties, thanks to the relentless work of a young Texas congressman — and future U.S. president — named Lyndon Baines Johnson. (Later, parts of Burleson, Colorado, Gonzales and Milam counties were added to the Bluebonnet service area.)

In rural Fayette County, Isabel Albrecht saved up and bought a washing machine when the electric grid finally reached her cotton farm in Willow Springs, 22 miles east of La Grange. That’s where she and husband Oscar also raised cattle and chickens. But even after home electricity, she still preferred to scrub clothes on a washboard.

War was coming, too, though that was still just a rumble in the distance. In July, an article in Life magazine asked a group of prominent journalists just returning from Europe, “Will there be war?” No, reassured Amon Carter of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, and his colleagues agreed. But in September, as Fred Quitta (seen in the photo at right, top row, fifth from the left) and Edward “Toad” Smith (third row, second from left) suited up for their Smithville Junior High Tigers football game, German tanks were already rolling into Poland. Five years later, those two young men would join the heartbreaking list of those who had given their lives in the defense of freedom. Quitta died in the battle to take the island of Leyte in the Philippines from the Japanese, and Smith lost his life at Saint-Georges-d’Elle, France, just three weeks after D-Day. Tiger teammate Carl “Rusty” DeLoach (top row, fourth from right) served on the destroyer USS Black, survived

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The mission: Bring a pastor and youth director to four rural congregations of the Reformed and Evangelical Church in the German farming communities of Mound Prairie, Birch, Gay Hill, and Lyons in Burleson County. The team was led by Lone Star Parish leaders the Rev. Martin Ernst (standing to right of map) and Ms. Leona Poppe (left of map), who moved to Somerville in 1939 and stayed until 1943. In a 1961 thunderstorm, lightning struck the steeple at Birch and the old church burned to the ground, prompting an eventual consolidation of the four churches into one congregation in Lyons, which lives on today as the Evangelical United Church of Christ, led by the Rev. Darrin Holub. *Photo courtesy of Winkelmann Photo Collection*



1939 THE MUSIC

When the Saints Go Marching In — Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra

Over the Rainbow — Judy Garland

God Bless America — Kate Smith

Moonlight Serenade — Glenn Miller and his Orchestra

Strange Fruit — Billie Holiday

The Lion Sleeps Tonight (aka Mbube) — Solomon Linda's Original Evening Birds

Lester Leaps In — Count Basie's Kansas City Seven

Begin the Beguine — Chick Henderson

Beer Barrel Polka — Andrew Sisters

Beautiful Brown Eyes — Roy Acuff

A moment of innocence in the fall of 1939 was captured in the annual football team photo of the Smithville Junior High Tigers, below. War was approaching, and in September, as the boys suited up for their first game, German tanks were rolling into Poland, ushering in a war that would affect them all. Several of them served in World War II, and two made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. *Photo courtesy of the Smithville Heritage Society*



Feeding turkeys until they were stuffed was just one of Isabel Heinsohn Albrecht's chores in 1939 at “Wayside Manor,” the Fayette County poultry, cotton and cattle farm she owned with her husband, Oscar, on land that had been in his family since 1866. Before rural electrification, her house was powered by a Delco-Light Plant. Albrecht died in 1966, but Trinity Lutheran Church in Frelsburg, 19 miles southeast of the old farm in Willow Springs, still displays an altar cloth intricately crocheted by her. *Photo courtesy of the Albrecht family*

1939 THE MOVIES

Gone with the Wind — Starring Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Thomas Mitchell, Barbara O'Neil and Hattie McDaniel. Directed by Victor Fleming, George Cukor and Sam Wood. Eight Academy Awards: Best Picture, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, Best Director, Art Direction, Cinematography, Film Editing and Screenplay

The Wizard of Oz — Starring Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Ray Bolger and Bert Lahr. Directed by Victor Fleming, George Cukor, Mervyn LeRoy, Norman Taurog and King Vidor. Academy Awards for Best Original Score and Best Song, “Over the Rainbow”

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington — Starring James Stewart, Jean Arthur, Claude Rains and Eddie Arnold. Directed by Frank Capra. Academy Award for Musical Scoring and Best Original Story

Stagecoach — Starring John Wayne, Claire Trevor, Andy Devine and John Carradine. Directed by John Ford. Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor

the war, and returned to Smithville to work on the railroad and marry his high school sweetheart Juanita. DeLoach died in 2013 at age 86; Juanita, who had been by his side for 65 years, died 12 hours later in her sleep.

The Great War, known then as “the war to end all wars,” had started just 25 years earlier, and some of its veterans living in Central Texas were still in their early 40s. In fact, that terrible conflagration received a new name in June of 1939, when Time magazine grimly dubbed it “World War I” with a gloomy eye to “World War II” building in Europe.

Other changes, as a tumultuous decade entered its final year: On Jan. 17, radio host and flour mill owner W. Lee “Pappy” O’Daniel was sworn in as the state’s 34th governor with great hoopla at Memorial Stadium in Austin with 37 marching bands and an attendance of 60,000. O’Daniel replaced James V. Allred, who late in his second term was nominated by President Roosevelt to a federal district judgeship.

In Giddings, a new mural was unveiled on the wall of the U.S. Post Office. The artist hired by a federal New Deal jobs program had painted cowboys opening mail at a rural mailbox, including one who received a package of red cowboy boots. The painting shows mountains in flat Lee County, but the postmaster called the mural “a first class job.” New Deal post office murals were also completed in 1939 in Elgin, Lockhart, Smithville, La Grange and Caldwell. In Lockhart, the young men of the Civilian Conservation Corps were busy building a swimming pool next to Clear Fork Creek that later would become part of Lockhart State Park. Additional New Deal workers were building Bastrop State Park and Buescher State Park near Smithville.

These moments and so many others live on in the black-and-white photos taken that year by photographers such as F.C. Winkelman in Brenham and Harry Forrest Annas in Lockhart, who each had downtown studios for decades in their communities. They documented countless weddings, babies, funerals, group photos and civic events both grand and intimate. We are fortunate to have their images as we look back and wonder what life was like then.

Although the people in these hand-printed black-and-white images are frozen in time today, they lived these moments in color. For them, the days of 1939 slipped by one at a time, a bit quicker than folks wanted them to.

What was to come was uncertain. They didn’t know how the story would end, but their contributions live on in this particular patch of Texas that stretches from the San Marcos River in the west to the Brazos in the east. ■



The federal New Deal job programs during the Great Depression produced recreational treasures in Central Texas state parks. In Lockhart, the Civilian Conservation Corps built the pool in what is now Lockhart State Park. It was 93 degrees on the Fourth of July, 1941, opening day for the pool next to Clear Fork Creek. The pool’s proximity to the creek caused persistent problems: flooding after heavy rains and the occasional snake. Lifeguards had to shovel mud into buckets and throw it back into the creek. The pool closed in the early 1970s. The old pool site now is a grassy area with picnic tables where the bathhouse once stood. *Photo courtesy of Harry Annas Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin*



Central Texas has a smokin’ hot reputation for outstanding slow-cooked barbecue, with a pedigree that dates to German and Czech settlers who arrived in the mid-1800s. Back then, local meat markets would wood-smoke meat that had not been sold to prevent spoiling. The oldest barbecue shop in Central Texas is Southside Market in Elgin, above, which opened in 1882. By 1939, Southside and several other barbecue joints were so popular they remain open today, including two in Lockhart: Kreuz Market (opened in 1900) and Black’s Barbecue (opened in 1932 under a different name). By 1941, Giddings had City Meat Market, which is still serving today. Central Texas barbecue continues to lure world travelers to those famous 5-star spots as well as ‘younger’ barbecue shops across Bluebonnet’s service area. After all, different smokes for different folks. *Photo courtesy of Southside Market*

Co-op board seats up for election in 2019

Bluebonnet members interested in serving on the co-op’s Board of Directors can run for one of four seats up for election during the Annual Meeting on May 14, 2019.

Candidates can be nominated either by presenting an application for nomination with at least 50 signatures from co-op members in their respective districts or by paying a \$250 filing fee.

Bluebonnet’s Board is made up of 11 directors who serve staggered three-year terms. The four seats up for election in 2019 are for District 1, Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties; District 3, Bastrop County; District 5, Burleson County; and District 7, Washington County.

To run for the Board, candidates must be at least 21 years old, a co-op member in good standing, agree to a background check and meet other qualifications outlined in Bluebonnet’s bylaws.

Nomination application forms are also available at the co-op’s member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

All candidates’ petitions, filing fees and application for nomination forms must be submitted at any Bluebonnet member service center by 4 p.m. Feb. 13, 2019.



Details, bylaws and nomination applications are online at bluebonnet.coop. Click About, then Leadership, then Becoming a Director. For more information, call a member service representative at 800-842-7708. (Sarah Beal photo)

DEADLINES APPROACHING! APPLY TODAY!

2019 OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BLUEBONNET SERVICE AREA

Government-in-Action Youth Tour

Two high school students to tour Washington, D.C., June 12-21, 2019 — plus a \$1,000 scholarship

APPLICATION DEADLINE:

JAN. 18, 2019

Scholarships of Excellence

\$2,500 each to graduating high school seniors to pursue a trade and technical certificate, associate degree in a vocational field or a bachelor’s degree

APPLICATION DEADLINE:

MARCH 8, 2019

Find out more at bluebonnet.coop (click Community, then Scholarships) or by contacting Karen Urban at karen.urban@bluebonnet.coop or 512-332-7961



CONTACT US

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative
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Member services: 800-842-7708, email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or visit one of our five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

REPORT AN OUTAGE

At 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app.

OFFICE CLOSING

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Jan. 21 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Jan. 24 for a company meeting. Report outages at 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app. Pay your bill any time online, on our mobile app or by calling member services at 800-842-7708.

BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet’s Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. Jan. 22 at Bluebonnet’s Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop.

MAGAZINE QUESTIONS?

Contact Lisa Ogle at 512-332-7968 or email lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.

This year is Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's 80th anniversary, so over the next months, we will supplement some of our magazine stories with historical photos to offer a glimpse of life in the region in decades past. U.S. 290 and Texas 71 and the vehicles on them looked nothing like today's bigger crowded highways. At right, construction begins on what is to become U.S. 290 in Chappell Hill, near Brenham, in March 1922. At far right, in 1942, a Dodge half-ton pickup stops on the side of what is now Texas 71 in Bastrop County. Historic photos courtesy of Texas Department of Transportation



By Ben Wear

Dock Jackson grew up on the road to Houston. But back then, in the 1950s and 1960s, the “highway” from Austin to the coastal plains that passed through Bastrop was just a small-town street named Chestnut. From the front yard of his childhood home, Jackson could watch travelers making their heedless way through the town of about 3,000. After some time spent in Austin, Dallas and New York as a young man, he returned home and served 24 years on the Bastrop City Council.

“I remember it as the busiest highway,” he said recently. “Not busy like 71 now, of course, but pretty busy. Everything came through town. In those days, people got a chance to see Bastrop.”

That old town route gave way to a true highway loop south of old Bastrop: four lanes and a new bridge over the Colorado River that was cut through bottomland in the early 1970s. That highway drew development, then traffic lights and, in the past decade, overpasses that the Texas Department of Transportation, or TxDOT, built to bypass city traffic. Now more than 50,000 cars and trucks blast through Bastrop on Texas 71 each day.

Jackson is one of many residents in the Bluebonnet region who have seen highways grow crowded and clogged.

Bastrop and Bastrop County, like much of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's western service area, have exploded with growth and traffic in the past 20 years as Austin expands east toward what used to be more rural communities. And TxDOT, reacting to the growth in eastern Travis County, Elgin, Bastrop and San Marcos, has begun driving money and highway expansions into Blue-

The toll of traffic: injuries, fatalities

TEXAS 71 Between Texas 130 in eastern Travis County and Smithville, 2013-2018

SERIOUS INJURIES: **935, or 187 per year**

FATALITIES: **33, or 6.6 per year**

The top speed limit of Texas 71 between Bastrop and Smithville is 75 mph

U.S. 290 Between Texas 130 near Manor and Giddings, 2013-2018

SERIOUS INJURIES: **926, or 185.2 per year**

FATALITIES: **52, or 10.4 year**

The top speed limit between Giddings and Elgin is 70 mph

Statistics courtesy of TxDOT

the STUCK-IN-TRAFFIC BLUES

If you travel the **major highways** in Bluebonnet's area at **rush hour**, it's a familiar refrain. Relief may be around the corner: Some big **road improvements** are in the works.

Above, evening rush-hour traffic along U.S. 290 crawls into Manor from Austin.

At right, Dock Jackson, a former Bastrop City Council member, seen in front of Texas 71 in Bastrop, remembers when traffic traveled through town via Chestnut Street. Texas 71 was rerouted south of old Bastrop in the early 1970s. Photos by Sarah Beal



bonnet's service area.

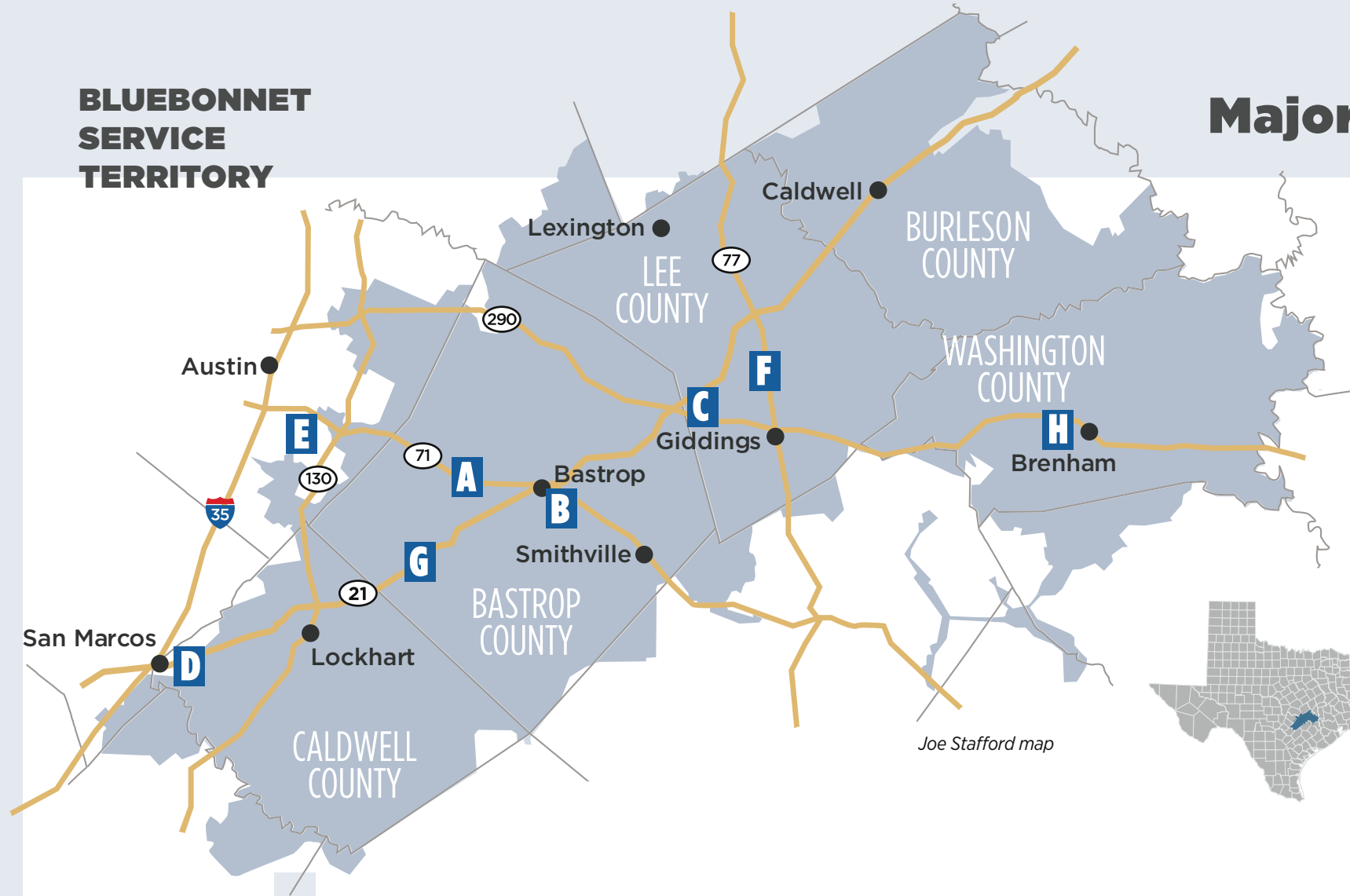
The state agency, responsible for expansion and maintenance of interstates, U.S. highways, state highways and farm-to-market roads, plans to spend more than \$400 million on highway expansions in Lee, Bastrop and Caldwell counties between 2019 and 2024. Bluebonnet's eastern areas, including Burleson and Washington counties, are still mostly rural in character and TxDOT's plans there are more modest. Across the cooperative's service area, the myriad roads that do not fall under TxDOT jurisdiction are built, maintained and improved by counties and cities.

“The traffic dollars follow demand,” said Bastrop County Judge Paul Pape, who took office in 2012 and was re-elected in November for another four-year term leading the county Commissioners Court. “They go where the population is, and where the traffic is, always lagging behind development. We've lagged in the past, but I'm very happy now.”

Bluebonnet provides power across a 3,800-square-mile swath of Central Texas within 14 counties. The cooperative serves

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BLUEBONNET SERVICE TERRITORY



Joe Stafford map

Major road projects in the next 5 years

The Bluebonnet region continues to see major highway construction projects that accompany the area's explosive growth. Here are the biggest projects underway, listed roughly in order of overall impact to the region.

- A TEXAS 71 OVERPASSES** — \$142.1 million to bypass five traffic lights from FM 1209 to Kellam Road. Construction to begin between 2020 and 2023 on various overpasses.
- B TEXAS 71 FRONTAGE ROADS** at Colorado River in Bastrop — \$46.3 million to build frontage road bridges on either side of the existing main highway bridge. Work to start in spring 2019.
- C U.S. 290 MEDIAN AND SHOULDERS** — \$84.9 million to convert undivided four-lane highway to a divided highway, with wider shoulders, between Paige and Giddings.
- D SAN MARCOS LOOP** — \$78 million to complete the FM 110 loop around San Marcos' southern and eastern sides. Construction to begin in 2019 on all three segments.
- E TEXAS 130 EXPANSION** — \$220 million to expand the tollway from four lanes to six lanes between Texas 71 and Texas 45 North, and to add three flyover bridges at U.S. 290.
- F WIDEN U.S. 77 SHOULDERS** in Lee County — Add wider shoulders to the road north of Giddings. Work to begin in 2020.
- G TEXAS 21 EXPANSION** in Bastrop and Caldwell counties — Add passing lanes in various sections of the road between Bastrop and San Marcos. Work could start by late 2019.
- H IMPROVE U.S. 290 CLOVERLEAF** in Brenham — TxDOT is working on designs for this \$50 million project on the city's west side and hopes to begin work in 2024.

— Ben Wear

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more than 98,000 meters with 11,000-plus miles of power lines.

Bastrop County, which had about 17,500 residents in 1970 when Jackson was nearing high school graduation, had almost 85,000 people in 2017, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The city of Bastrop itself has more than doubled in population in that time to 9,700 residents, while Elgin has grown 70 percent to about 8,800.

The growth in Hays County and San Marcos has been even more remarkable. Eastern parts of Hays County in or near San Marcos east of Interstate 35 are part of Bluebonnet's service area. San Marcos has ballooned by about 150 percent since 1970, to just over 63,000 people in 2017, and what was a primarily rural Hays County has sprouted rooftops in Buda and Kyle and seen its population grow by 650 percent in that time.

The rapid growth is also popping up in Bluebonnet's service area in Caldwell County. In the last 18 years, the population there has grown by more than 32 percent, and in the last few years, Caldwell has become one of the fastest growing counties in the Austin area.

In the Bluebonnet service area, TxDOT

has a number of major projects on deck, which it believes will handle the continuing growth as well as address other traffic hurdles in the cooperative's eastern counties, including Lee and Washington.

Other projects will impact Bluebonnet members commuting to and from Austin. Other less extensive road projects are planned for areas scattered across the service area.

Making Texas 71 a freeway

For the past decade, TxDOT has been building overpasses along the highway in and just west of Bastrop, and only adding traffic lights to newly built frontage roads at intersections such as Loop 150, Texas 304 and Texas 95. But there are still five spots between Bastrop and Austin where cars going 70 mph might round a bend or crest a hill and face a red light: FM 1209, Pope Bend Road, Tucker Hill Lane, Kellam Road and Ross Road.

TxDOT has set aside \$142.1 million to eliminate those remaining bottlenecks with bridges over the crossing roads. The agency expects the work on the FM 1209 overpass to start in 2023, while work on the other intersections is expected to begin in the fall of

2020 and be completed by 2022.

In theory, for the first time, there would be a true expressway between Austin and Houston — a combo of Texas 71 and Interstate 10 beginning at Columbus — and Bluebonnet members would have clear sailing to and from Austin. But the possibility remains that TxDOT, reacting to additional development, could decide to install more stoplights in the interim.

"I tried to get a promise out of them that they wouldn't add any," Pape said. "They couldn't promise. But I honestly believe they will not."

New Colorado River crossings

The Texas 71 bridge over the Colorado River and a freight railroad track just east of the river are nearing 50 years old, and frontage roads dead-end on either side of the river. That is going to change. In March, TxDOT plans to start construction of new frontage road bridges on either side of the existing Texas 71 bridge.

That \$46.3 million project should take three to four years to complete, TxDOT officials estimate. Then, in a separate project,

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At left, looking west toward Austin along U.S. 290 in Manor, traffic lights contribute to the congestion in the area. TxDOT doesn't plan to eliminate them in the foreseeable future. However, the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority said it is open to new talks about an extension of the tollway from U.S. 183 in Austin to several miles east of Manor. Photo by Ray Bitzkie



TxDOT plans to add medians and ample road shoulders throughout the 11-mile stretch of U.S. 290 between Paige and Giddings. Construction is expected to begin by the end of this year. Photo by Sarah Beal

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highway traffic would be temporarily diverted to those new frontage road bridges so that the 1972 bridge can be demolished and replaced with a new Texas 71 bridge that will be several feet higher above the river, Pape said.

"It will get a little bit worse for a couple of years, before it gets a whole lot better," he said.

Dividing U.S. 290

Most of U.S. 290 in the stretch from the eastern edge of Austin through Lee and Washington counties, is already a divided highway — two lanes on each side with a grassy median in the middle. This is infinitely safer than having four lanes separated by only a double yellow stripe, particularly at that highway's speed limits of up to 75 mph.

But today, for much of the 11 miles of U.S. 290 between Paige and Giddings, the highway is a dangerous four-lane, undivided road with generally narrow shoulders. In December 2018, TxDOT began taking construction bids for three projects, totaling \$84.9 million. Those projects will include medians and ample road shoulders throughout that stretch. The last of the bids will come this spring, and construction should begin along that part of the highway by the end of 2019.

As for U.S. 290's numerous traffic lights in Manor, Elgin, Giddings, Brenham and other spots in the Bluebonnet area, TxDOT officials said there are no plans in the foreseeable future to eliminate them.

About a decade ago, the Central Texas Re-

What's the speed limit?

Ever wonder how speed limits are determined for area highways and roads? They are set by the Texas Transportation Commission, an appointed board that governs the Texas Department of Transportation. The process is complex.

Among the factors that go into determining a speed limit are engineering recommendations based on field surveys of actual speeds motorists drive. The theory behind that is that drivers will, in general, drive at a speed that is appropriate to the design and condition of a given stretch of road.

gional Mobility Authority, the toll agency headquartered in Austin, had planned to build a turnpike extending from U.S. 183 in Austin to several miles east of Manor. But Manor residents and business owners at the time rebelled at the idea of an expressway through the middle of their town. The tollway opened in 2015, but stops just west of Manor.

Mobility authority officials say now they are open to talking about an extension of the tollway, which would eliminate grinding rush-hour traffic through Manor. TxDOT reports that 47,570 vehicles traveled on U.S. 290 dai-

ly in 2017. But those talks are in early stages, and it is unclear when or even if that project will happen.

Looping San Marcos

Earlier this decade, TxDOT completed the first stretch of FM 110, a new loop around San Marcos' lightly developed southern and eastern sides. Virtually all of that loop — the completed part and the three segments yet to be built (running 11.2 miles from Texas 123 to Interstate 35 at Yarrington Road) — are in the Bluebonnet service area.

TxDOT plans to take bids on all three of those new segments in 2019, officials said, with construction to follow. The remaining construction cost is an estimated \$78 million. TxDOT plans to initially build the loop as a two-lane road and eventually expand it into a divided four-lane highway.

"The loop is going to be quite a game changer," said John Thomaides, mayor of San Marcos from 2016 until 2018. "Economically, it's a huge boon for the city. We've already seen companies that are looking to locate in San Marcos and looking to locate on that loop.

"The future is very bright here, if we kind of let it happen."

Tollway expansions

Bluebonnet members who commute to Austin and back will also be aided by a huge project already underway, as well as several others to begin soon east of Austin.

The mobility authority is two years into construction to expand about eight miles of U.S. 183 from U.S. 290 to Texas 71 near Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. This \$750 million expansion from a four-lane road with traffic lights to a six-lane tollway that will also have four to six free frontage road lanes should be finished in late 2020.

The mobility authority and TxDOT, meanwhile, are about to begin \$220 million of expansion work on the Texas 130 tollway, a busy stretch of which is in the western part of Bluebonnet's service area. Early this year, the authority will begin a \$127 million project to add three flyover bridges to the U.S. 290/Texas 130 interchange to ease the transition between those two highways. Only one such direct connecting bridge is there now. And TxDOT is about to begin two projects to add a third lane to each side of Texas 130 between Texas 45 North in Pflugerville and Texas 71 east of the airport.

More road projects in the works

TxDOT has a number of other projects on smaller, less trafficked roads set to begin in 2019 and 2020, including widening several miles of U.S. 77 in Lee County and three stretches of Texas 21 in Caldwell and Bastrop counties. That crucial road between Bastrop and San Marcos, much of which now is just two lanes, would become what TxDOT calls a "Super 2," with passing lanes added on alternating sides to make it essentially a three-lane

The U.S. 290 cloverleaf on Brenham's west side tends to create bottlenecks, particularly when special events such as football games put more people on the road. TxDOT plans to rework the cloverleaf; construction could begin in 2024, officials said. Photo by Sarah Beal



Try some TxDOT tools

The state's Department of Transportation website, txdot.gov, has useful information for drivers, particularly about highway conditions and improvement projects.

DriveTexas.org shows current conditions, closures, construction and other information across the state. By providing your location, the map will tell you about road conditions in your area.

On the txdot.gov homepage, a link takes you to the Project Tracker program, where you can follow progress of road construction projects.

For an overview of TxDOT's ongoing efforts to improve the state's roads, go to texasclearlanes.com.

road for much of its length. That change will reduce the number of drivers trying to pass in the oncoming lane, a primary cause of head-on collisions.

Pape said he has been told TxDOT has Super 2 expansions in mind for a 16-mile stretch of Texas 95 between Elgin and Bastrop. That part of the highway has had an increasing number of accidents in recent years — and 23 fatalities since 2010. In 2018, at least 40 crashes and five deaths were reported on that part of the highway. TxDOT has no near-term improvements planned, but it began to reassess the speed limit on that stretch of Texas 95 after four members of a family died in a crash last October.

"Help is on the way, but it's taken longer

than it should have taken," said Jackson, who has remained politically involved since leaving the Bastrop council in 2009. Texas 95 "is not well lit and so narrow. We have all these little crosses, markers on the road where people have been killed."

Plans for co-op's eastern counties

Former Washington County Judge John Brieden, who stepped down in January after eight years in office, has highway goals that are important to residents there.

In particular, Brieden would like to see a reworking of the troublesome U.S. 290 cloverleaf on Brenham's west side. That interchange between U.S. 290 to the west and a loop around Brenham is a bottleneck on the route from Houston to Austin, particularly when special events such as football games attract more drivers.

"There are only one-lane entrances and exits that back up," Brieden said. "Sometimes we have traffic stacked up as much as two miles."

The interchange situation, Brieden said, has been a real "hot potato" in the Brenham community.

The state is working on it, said officials with TxDOT's Bryan district. The district is "developing concept alternatives" about how to improve the U.S. 290 cloverleaf, spokesman Bob Colwell said.

TxDOT has allotted \$50 million for the eventual reworking of the cloverleaf, Colwell said in an email, and officials envision starting the construction in 2024.

In January, the agency planned to award a contract of about \$3.5 million, Colwell said, to widen narrow FM 50 by adding shoulders and turn lanes from about two miles north of FM 2621 to where the road feeds into Texas 105 on Brenham's east side. ■

Bluebonnet, LCRA help fund community projects



The Washington, Texas, Volunteer Fire Department will get a generator to help supply water to fight fires and provide other emergency services during a power outage, thanks to a \$19,740 community development grant from the Lower Colorado River Authority and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. The grant is part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program. From left to right: Pamela Jo "PJ" Ellison, LCRA board member; John Brieden, former Washington County judge; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Robert Jensen, Washington Texas VFD captain; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet representative; Russell Borgstedte, VFD secretary; David Bledsoe, firefighter; Clyde Miller, VFD fire chief; Billy Jensen, VFD vice president; Ken Mutscher, Bluebonnet Board vice chairman; and Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board member.



The Dale Volunteer Fire Department is getting a new brush truck, thanks to a \$50,000 community development grant from LCRA and Bluebonnet. From left to right: Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Clifton Holder, firefighter; Joyce Buckner, Bluebonnet representative; John Hernandez, Dale VFD president; Brian Barrington, Dale VFD fire chief; Milton Shaw, Bluebonnet Board member; Rick Arnic, LCRA Governmental Affairs representative; and A.S. Mercado with Dale VFD.

Application deadline nears for co-op Board seat candidates

Candidates for four seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors must submit petitions, filing fees and completed application for nomination forms by 4 p.m. Feb. 13, 2019, at any of the co-op's five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor.

The seats up for election represent District 1 for Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe

and Hays counties; District 3 for Bastrop County; District 5 for Burleson County; and District 7 for Washington County.

Get information about eligibility and the application on bluebonnet.coop: Click on the About tab, then Leadership in the drop down bar and then click on the Becoming a Director link. You can also call a member service representative at 800-842-7708.



The Round Top Family Library is replacing its aging heating and air conditioning system, thanks to help from a \$13,154 community development grant from LCRA and Bluebonnet. Front row, from left to right: Laura D. Figueroa, LCRA board member; Pamela Jo "PJ" Ellison, LCRA board member; Deborah Kainer, library board member; Barbara Smith, library director; Byron Balke, Bluebonnet Board assistant secretary/treasurer; and Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member. In back, from left to right: Tammy Massengale, library supporter; Bruce Spaulding, Sue Spaulding and Lovetta Hicks, library board members; Russell Jurk, Bluebonnet Board member; Julie Wantland, library president; Steve Ditsler, library board member; and Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet representative.



The Dime Box Lions Foundation can begin construction on the town's first community park, thanks to a \$20,700 community development grant from LCRA and Bluebonnet. From left to right: Carol Richardson, Dime Box Lions Club member; Joyce Lerche, club member; Carol Dismukes, club secretary; Jan Perry, club president; Russell Jurk, Bluebonnet Board member; Sharon Brown, club treasurer; Roger Wubbenhorst, club program chairman; Barbara Hoover, club member; Brandon Scott, Leo Club trustee; Patti Adcock, club member; Mark Johnson, Bluebonnet representative; Katie Guynes, Leo Club president; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; and Cassidy Aguilar, Leo Club historian.

EIGHT DECADES OF LIGHTING THE WAY!

It's a milestone year for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. We're turning 80. The co-op, originally called the Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative, received its state charter on Aug. 2, 1939. The mission was to provide electricity to rural residents in 10 Central Texas counties (which later grew to include parts of 14 counties). In 1965, the co-op was renamed Bluebonnet.

We're celebrating our history with stories in Texas Co-op Power magazine, fun content in our social media, on our website



and at our five member service centers — where we will host birthday parties (and all members are invited). We'll have displays of old appliances at our Annual Meeting, a call for heritage recipes from our members, video memories from some of our oldest residential and business members, a look at what was happening in each of our eight decades and some great giveaways throughout the year (including some new appliances).

Follow us in the magazine, on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube for content you'll enjoy. Are you one of Bluebonnet's earliest members, or do you know someone who is? We want to tell your story. Please contact Lisa Ogle at 512-332-7968 or email her at lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.



A handful of hardy linemen pose in 1947 at the cooperative's headquarters in Giddings. Photo courtesy of Gene and Karen Urban

In the headlines: February 1939

- Germany launched the battleship Bismarck.
- Stagecoach, the John Ford-directed Western movie starring Claire Trevor and John Wayne, was released.
- The average annual wage in the U.S. was \$3,800.

CONTACT US

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative
P.O. Box 729
Bastrop, TX 78602

Member services: 800-842-7708,
email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop
or visit one of our five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

OFFICE CLOSING

Bluebonnet offices will be closed Feb. 18 in observance of **Presidents' Day**.

REPORT OUTAGE, PAY BILL

Report outages at 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app. Pay your bill any time online, on our mobile app or by calling member services at 800-842-7708.

ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

For inquiries about Bluebonnet's pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine, contact Lisa Ogle at 512-332-7968 or lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.

BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet's Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. **Feb. 19** at Bluebonnet's Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop.

SCHOLARSHIPS TO POWER YOUR EDUCATION

30 SCHOLARSHIPS for trade and technical programs

30 SCHOLARSHIPS for colleges or universities



Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is awarding \$2,500 each to qualified students graduating from high school or accredited home study programs.

Get information from your high school counselor, Bluebonnet's member service centers or at bluebonnet.coop. For applications, click the Scholarships link under the Community tab.

Application deadline is 5 p.m. March 8, 2019

Questions? Contact Karen Urban at 512-332-7961 or karen.urban@bluebonnet.coop



Demonstration farm has
a generous past and cutting-edge future

THE LULING FOUNDATION

80th
ANNIVERSARY

BLUEBONNET MEMBER SINCE 1939

Bluebonnet is celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2019 by visiting some of the cooperative's earliest commercial members. They joined "when the lights came on" and are still doing business. This month we feature the Luling Foundation, an agriculture demonstration farm that was in its 13th year when the cooperative that eventually was named Bluebonnet began providing electric service to Caldwell County and other counties east/southeast of Austin.

By Clayton Stromberger

*A*s you drive down quiet, tree-lined Mulberry Avenue out on the southwestern edge of Luling, just past the high school football stadium, you come to an unadorned metal archway that reads, "The Luling Foundation," and below that, "Est. 1927." Passing under the arch, you're simultaneously going backward and forward in time.

This area of gently rolling land nestled above the winding San Marcos River is both a historical site with a unique role in Caldwell County's past and a working farm of tomorrow where cutting-edge practices are shared with the next generation of

Continued on page 21

"More people were introduced to the farm over the years by making ice cream in a bag here in third grade than I can count."

— Bonnie Dredla
THE LULING FOUNDATION

Bonnie Dredla, left, office manager at the Luling Foundation, stands with some of the demonstration farm's registered black Angus herd (Sarah Beal photo). Upper left, an undated photo from the farm's early days. Below left, a group of young men, ages 17-22, who took part in the farm's training school established in March of 1934. The one-year program taught hands-on classes in poultry, dairy, livestock and general farming. Historic photos courtesy of the Luling Foundation



Q&A

with *Bonnie Dredla*

The Luling Foundation is her home and holds her heart. Office manager Bonnie Dredla lives on the property with her family and has worked there 15 years. She is constantly reinvigorated by the beauty of the place and its important mission.

What's one thing that folks might not know about the Luling Foundation?

People are so surprised about how many global visitors have been here. I have a map on the wall with colored pins showing all the places people have come from around the world. We've had people from Indonesia, Pakistan, Italy, Russia, Latvia, Mexico, Canada, England. We've had several exchange students from Poland. The most recent group was from Brazil. A mayor from China tried his first beef jerky here in the office.

What are your big annual events, and how many people visit each year?

We have about 1,500 visitors each year. Our Field Day has been going from the beginning, and it's the third Thursday of May every year. We have vendor booths, specialists, demonstrations, tours. We serve a big barbecue dinner and peach cobbler. We've had a Progressive Ag Safety Day for fifth-graders the last seven years, and that will continue this spring as Ag Literacy Day. Bluebonnet Electric



Sarah Beal photo

THE LULING FOUNDATION

lulingfoundation.org

830-875-2438

523 S. Mulberry Ave.

Luling, TX 78648

Open 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

(Closed from noon to 1 p.m.)

has been a sponsor and advocate of the event since it started in 2011.

Education has been an integral part of the foundation from its beginning. What knowledge do you hope young visitors will leave with after seeing the farm?

A lot of it is just changing their perspective of what they think agriculture is, because often they think you have to have a chicken in the back yard, or it has to do with a tractor. They think you have to be in 4H or FFA (Future Farmers of America.) We're all involved in agriculture. If you work at H-E-B, you're in agriculture. When you put your clothes on, you're in agriculture.

If Edgar B. Davis were able to drop by and see what the foundation is doing today, what would he think?

I think he'd be proud that it's still going on,

that his vision is still being fulfilled. One of the beautiful things I get to see in this job is all of the kids who have come through here. More people were introduced to the farm over the years by making ice cream in a bag here in third grade than I can count. I think that seeing the students do things that are outside, that are hands-on, that are tangible, and give them knowledge they can take away from here, that's what I think he'd be most proud of.

What can you tell us about your electric use?

We reinsulated the demonstration barn several years ago. The 92-year-old office building has energy efficient windows on the outside. We also have four solar panels to operate a water well.

What has the longtime connection with Bluebonnet meant to the foundation?

We've gotten high-quality service from Bluebonnet, and thanks to its community grants, we've been able to make some wonderful improvements to our facilities. We received one grant for \$30,000 in 2016 for a new workshop, and we've gotten three Community Development Partnership Program grants from the LCRA and Bluebonnet over the years. It's a relationship where both parties are able to fulfill a mission in providing a service to the community.

Continued from page 18

farmers and cattle ranchers.

The Luling Foundation exists because of Rafael Rios No. 1, the most famous oil well in the county's history. Thanks to that well, drilled in 1922 after six dry misses, Yankee entrepreneur-turned-wildcatter Edgar B. Davis hit black gold and became even more of a millionaire than he'd been upon making his first two fortunes in the shoe and Indonesian rubber businesses.

Guided by the devout Congregationalist faith of his Massachusetts upbringing, Davis believed that "gracious Providence" had directed him to seek oil near Luling. That same spirit led him to share much of his newfound wealth through philanthropic gifts to the community he'd come to know and care for during his days of searching.

Touched by the plight of area farmers who appeared trapped in a cycle of diminishing returns due to reliance on the single crop of cotton, Davis created the Luling Foundation as an agriculture demonstration farm and endowed it with \$1 million (the equivalent of more than \$14 million today).

Over the decades, the Luling Foundation — which serves Caldwell, Gonzales and Guadalupe counties — has tested and shared best practices for growing row crops, pecans and winter forage crops for livestock, while raising, at various times, goats, dairy cows, turkeys and, since 2000, Angus cattle.

Produce from its gardens have graced many a Luling dinner table, and generations of Texas schoolchildren have enjoyed a daylong taste of farm life on memorable field trips. The foundation gives \$15,000 in scholarships annually to high school students to pursue learning in agriculture, health care and trade/vocational studies.

Its 1,100-plus acres hold history: As a congressman, Lyndon B. Johnson had turkeys and pecans shipped from there to Washington, D.C., and Baseball Hall of Fame fastball pitcher Nolan Ryan came by one day to talk to the experts about Beefmaster cattle.



Edgar B. Davis



The Luling Foundation's main office today, left, and back in 1930, below, three years after the foundation was created.

Sarah Beal photo



Historical photos courtesy of the Luling Foundation



The milking parlor in the dairy barn, above, which was remodeled in 1928 to meet requirements for production of 'Certified Milk.' Economics and a prolonged drought ended the dairy operation in 1956. Turkeys were also a big part of the farm's early days, right.



Thank a farmer — celebrate National Ag Day

For the 46th year, the Agriculture Council of America is hosting National Ag Day on March 14, 2019.

It's a good day to reflect on and appreciate the contributions of American farmers, who receive just 14.8 cents, on average, of every food dollar consumers spend throughout the year, according to the National Farmers Union. The remaining 85 percent of food revenue goes to marketing, processing, wholesale, distribution and retail costs.

National Ag Day coincides with the beginning of cotton, corn, sorghum and soybean planting season for many Texas farmers. Think of the wide variety of commodities and products those crops

alone make possible — clothing and other textiles, animal feed, renewable fuels such as ethanol and many convenience foods.

With each U.S. farmer feeding an average of about 165 people in exchange for a modest financial reward and, frequently, a lack of recognition, take a moment to honor the hard work they do for our country's benefit and that of others around the world. Agriculture is America's No. 1 export, a vital contributor to sustaining a healthy economy.

So support your local farmers' markets, farm-to-table restaurants and spread the word about your favorite local farms.



A home-school group from San Antonio watches Johnny Fenn place an ear tag and ear tattoo while Jason Dredla freeze-brands one of the Luling Foundation's cattle. *Photo courtesy of Bonnie Dredla*

Page 22: How the Luling Foundation builds better cattle, plus a lesson on freeze branding.

Page 23: Bluebonnet will be celebrating its 80th anniversary all year — join us!



Luling Foundation manager Walter W. Cardwell Sr., left, hands out baby chicks in 1935. Cardwell's annual report in 1945 gave advice to every property owner: 'Be flexible enough to make changes as they appear necessary.'

Building a better beef cow

At the Luling Foundation, refining the production of the very best Angus cattle is done by combining detailed research and science's latest tools. Here are a few interesting facts about their work:

- EPD, or Estimated Progeny Difference, is a detailed analysis of data about a sire and dam that is exact enough for breeders to place a dollar value on a calf destined to produce top-quality beef.
- At the foundation facility, tanks of liquid nitrogen can hold up to 600 "straws" of valuable semen.
- Ideally, a bull used to breed heifers should have a genetic trait to sire a low- to moderate-weight calf at birth.
- The foundation's certified group scale can weigh 8 to 10 feeder-weight calves at a time (up to 10,000 pounds). Weight is important when cattle are loaded onto trucks, where a delicate balance of weight distribution is essential.
- The cattle pens were designed by Temple Grandin, a celebrated author and animal science expert who promotes humane, stress-reducing livestock handling and facility design.



Above, a vintage photo of one of the foundation's early champion bulls. Today it strives to keep cattle operations on the cutting edge of industry technology and techniques. Among a number of well-known people who have visited the Luling Foundation's demonstration farm is Temple Grandin, left. She designed livestock handling facilities that are more humane and widely used today. She visited the Luling Foundation to help design its low-stress chute system.

A modern alternative: freeze branding

Rather than fire branding, the Luling Foundation has been marking its cattle with denatured alcohol and dry ice since starting their Angus herd in 2000. This method can reduce the risk of infection that can occur with fire branding. How it works:

- The technique is only used on cattle with dark hides.
- The area to be branded is shaved and sprayed with denatured alcohol until soaked.
- The brand is removed from coolant and placed on the animal for 50 seconds; holding the brand firmly in place is difficult but necessary.
- A few weeks after branding, the hair loses its pigmentation and hair follicles turn white, creating a distinctive, easily readable brand.

With freeze branding, extreme cold is applied to the hide of the animal, killing the pigmentation in the hair follicles. The technique results in white hair where darker hair would have normally grown, leaving a clear brand. Freeze branding causes less pain and stress to the animal than traditional fire branding and decreases the risk of infection. *Sarah Beal photo*



JOIN THE Party!

It's a milestone year for Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative. We're turning 80! Here are some of the ways we'll celebrate.

80th
ANNIVERSARY

AT EVENTS

Attend our **Annual Meeting** on Tuesday, May 14, in Giddings. In addition to a state-of-the-cooperative report and a vote on important Bluebonnet business, you can see a collection of vintage electric appliances like the early blow dryer below. There will be timeline displays, a history photo booth and more. Get information **on the next page** and in the April and May issues of Texas Co-op Power magazine.

Later this year, join us at **birthday parties** in locations around our service area. These family-friendly events will feature activities, displays, prize drawings, birthday cupcakes and lots of Bluebonnet history. Keep an eye on our pages in Texas Co-op Power magazine and on social media for details.



LOOKING BACK: THE '40s



'**Casablanca**' starring Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, won the Best Picture Oscar for 1943.

'**Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy**' was a hit for the Andrews Sisters and became a World War II classic. Bette Midler re-recorded the song and made it a hit again in 1972.

'**Oklahoma!**' was Rogers & Hammerstein's first collaboration and a Broadway smash hit. It garnered a special Pulitzer Prize in 1944.



IN OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

- **Contests and giveaways** throughout the year will spotlight our past, test your knowledge and share your stories.
- **A monthly countdown** of our eight decades. Throughout March, we're looking back at the 1940s.
- **Video conversations** with longtime members and employees and man-on-the-street pop quizzes for fun prizes.
- Look for our hashtag, **#bluebonnetturns80**

Longtime member profiles will introduce you to some of the cooperative's earliest commercial and residential members. Two profile subjects this year:

● **St. Matthew Lutheran Church**, perched on the gentle rise of Sandy Hill, 10 miles northeast of Brenham, has been welcoming area residents since 1891. It first got electricity in 1939. Like the other Lutheran churches that dot Washington County, St. Matthew was formed to serve the local community of German immigrants, most of them cotton farmers. Its doors are still open today.

● **SPJST Lodge No. 38**, left, another of the cooperative's first members, joined in 1939. The Czech fraternal order's meeting place was built 13 years earlier, in 1926, in an area once known as Kovar, between Smithville and Flatonia. You can still rent the 72-by-100-foot dance floor today.

IN FUTURE ISSUES

- In April, read about the **history of electric appliances** and enjoy an entertaining timeline of the devices that changed lives.
- Visit with some of our **former meter readers**, and learn about the history of the meters of yesterday and today.
- Savor some of our readers' favorite family **heirloom recipes**; selected entries will receive a great cookbook.
- In August, learn **80 things about Bluebonnet**, the region and your electricity.
- At the end of the year, we'll offer experts' — and your — **predictions for the next 80 years** about the cooperative, our region and electricity.

SAVE THE DATE

Annual Meeting, Board election set for May 14

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting will be May 14, 2019, at The Silos, formerly the Sons of Hermann Hall, in Giddings. Four of 11 seats on the Board of Directors will be up for election that day, and co-op officials will present members with the annual state-of-the-cooperative report.

Board members serve staggered three-year terms. Seats up for election this year represent District 1 for Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales and Hays counties; District 3 for Bastrop County; District 5 for Burleson County; and District 7 for Washington County.

The deadline to declare candidacy and file required documentation and fees in order to seek a seat on the Board was Feb. 13. Look for information about all candi-

dates and more details about this year's Annual Meeting in Bluebonnet's pages of the April edition of Texas Co-op Power magazine or on our website.

The Silos is at 1031 County Road 223, Giddings. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m., and the meeting will begin at 2:30 p.m. If you are unable to attend, you can vote by proxy.

Proxy forms will be mailed to Bluebonnet members this month and must be postmarked by, or dropped off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor by 5:30 p.m. May 7.

If you have questions about the meeting, call 800-842-7708 from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop.



Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting gives members a chance to meet Bluebonnet employees, to vote for Board members and to get an update on the state of the co-op. Entertainment includes a live band, a photo booth, information tables, kolaches and door prizes. Sarah Beal photo

CONTACT US

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative
P.O. Box 729 Bastrop, TX 78602

Member services: 800-842-7708, email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or visit one of our five member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor.

REPORT AN OUTAGE

At 800-949-4414, bluebonnet.coop or via our mobile app.

BOARD MEETING

Bluebonnet's Board of Directors will meet at 9 a.m. March 19 at Bluebonnet's Headquarters, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop.

MAGAZINE QUESTIONS?

Contact Lisa Ogle at 512-332-7968 or email lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop.

CORRECTION

A story on Page 19 in the February 2019 issue of Texas Co-op Power magazine contained an incorrect date. The Texas 71 bridge over the Colorado River was built in 1958.

Hurry! Deadline near!

SCHOLARSHIPS TO POWER YOUR EDUCATION

30 SCHOLARSHIPS for trade and technical programs

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is awarding \$2,500 each to qualified students graduating from high school or accredited home study programs.

30 SCHOLARSHIPS for colleges or universities

Get information from your high school counselor, Bluebonnet's member service centers or at bluebonnet.coop.

Submit your application today!

Click the Scholarships link under the Community tab at bluebonnet.coop

Application deadline is 5 p.m. March 8, 2019

Questions? Contact Karen Urban at 512-332-7961 or karen.urban@bluebonnet.coop

Power out?

Help is just a text away.

Reporting an outage to Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is as easy as typing OUT.

Save time and help us quickly restore power using Outage Alerts texts.

If Bluebonnet has your cell phone number on file, in March you will receive a welcome text giving you the power to report outages and get outage status updates. Plus, if another member has already reported it, you'll get an automatic text saying we know about your outage.

You will receive a welcome text from the number **85700**. Save it with an easy-to-remember name, like Bluebonnet Outages. From there you can:

- ▶ Text **OUT** to that number if your power is out.
- ▶ Text **STATUS** if you want an update and estimated restoration time. You will also get a text when your power is restored.
- ▶ Text **HELP** for more information (or call 800-842-7708 from 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday-Friday).
- ▶ Text **STOP** if you don't want to receive Outage Alerts.

Don't want to wait? Enroll today!

Text **BBOUTAGE** to **85700**

Members previously enrolled in outage text alerts will not receive a welcome text. Message and data rates may apply.

1234 Smith Street: We are aware of outages in your area. Estimated restore time: Thursday, March 28, 4 PM



2019 ANNUAL MEETING & BOARD ELECTION FAQ

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's Annual Meeting is Tuesday, May 14, 2019, at The Silos on 77, formerly the Sons of Hermann Hall, 1031 CR 223 in Giddings. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and end at 2:30 p.m. The meeting will start at 2:30 p.m. If you need more information after reading the questions and answers below, call 800-842-7708 between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop.

What is the Annual Meeting, and why is it important to attend?

Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting is one of the many benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative. The meeting, held each year in May, offers members the opportunity to meet the Board of Directors, the general manager and the co-op's executive staff. Members hear a "State of the Co-op" message, elect directors and attend to any business that may come before the membership.

Bluebonnet's service area is divided into seven districts. Can I vote for candidates in all districts or just the district in which I live?

During contested Board elections, co-op members can vote for directors in all districts. The districts in the co-op's service area were drawn along Bluebonnet's service area boundary and county lines. The seven districts are represented by one to three directors based on, among other things, the number of meters in each district.

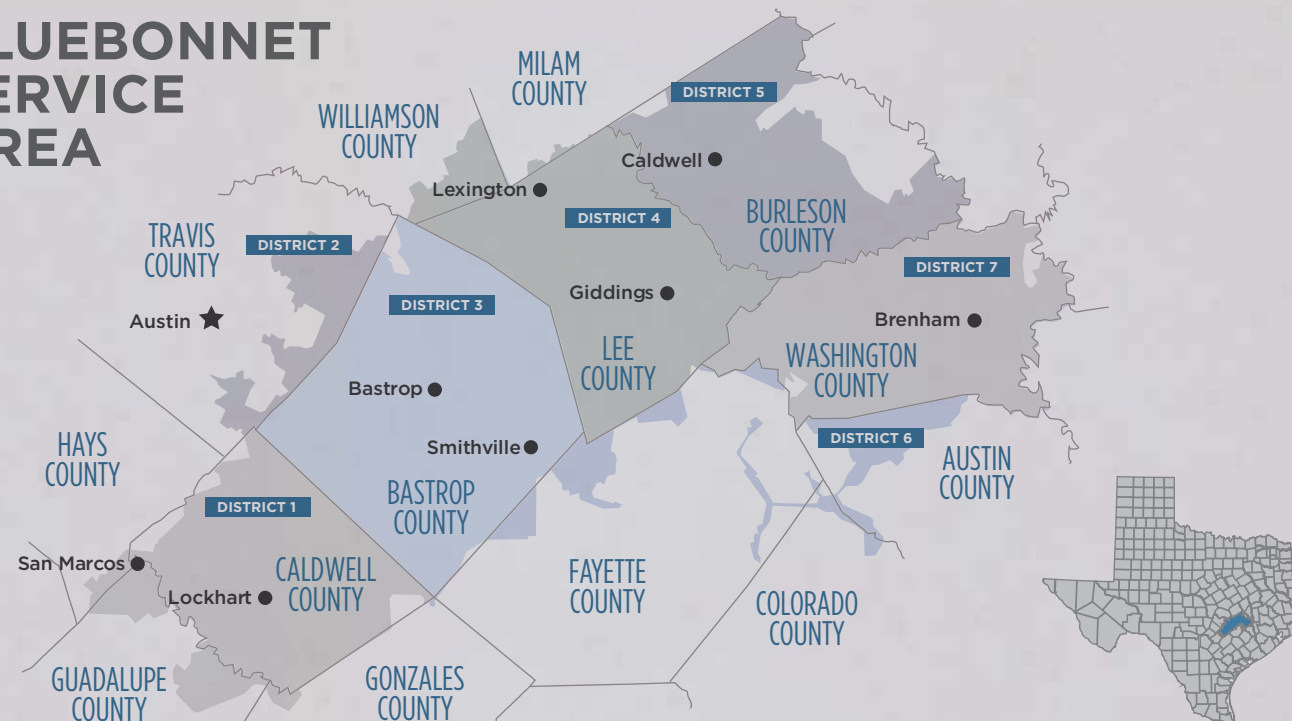
How many Board of Director seats are up for election?

Four of the 11 seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors are up for election this year. Three of the candidates — Milton Shaw, District 1, representing Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties; Ben Flencher, District 5, representing Burleson County; and Ken Mutscher, District 7, representing Washington County — were unopposed and are elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's by-laws. There are four candidates for the District 3 seat, representing Bastrop County: incumbent Debbi Goertz and contenders Juanita Valarie Neidig, Ron Spencer and Matthew Weilert.



Open this dust cover to read more about board candidates and the Annual Meeting

BLUEBONNET SERVICE AREA



What are my voting options?

There are four candidates for the co-op's District 3 Board seat. There are currently no additional ballot items to be voted on this year. However, items can be added to the Annual Meeting agenda that would require a vote by members. Those items would have to be added no later than 10 days before the Annual Meeting. Your proxy could be used in that vote, which is why your proxy selection is important.

What is proxy voting, and how does it work?

Proxy voting allows members who cannot attend the Annual Meeting to designate another person to vote in his or her place. On the proxy, members can assign their vote to either Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee or to an individual. Proxies are counted together with those registered at the Annual Meeting to ensure at least 1 percent of Bluebonnet's membership is present in person or represented by proxy to constitute a quorum.

Who serves on Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee?

The Proxy Committee is composed of all Bluebonnet Board members whose terms are not currently up for election. This year's Proxy Committee members are Roderick Emanuel, Byron Balke, Shana Whiteley, Bryan Bracewell,

Russell Jurk and Robert Mikeska.

How do I vote by proxy?

Complete the proxy form and return it by mail or drop it off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor. If you misplace the proxy form, stop by a member service center to pick one up or call 800-842-7708 and ask a representative to mail one to you. Proxies must either be hand-delivered to a member service center by 5:30 p.m. May 7, 2019, or mailed to:

**Bluebonnet Elections Processing
c/o Election Services Co.
P.O. Box 9020
Ronkonkoma, NY 11779-9822**

Mailed proxies must be postmarked by May 7, 2019.

Can this proxy be used again at future Annual Meetings?

No, the proxy is valid only for the meeting specified on the proxy form.

Can I vote at the Annual Meeting if I sent in a proxy form?

When you register at the meeting, you may revoke your proxy and then vote in person.

What information do I need to bring with me to register at the Annual Meeting?

You will be asked to verbally recite two pieces of information that are on

your account. This account verification process is identical to the one performed any time members would like to transact business on their accounts. You can simply tell the member service representative at the registration desk any two of the following pieces of information about your account: the name(s) listed on the account, your Bluebonnet account number, your birthday, last four digits of your Social Security number, your driver's license number or your mailing address.

Who administers the election?

Election Services Co., which is a third-party, independent vendor that specializes in administering corporate elections nationwide. It has the skills, experience and equipment to efficiently and accurately tally proxies and votes while adhering to the Federal Trade Commission's Red Flag requirements that protect members' confidential account information.

Can I change my address or do other business at the Annual Meeting?

Bluebonnet's member service representatives at the information booth will be able to help members with most of their co-op business and answer any questions they would normally handle at any member service center or through the call center.



JOIN US!

for the
Bluebonnet

ANNUAL MEETING

The Silos on 77
(formerly Sons of Hermann Hall)
1031 CR 223, Giddings, TX

**REGISTRATION 1:30-2:30 P.M.
MEETING STARTS AT 2:30 P.M.**

May 14, 2019

2019 NOMINEES FOR BLUEBONNET'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ben Flencher District 5 (Incumbent)



Flencher, chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric co-op's Board since 1987. He is an ex-officio member of Bluebonnet's Board committees — Audit & Finance, Employee Services, Energy Services, Legal & Governance, Member Experience and Technology. He grew up in a banking family in Somerville and began his lifelong banking career by rolling coins and filing checks as a young boy at the bank where his father worked. He was officially hired when he was in eighth grade and continued to work at the bank while in college. Today, he is president of that same bank — Citizens State Bank, Somerville — a position he's held since 1981. Under his leadership, the bank has grown to six locations. Flencher graduated from Texas A&M University in 1974 with a degree in finance. He is a lifelong member of the First Lutheran Church in Somerville. He and his wife Betsy, have four sons: Aaron and Cory, who work in the banking industry; Ryan, who works in commercial real estate; and Josh, who owns a dirt contracting company. The Flenchers have five grandchildren, and another one due in mid-April.

Debbi Goertz District 3 (Incumbent)



Goertz has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2017. She has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certifications through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. She chairs Bluebonnet's Technology Committee and is a member of the Energy Services and Legal & Governance committees. Goertz has been an attorney in Bastrop since 2004, representing clients in civil matters including trusts and estates law, and some Medicaid issues. She was born in Kilgore and grew up there and in Bryan. After graduating from Bryan High School, she received a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in merchandising from Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She worked at Bloomingdale's in Dallas as a department manager before opting for a career change. Goertz attended Baylor Law School in Waco and earned her law degree in 1993. After graduation, she moved to Bastrop and has been a Bluebonnet member since 1998. Goertz worked briefly in a Bastrop law firm before beginning a career with the Texas Department of Public Safety, first as a hearing examiner, then as Texas' administrator for school bus safety. She has worked with numerous Bastrop and Smithville nonprofit groups, including Samella Williams Angels Unaware Ministry, Children's Advocacy Center, Bastrop County Historical Society and Family Crisis Center, and was a Girl Scout leader for 10 years. Her daughter, Abby, is a student at the University of Texas at Austin.

Juanita Valarie Neidig District 3



Neidig is an accomplished business owner with more than 30 years of experience in the electric supply industry. In 2002, she started LTH Enterprises Ltd. and is the managing partner. The company provides electrical, plumbing and custodial materials for new and remodeled construction projects, as well as maintenance and operations supplies to clients that include schools and universities as well as city, county and federal governments. She was born and raised in east Austin, graduated from Johnston High School, and immediately went to work at an electrical distribution company. She held positions in several electric supply companies, gaining 14 years of experience and knowledge that led to the start of her successful business. She serves on the Elgin ISD Board of Trustees and the Elgin Education Foundation. She is active at Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Elgin High School's scholarship committee, athletic booster club, and baseball & softball fundraising committees. Neidig is a proponent of Blue Santa, Coats for Kids in Austin and the Ronald McDonald House charities. In her spare time, she is an avid runner, qualifying for the Boston Marathon, completing five marathons and more than 50 half marathons and triathlons. She and her husband of 22 years, Harlan, have two children: Jacob, who will attend Stanford University in the fall, and Emma, who is active in Elgin High softball and volleyball. They live on their working cattle ranch that straddles Travis and Bastrop counties.

Milton Shaw District 1 (Incumbent)



Shaw has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2010. He has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certifications and Director Gold credential through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Shaw is chairman of Bluebonnet's Legal & Governance Committee and is a member of the Employee Services and Member Experience committees. He grew up in Luling and traveled America during a 30-year career with Shell Oil Co. He and his family moved to six states while he managed marketing of Shell's real estate assets and oversaw multimillion-dollar budgets. Shaw has decades of experience in community relations and customer service. After graduating from what is now Texas State University in San Marcos in 1962, Shaw managed a store for Western Auto and later was a manager in the Sears department store chain's management development program. He retired from Shell in 1998 and returned to Luling with his wife and high school sweetheart, Judy. They run a few head of cattle on 46 acres in Caldwell County. Shaw is active in his community, including service over the years in the Luling Chamber of Commerce, Community Action, Inc., Kiwanis Club, Caldwell County Development Board, Polonia Water Supply Corp. and McNeil Baptist Church. He and Judy have three sons: Milton Jr., a worldwide customer service manager for Shell; Mark, executive vice president — chief legal and regulatory officer for Southwest Airlines; and Michael, partner in the Jackson Walker law firm in Houston. The Shaws have seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Kenneth Mutscher District 7 (Incumbent)



Mutscher, vice chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric co-op's Board since 1998. He has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certifications and Director Gold credential through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He chairs Bluebonnet's Employee Services Committee and is a member of the Technology Committee. He also serves as an ex-officio member of the Audit & Finance, Energy Services, Legal & Governance and Member Experience committees. Mutscher was an investigator for the state's Board of Pharmacy, a National Guard officer and owned a financial services business in Brenham. He is retired and lives in Brenham. He was an all-around athlete at Brenham High School, lettering in football, baseball, basketball and track. He attended Blinn College on a baseball scholarship and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1965 with a business administration degree. He has worked with several community organizations, including the Brenham Lions Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Coastal Conservation Association, Washington County Little League and the Bluebonnet Beef Breeders Association of Washington County. He is a director of the Blinn College Foundation Board and has held numerous offices as a member of Grace Lutheran Church. Mutscher enjoys golf, fishing, hunting, traveling and raising Brangus cattle. He and his wife, Sarita, have a son, Kevin, who is an attorney in Brenham, and one grandson.

Ron Spencer District 3



Spencer grew up in Houston, where he graduated from high school in 1974 and then attended technical school to become a certified welder. He moved up the ladder during six years in the oil rig industry. In 1980 he joined his family's business, International Management Services Inc., a Houston-based consulting firm specializing in helping companies work in America's free-trade zones. During his 10 years with IMS, Spencer worked at a subsidiary, overseeing procurement and logistics of medical supplies and pharmaceutical materials. In 1990, he moved to Austin and began working at Dell, where he worked in the procurement department and was responsible for all mass storage products. At Dell, Spencer developed the framework for a new supply chain design and inventory management system. He became global senior manager, overseeing the procurement of the company's mechanical devices and power supplies. In 2000, he left Dell to set up his own consulting practice, working with global suppliers of electronic components. After living in Florida for three years, he returned to his Texas roots, moving to Bastrop in 2011. He is semi-retired, but is an active investor in real estate and restaurants. He has also been an avid pilot for 15 years. Spencer is on the board of directors for the Bastrop Economic Development Corp. and on the advisory board for the Smithville Airport. His son, Justin, is a University of Texas at Austin graduate working in the Austin restaurant industry. Spencer has two grandchildren.

Matthew Weilert District 3



Weilert has more than 30 years' experience in corporate safety and risk reduction. He is a decorated Navy veteran who grew up in Bastrop. His father was CFO of Austin Meter, a maker of boiler turbine generator control systems. Weilert graduated from Bastrop High School and earned a degree in safety engineering from Texas A&M University in College Station in 1985 on a Navy scholarship. In 1996, he founded Systems Thinking Institute, which brings field-tested process improvement concepts to international businesses. Companies that have used those concepts include Battelle, GM, United Defense, Kratos Defense and Panera Bread. The concepts have been taught in the U.S., Canada and Malta. The institute uses structured questions within day-to-day business operations to help companies improve their bottom-line results. Weilert moved the institute from New Hampshire to Texas in 2010. He set aside that work for nearly two years to care for his father in hospice until September 2018. Since then, Weilert launched a startup he hopes will "disrupt Amazon" by building a team that will deliver authentic, individual interactions for online shoppers and put a personal face to that process. Weilert, an Eagle Scout, has been active in Boy Scouts in Austin, Bastrop and Pensacola, Fla. He has been a member of Ascension Catholic Church in Bastrop since childhood and was part of a team that introduced a men's leadership program to more than a dozen Catholic churches in the Austin diocese. He has a son, 9-year-old Stephen Carl.

Flip to the back and **open this dust cover** to read about **other board candidates**, the election and the Annual Meeting



VOTE AND YOU COULD WIN GREAT PRIZES!

Anyone who votes either by proxy or in person at the Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 14, will be entered in a drawing to win a truck being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. Anyone who votes by proxy will be entered in a drawing for more prizes. Get more information on **Page 27** inside this issue of Texas Co-op Power magazine.

Electric Appliances

A brief history of

From a single light bulb to a know-it-all virtual assistant, the past century has taken us on a roller coaster of innovation

By Ed Crowell

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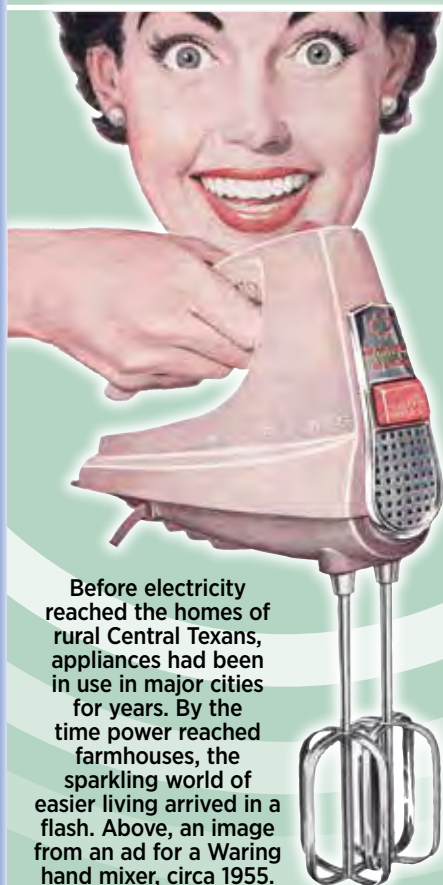
When Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative powered the first light bulbs in rural Central Texas in 1939, the World's Fair in New York was unveiling an all-electric home with a dazzling kitchen, complete with a refrigerator, electric range, dishwasher, coffee maker, garbage disposal, food mixer and an automatic toaster.

To allow buyers in Texas and other states to get a close look at these life-changing devices, the federal Rural Electrification Administration outfitted a traveling show of circus tents filled with innovative home appliances. The caravan of dreams drew crowds by the thousands, and by the early 1940s, appliance sales were skyrocketing.

Wood-burning stoves, clothing washboards and heavy hand irons heated by a fire — all of which required backbreaking labor — were pushed aside for these conveniences of modern living.

Timeline and story continued on page 22

A TIMELINE OF ELECTRIC HOME DEVICES



Before electricity reached the homes of rural Central Texans, appliances had been in use in major cities for years. By the time power reached farmhouses, the sparkling world of easier living arrived in a flash. Above, an image from an ad for a Waring hand mixer, circa 1955.



1882
Summer relief comes with electric fan invention by Schuyler Skaats Wheeler, a New York City engineer.



1889
Singer company introduces first practical electric sewing machine.

1891
Carpenter Electric Manufacturing Co. in Minneapolis-St. Paul introduces electric oven. Its 1893 catalog tells how to bake pies: Place pies 'in the oven, turn on the electricity for thirty minutes, then take the pies out. They will always be done.'



1916
GM buys first self-contained electric refrigerator from Alfred Mellowes, who developed it in a backyard in Fort Wayne, Ind. GM names it Frigidaire and begins mass production; 'fridge' enters the lexicon.



1919
KitchenAid produces first household electric stand-up food mixer.



1908
Hoover vacuum cleaner goes on sale after James Murray Spangler, a night janitor in Canton, Ohio, whose asthma worsens from dust, invents device using fan, tin box, sateen pillowcase and broom handle. He sells patent to Hoover.



1908
Alva J. Fisher invents electric washing machine called the Thor, made by Hurley Machine Co. of Chicago.

1920s
Armstrong Electric Co. unveils Perc-O-Toaster, which makes toast and coffee in one. Its ad touts, "Your complete breakfast prepared in one appliance."



1926
Toastmaster, first electric pop-up toaster, goes on sale. Invented by Charles Strite, who didn't like burned toast served in cafeteria of Minnesota plant where he worked.

1926
C. G. Johnson, founder of Overhead Door Corp. (now based in Lewisville in Dallas-Forth Worth area), invents electric garage door opener in Hartford City, Ind.



1927
Architect John W. Hammes of Racine, Wis., develops first garbage disposal, nicknamed 'electric pig' by manufacturer Emerson Electric Co.

1929
Former U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jacob Schick develops electric shaver after having trouble shaving in below-zero weather while mining in Alaska.



1937
First Waring Blender debuts as Miracle Mixer at National Restaurant Show in Chicago, demonstrated by Fred Waring himself.

1938
Ross Moore, who hated hanging wet laundry as boy in North Dakota, invents clothes dryer but can't find company to build it until Hamilton Manufacturing in Two Rivers, Wis., embraces idea and begins selling first 'June Day' dryer in 1938.



1940
CBS researchers invented first mechanical color TV system in 1940, based on 1928 designs. Federal Communications Commission approved unrefined system in 1950, but first color TV sets did not hit market until early 1950s.



1946
Raytheon Corp. engineer Percy LeBaron Spencer discovered microwave cooking by accident when he got close to magnetron in lab that melted candy bar in his pocket. He experimented by cooking popcorn near magnetron, then built crude metal box for magnetron — the initial microwave oven — to heat his lunches. Practical microwaves for home use appeared in 1960s.



Continued from page 21

The consumer race for electric appliances gained momentum as World War II ended in 1945. The post-war housing boom increased consumer demand for kitchen appliances as well as electric radios and then TVs.

By the 1950s, color televisions were available, though most popular TV shows aired in black-and-white until the late 1950s or early 1960s. General Electric made its household appliances pop by adding color such as Petal Pink and Canary Yellow (a design trend that may have influenced the future Apple CEO Steve Jobs in the late 1990s when he unveiled colorful “flavors” of the iMac personal desktop computer: blueberry, strawberry, lime, tangerine and grape).

At Bluebonnet’s then-headquarters in Giddings, electric appliances could be viewed and touched, just like in a retail showroom. Bluebonnet held appliance demonstrations in small towns and communities across its service area.

The 1960s and 1970s brought the ability to save substantial time on cooking. Microwaves, Crock-Pots and Mr. Coffee — the first automatic drip machine — were unveiled and embraced by consumers. Cuisinart food processors and hot-air popcorn poppers also made kitchen time less onerous.

Again, Bluebonnet took center stage to

help consumers understand how all those new appliances could change lives. Bluebonnet hired Lavonne Morrow to demonstrate microwave cooking, and some events drew more than 100 eager learners. She shared recipes for microwave casseroles, three-minute fudge and even a tiny birthday cake baked in an ice cream cone. To consumers’ amazement, she showed how an entire meal for six people could be prepared and cooked in a microwave in just 30 to 45 minutes.

Clearly, electric appliances were changing American culture. The convenience of a microwave, washing machine or vacuum cleaner freed more time for work outside the home. Growing numbers of American women joined the workforce for a paycheck.

America turned its attention to the environment in the 1970s, as oil and gas supply crises brought long lines at the gas pumps and prompted President Jimmy Carter to ask Americans to save energy by turning thermostats to 65 or lower in the winter.

It’s no surprise that the 1980s and 1990s saw advances in energy efficiency in home appliances and a big turn toward automation. In 1992, the Environmental Protection Agency introduced the Energy Star program to promote the purchase of energy-efficient appliances.

Today’s digital age is bringing increas-

ingly “smart” electronics into the home that merge internet connectivity with phones, computers, artificial intelligence devices and appliances. Alexa, the voice-activated virtual assistant in the Amazon Echo device, was unveiled in 2016, and 100 million had been sold by the end of 2018, according to the company. A seemingly endless stream of other new devices can connect with the Echo or its top competitor, Google Home. Virtual assistants can turn on and off smart appliances and timers, stream music and read books to you, and each adds new skills regularly. A glut of smart security cameras that allow you to view the outside or inside of your home on your phone are popping up everywhere.

In the living room, consumers are making way for big-screen televisions with curved displays, screens that roll up and down and technology that illuminates every pixel in the screen. That means viewers can sit at any angle to the screen without a distorted image.

Some of today’s refrigerators have cameras inside to show whether you need to buy milk or eggs when you check from a smartphone while at the grocery store. Samsung’s \$4,100 fridge also has a computer screen on the outside door for searching recipes, displaying family photos and keeping lists and calendars. GE’s new Kitchen Hub is a smart screen on a stove ventilation hood. It

controls the thermostat and lights, security cameras, and other smart appliances. Users can stream movies and music and have video chats.

Or, there is always the option to just ignore all of these chatty, mind-boggling innovations.

Today’s refrigerators are a long way from the Giddings High School “home ec” classes that Shirley Hannes began teaching in 1961. She commanded four kitchen nooks filled with stoves, refrigerators, washers and dryers, all loaned by Bluebonnet. Hannes made certain her students knew how to use the latest in home appliances, some of which must have glowed in mid-century hues of Harvest Gold and Avocado.

Hannes, who now lives south of Houston in Pearland, doesn’t want a virtual assistant like Alexa, but she loves the two-door refrigerator she bought in 2018 because it makes and dispenses ice.

She’s not one to replace appliances just to have the newest model. “We built our house in 1976, and the stove was new then,” she said. “It’s still in good shape, so I’m not planning to replace it yet.” ■



Women gather at an appliance showcase in the Bluebonnet region in the mid-1940s. Appliance shows like this, put on by the federal Rural Electrification Administration, drew large crowds across the country. Join us at our Annual Meeting on May 14 in Giddings to see a lineup of vintage appliances, our large appliance timeline and other nods to our 80th anniversary. The event is open to all Bluebonnet members.

Continued from page 21

1950

Zenith develops first TV remote control, the ‘Lazy Bones,’ connected to TV by cable. Some customers complained of tripping over cable on living room floor. Similar corded remote controls came out shortly thereafter, including Emerson Model 1158, left.



1955

Kitchen appliances pop with color as General Electric introduces first rainbow hues: ‘Petal Pink, Canary Yellow, Cadet Blue, Turquoise Green and Woodtone Brown.’ Mid-century Coppertone, Avocado and Harvest Gold arrived in 1960s.



1960

Japanese inventor Kazuo Hashimoto begins U.S. sales of ‘Ansafone,’ first commercially successful telephone answering machine.



1967

Amana unveils first countertop microwave, the Radarange, left, with \$495 price tag. Product demonstrators cook Lazy Maple bacon to entice buyers. ‘Never ever lie or exaggerate about this machine,’ team leader says. ‘You don’t have to. It’s a marvel.’



1968

Claire’s True-to-Light Makeup Mirror allows women to put their glam on with lights simulating day, office or evening.



1970

Conair introduces popular pistol-grip hair dryer.



1972

Invention of Mr. Coffee, first in-home percolator with automatic drip process, turns homes into personal coffee shops.



1973

Home chefs slice, dice and purée food like professional prep cooks as Cuisinart unveils electric food processor.



1978

Fresh popcorn spills into home kitchens when Presto and Wear-Ever introduce hot-air poppers.



1987

Bread Maker machine by Panasonic turns U.S. kitchens into corner bakery.



2010

Japanese company Joybond offers portable mini-fridge for watermelons or other fruits. Device can be switched to heat setting, too.



1992

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency introduces Energy Star program to identify and promote energy-efficient appliances.



2001

Swedish company Electrolux introduces disc-shaped Trilobite, first robotic vacuum cleaner that uses sensors to find its way around room.



2016

Amazon offers Echo speaker, voice-activated virtual assistant named Alexa — an instant consumer hit. Alexa recites weather, traffic and news reports; turns on and off smart appliances and timers; tells jokes; plays music; reads books; and schedules rides. Other brands of virtual assistants soon follow.



2015

Five Elements Robotics unveils Budgee, \$1,400 robotic personal assistant that can follow person and carry 50-pound load.



2019

GE introduces Kitchen Hub, smart screen and virtual assistant on stove ventilation hood that controls thermostat and lights, security cameras, and other appliances. Users can stream movies and music and engage in video chats.



2019

Electronics giant LG unveils TV with flexible 65-inch screen that rolls up for viewing and rolls out of sight when not in use.

Text by Denise Gamino • Design by Joe Stafford

Texas barbecue legend remembered as 'fierce advocate' for co-op members

By Melissa Segrest

Richard "Rick" Schmidt, a Texas barbecue legend and larger-than-life member of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board of Directors for more than two decades, died at age 73 on Feb. 11, 2019. He was board chairman from 2002 to 2014 and oversaw significant modernization of the cooperative.

During that time, Bluebonnet upgraded every aspect of its business from facilities to technology, adding advanced tools in the field; building a new headquarters, substations and member service centers; upgrading the co-op's system for mapping and monitoring power outages, including a state-of-the-art control center; and more.

In 2018, Schmidt was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 43 years, Evelyn Schmidt.

"Rick had an enormous influence on Bluebonnet and its members during his 25 years on the Board of Directors," said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet's Board chairman. "He brought a keen eye for business and a strong sense of fairness, right and wrong. He was never afraid to look you in the eye and speak his mind with total honesty. He was a true leader whose presence will be missed and can never be completely replaced."

From 1984 to 2010, Schmidt was owner of the storied Kreuz Market, a 119-year-old restaurant in Lockhart, long considered by many to be the home of some of Texas' finest barbecue. He retired after he sold the business to his son, Keith Schmidt.

Consistency and customer service were Rick Schmidt's bedrock beliefs as a businessman, community leader and member of the Bluebonnet Board. "He was slow to change, but he was all about making things more efficient and making things easier, especially for a customer," his son said. "We've had generations of families come in (to Kreuz Market) and say this is just as good as it was 20 years ago. You have to keep the soul and the spirit of the place alive, no matter what you may add or take away from it."

Rick Schmidt brought that same passion



A younger Rick Schmidt, showing off the famous barbecue at Kreuz Market on the cover of a magazine in 1994. *Texas Highways* magazine photo

to his work as a Bluebonnet Board member.

"Rick was a fierce advocate for our members and strong supporter of our employees," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager. "One of Rick's greatest attributes was that you always knew what he was thinking and where you stood with him. We will remember his honesty, loyalty, integrity and unwavering work ethic. We faced some critical challenges during the last decade. Rick was unafraid to make the toughest decisions, which was integral to his and Bluebonnet's success during his tenure as board chairman."

Schmidt was born on Dec. 6, 1945. A Lockhart native, he graduated from Lockhart High School and, in 1968, earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Texas Christian University, where he was a baseball scholarship recipient.

For a time, he worked as a salesman for large food distribution companies but took the reins at Kreuz Market in 1984 when his father, Edgar "Smitty" Schmidt, who had bought the business in 1948, sold it to Rick and his brother, Don.

Rick Schmidt was on the Lockhart Chamber of Commerce and was its president twice. "He always worked for the betterment

of Lockhart and its citizens," Keith Schmidt said. His stubbornness and straight talk were well-known. "He wouldn't hold back if something needed to be said, especially if he felt it was his duty. He would say it," his son said. Rick Schmidt's friends said his gruff exterior disguised a heart of gold.

Schmidt was proud of his role as a leader at Bluebonnet. "He felt that most of the members of the co-op were people like him, so the decisions he would make would be the decisions his constituents would also make," his son said. "It wasn't what was best for the (cooperative). It wasn't what was best for the Board. It was what was best for the co-op member. That's how he conducted himself at Bluebonnet, at Kreuz Market and anything else he did."

Rick and Evelyn Schmidt were active members of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Maxwell, a small community near Lockhart. They supported the Maxwell Social Club, and after his retirement from barbecue eight years ago, they enjoyed traveling in their RV. He loved to hunt and fish as well. They were especially fond of old-style country music and Western swing dancing. In 2018, Rick Schmidt was key to bringing the Western Swing and BBQ Festival to Lockhart.

Standing at Kreuz Market near his father's favorite round table, with Rick's name emblazoned on it, Keith Schmidt said, "It always had a 'reserved' sign on it, and it's gonna stay that way." The table was adorned with flowers and photos in memory of his father.

Rick Schmidt was buried on Valentine's Day. He and Evelyn "were forever Valentines," their son said. "He had a really hard time after she passed. I have no doubt if she were still alive they'd both be here. I guess the best way you could say it was that he lost his joy. So many people have said it, and I believe it: He died of a broken heart."

After his father's death, Keith Schmidt posted a tribute on his Facebook page: "So long, Dad, we'll keep the table reserved for you and Evelyn to watch music on Sunday. I'll miss you more than anyone knows, but also know more than anyone how happy you were to see Evelyn's face in the light."

Rick Schmidt is survived by sons Keith and Leeman Schmidt, brother Don Schmidt and sister Nina Sells, a granddaughter, a great-granddaughter, and numerous other family members and friends. ■



Rick Schmidt was on the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative board of directors for 25 years, and was board chairman for 12 years. He was a passionate advocate for co-op members. Schmidt, left, with some of his hunting dogs in a 2006 photo, and above, dancing with wife Evelyn Schmidt at the Bluebonnet Annual Meeting in 2017. She died less than a year before he did. (Melissa Segrest photo)

Sarah Beal photo

First-hand glimpse into government

Two high school students selected for tour of D.C., \$1,000 scholarship

By Lisa Ogle

The two young women selected to represent Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative during the 2019 Government-in-Action Youth Tour have fine arts in common, and both most want to see veteran memorials in Washington, D.C., this summer.

Hailey Sherrill, a senior at Smithville High School, and Carolina Barboza, a junior at Manor New Tech High School, were selected for the honor in February. Jacob Neidig, a senior at Elgin High School, is the alternate to join the tour if Sherrill or Barboza is unable to attend.

The two participants will tour the Texas Capitol and the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin and visit historical sites in our nation's capital from June 12-21. They also each receive a \$1,000 scholarship after graduating from high school.

The two recipients and alternate were among 10 finalists who were interviewed at Bluebonnet's Headquarters on Feb. 11. Recipients were selected based on the interviews and essays in the application about their congressional representatives, public service, what they would like to see in Washington and what makes them special as a Texan.

Sherrill, 18, of Smithville is a varsity cheer-leading co-captain and head captain of the color guard. She plays French horn and made 4A Texas All-State Band all four years. She hopes to attend Louisiana State University in the fall, majoring in education. After college, she would like to return home and teach music.

"Smithville teachers have molded and shaped me into the individual I am today, no matter the extra hours away from their families," she said in her application. "I am truly grateful for their impact on me today and hope to reciprocate the favor as an educator in the future."

In Washington, Sherrill looks forward to visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

"Not only is it a sincere reminder of the



Carolina Barboza, far left, a junior at Manor New Tech High School, and Hailey Sherrill, a senior at Smithville High School, were chosen to represent Bluebonnet at the 2019 Government-in-Action Youth Tour, which includes a trip to Washington, D.C., and a \$1,000 scholarship. Jacob Neidig, a senior at Elgin High School, center, is the alternate.

Sarah Beal photo

great sacrifice made for our country, but it brings even more personal meaning to me as the granddaughter of a Vietnam War veteran," she said in her application. "I value the time given to me with my grandfather and am reminded every day that we are so blessed to be given life in a country free of retribution and fear of suppression."

Barboza, 16, of Austin serves as president of her school's Key Club, a student-led service program; takes an after-school class on computer coding; and is a member of Interact, a volunteering organization, through which she plans to go abroad for an academic year.

She plans to become a chemical engineer "because of the freedom it gives me," she said. "I love the creativity and creation aspect of engineering and that engineers improve on what already exists to further humanity. I want to be a part of the achievements they pursue."

Barboza said in her application that after researching our nation's capital, she is most looking forward to seeing the Korean War Veterans Memorial.

"The Korean War is not something thoroughly taught in public schools curriculum, and I think that is what makes it significant," she said. "History is about not forgetting the past and the events that unfolded to lead to

these catastrophic events that shaped our futures."

Neidig, who turns 19 this month, lives in Elgin and has played football, baseball and several other sports, and is president of his school's National Honor Society and Key Club. He serves as a volunteer trainer at the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Central Texas in Austin and teaches first communion classes and serves a lector at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Elgin. He plans to study economics or political science at Stanford University in California.

Sherrill and Barboza will join 156 other young people representing other Texas electric co-ops and 1,888 teens from around the country in the nation's capital, where they will see lawmakers in action; tour monuments, museums and other historical sites; and attend events hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, an organization that represents more than 900 electric cooperatives.

The youth program began in 1964 and has more than 50,000 alumni, including CEOs and U.S. senators. For more information, visit bluebonnet.coop. Click on Community, then Scholarships. Look for 2020 Government-in-Action applications this fall. ■

April is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Bluebonnet is helping area organizations such as the Children's Advocacy Center and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Bastrop, Lee and Fayette Counties raise awareness during Child Abuse Prevention Month.

The cooperative's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart and Manor will be illuminated with blue light at night, our service vehicles will display blue ribbons in support of this cause, and key community events and resources will be promoted on our social media channels throughout April.

Learn more about this topic at childwelfare.org.

Vote and have a chance to win great prizes!

Voting for candidates for Bluebonnet's board of directors is one of the advantages of being a member of an electric cooperative. At the Bluebonnet Annual Meeting on May 14, members will hear a "state of the co-op" report, learn about milestones Bluebonnet has reached and plans for the co-op's future.

If you cannot attend the Annual Meeting, you can vote by proxy and still have a chance to win prizes. Any Bluebonnet member who votes by proxy or in person at Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting will be entered in a drawing to win a 2010 Ford F-150 4x4 SuperCab XLT half-ton pickup

that is being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet. It has a 6½-foot cargo bed and about 158,000 miles, and is valued at \$4,180.

Any member who submits a completed proxy form by mail postmarked no later than May 7 or in person at a member service center by 5:30 p.m. May 7 will be entered in a drawing for a Yeti Tundra 65 cooler, or one of five \$100 Bluebonnet bill credits. Members do not need to be present at the Annual Meeting to be entered in the drawings.*

*Bluebonnet employees, members of the Board of Directors and their spouses are ineligible to win.

Power out?

HELP IS JUST A TEXT AWAY.

Save time and help us quickly restore power using Outage Alerts texts.

Text **BBOUTAGE** to **85700** to sign up!

Then, save that number in your phone, perhaps as Bluebonnet Outages.

From there you can:

- ▶ Text **OUT** to that number when your power is out.
- ▶ Text **STATUS** for an update.
- ▶ Text **HELP** for more information.
- ▶ Text **STOP** to opt out of Outage Alerts.

Message and data rates may apply.



1234 Smith Street: We are aware of outages in your area. Estimated restore time: Thursday, April 28, 4 PM

Racing in the aluminum class, The Rastasafarians (Will Wolfe, left, and Callan Price) make their way past Stairtown, 17 miles southeast of San Marcos, during the 2018 race.



Team Boogie Again (Veronica Sosa, in front, and John Bugge) approaches the Staples dam, about 10 miles southeast of San Marcos.



As one of world's toughest canoe races, Texas Water Safari starts in San Marcos and annually attracts hundreds of paddlers in a grueling, daring dash to the Gulf Coast

Spring Lake in San Marcos, above, is filled with boats before the 2018 race begins. At right, the Miller Creek Racing Team jumps into the water after successfully passing its boat down the spillway of the Zedler Mill dam in Luling.

HARD CORE CANOEING

By Ed Crowell

Photos by Jay Godwin

The small Caldwell County river town of Martindale gears up every spring for what's billed as "The World's Toughest Canoe Race." Boats can be seen on sawhorses in yards and garages, strapped onto trucks and trailers, and going down the San Marcos River on practice runs.

The race is why Jay and Kristin Daniel moved their family from Katy to Martindale in 2017. They wanted to be closer to the action they love. Both are veterans



Kristin and Jay Daniel, seen in 2018, moved to their home in Martindale the year before to be closer to the Texas Water Safari, a 260-mile paddling race from San Marcos to the Gulf of Mexico. Jay has raced 24 times, including with the overall winning team in 2017.

of the Texas Water Safari, a grueling 260-mile paddle odyssey from San Marcos to the Gulf of Mexico. About the first 60 miles of the race run through the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area.

The Daniels, members of Bluebonnet, launch their boats for practice runs on the San Marcos River just behind their

house. As they prepared for the safari last year, the front entrance of their house all but screamed, "Racers at work!"

Two skinny, six-seat boats stretched across sawhorses near the carport. One was Jay's winning boat from 2017. The other was the boat he would use in the 2018 race with a different set of team-

mates. Hydration supplies, water pumps, tools, lights and other gear laid in wait nearby.

Kristin, who competed in the 2010 safari with Jay in a tandem boat, would serve as one of two team captains. The captains for each boat scurry by road to checkpoints along the race route on the San Marcos and Guadalupe rivers to toss racers supplies of water, ice and food.

Inside the Daniels' house, the dining room table held a 3-foot-tall silver Texas Water Safari trophy cup engraved with the names of the overall winning team members for each year the race has been run. Jay was taking his turn with the trophy that rotated among members of the 2017 team. The trophy's base has been expanded over the years to hold all the winning

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A crowd of race fans gathered in Martindale to see boats navigate rapids, going over or under a low-water bridge — depending on river levels — and passing near several roads.

Continued from previous page

names since the safari began in 1963. The motivation for racers is purely for the thrill of the chase, because the safari has no cash prizes.

This year's race, the 56th Texas Water Safari, is scheduled for June 8. The paddling-only marathon begins in San Marcos at the Meadows Center on Spring Lake, near the headwaters of the San Marcos River. Martindale, 7 miles downstream, is a popular viewing area with the racers turning through rapids, going over or under a low-water bridge — depending on river levels — and passing near several roads.

Jay was still uncertain at the beginning of April whether he would be racing in his 25th safari this year. He has finished 18 of them, a typical ratio for an exhausting race that claims many “DNFs” (did not finish). Of the 134 teams that started in the 2018 race, 51 were unable to make the Gulf Coast finish line at the fishing village of Seadrift on San Antonio Bay by the official cutoff time of 100 hours — four days and four hours.

Physical exhaustion from day-and-night paddling takes the biggest toll, compounded by laborious and slippery portages around dams and logjams. Spiders and mosquitoes are major annoyances, as is avoiding alligators near the coast.

Jay became a DNF in 2011. While he and a partner were carrying their two-person boat around the Gonzales dam, Jay fell on the concrete slab beside the dam. “I woke up with a concussion, or so they told me,” Jay said. “It makes me hurt just thinking about the sternum rub they did

2019 Texas Water Safari

WHO: 134 boats in 2018; likely similar in 2019

WHEN: Begins at 9 a.m. Saturday, June 8; entrants must check in with their boats by 8 a.m.

WHERE: Starts at Spring Lake, 201 San Marcos Springs Drive, San Marcos

ENDS: First finishers in the 260-mile race will arrive Sunday night at Seadrift on San Antonio Bay; racers have 100 hours to be considered finishers

REGISTRATION: Online only at texaswatersafari.org. Early registration fee \$200/person by May 5 or \$250 by May 24. Entrants must be 18 years old for solo racing or 13 if in boat with adult. Boats can only be people-powered.

FOR SPECTATORS: Spectators can watch from shore prior to start. Access is limited at start but plentiful along the San Marcos River to Interstate 35. Other locations for viewing include Martindale, Staples, Fentress and Luling on the San Marcos River. Also Gonzales, Cuero and Victoria on the Guadalupe River.

INFORMATION: texaswatersafari.org

on me with their knuckles to make sure I didn't lose consciousness again.”

Despite the arduous nature of the competition, there has been only one fatality in the race's history. In 2012, a solo racer who was not a veteran paddler failed to take in adequate electrolytes and collapsed south of Gonzales. He was airlifted to a hospital but died the next day.

Other paddling races around the world also feature long distances and challenging, unpredictable water conditions. It is difficult to compare exact degrees of toughness in Texas with races on the Missouri and Yukon rivers and in Australia, Africa, Canada and South America.

Jay's advice to any would-be competitors of the Texas Water Safari: Train a lot and learn the river.

As a veteran, his work is a bit more complex. His role in six-person boats for the 2017 and 2018 races was crucial: “I'm the driver,” he said. “When we need to turn the boat, I'm in control.” From the rear seat,

The members of team ‘Can't Paddle No More,’ Jeff Feguson and Tom Hallberg, make their way through Martindale. Below, Veronica Sosa takes a soak below the Staples dam.

using his paddle and the boat's rudder, he guides the craft through rapids, rocks and logjams on the twisting route.

In last year's race, his team came in fourth overall after 46 hours, 24 minutes, about 10 hours behind the winning boat. He had predicted the 44-foot-long boat he outfitted from a carbon and Kevlar fiber hull would place third or fourth. All the big boats are customized by the racing teams and have no size limits. They are just wide enough for the paddlers to sit atop hard, narrow seats without backs.

Jay, 55, knows the competition well after so many years paddling with various teams and in different sizes of boats. And he knows what to expect from the two Texas rivers, where race-week flows can vary widely from flood-to-drought levels.



The 2018 safari “was the first time in a few years that we had relatively low water flow, so that made a difference,” he said after the race. “It caught some people by surprise. But for us the race was straightforward. There wasn't a lot of drama.”

The course record of 29 hours, 46 minutes, was set in 1997 by a six-person boat in near flood-stage conditions. Jay said organizers today would not hold the race in such high water because of liability concerns.

The last six miles of the race can be the most challenging. That's where the Guadalupe River ends at San Antonio Bay and paddlers must cross the open water at the top of the bay to reach Seadrift. Wind and wave conditions can vary widely. Sometimes, if the bay waters are too rough, the racers get out of their boats to “push-swim” to the finish line at the Seadrift seawall.

“We did have a pretty long swim in the bay at the end, but it wasn't the worst swim there or the best one,” Jay said of the 2018 finish. “We dropped from third to fourth place. It was a little bit choppy, a little cross-ways to the waves and we were a lot tired by then.”

No serious mishaps occurred for his boat full of experienced racers, but Jay said a fish did catch them by surprise at night: “One of our guys had a light hanging from his neck and a gar jumped at him and he got scratched a little.”

There's no sleep time in the highly competitive and speedy six-person boats. “I fight through sleep, but about four in the morning is tough. At sunrise, I wake up mentally,” he said.

Jay grew up in San Antonio, paddled boats as a Boy Scout and has worked around the state as a programs specialist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. His boating expertise was honed when he worked for a canoe livery service in Martindale before his first safari in 1985. “I got hooked being around all these cool toys on the river,” he said.

With the 2018 team, there was a “lot of fun in the boat, cutting up with jokes and silliness,” he said. “It can get pretty sour out there when it's hot and miserable and you're paddling all the time. So if you can keep your spirits up, that is a long way toward success.”

The Miller Creek Racing Team name

The Miller Creek Racing Team checklist

In the 2018 race, team captains Kristin Daniel and Tom Vanderveer made 16 handoffs of drink and food supplies to the six men in the canoe to keep them hydrated and fed for an estimated racing time of 40 to 50 hours:

- Gallons of water: 46
- Pounds of ice: 700
- Jugs filled with water and electrolyte mix: 92
- Spiz bottles (food replacement liquid): 90
- Ice packs to cool necks and shoulders: 56
- Topo Chico and other bottled waters: 42
- Other sodas and drinks: 20
- Individual food packets: watermelon, mixed fruit, avocado, bacon, sandwiches (peanut butter and jelly, and ham and cheese) and candy bars (Snickers and Payday)

painted on their black boat was a bit of humor as well. Numerous small tributaries feed the rivers. When someone kept asking their names, the teammates said they were all called Miller Creek.

The most unusual phenomenon for Jay in 2018 was the strength of a solo racer, Andrew McEwan, an experienced white-water kayaker from Washington, D.C., who came in fifth overall just 45 minutes behind Jay's six-person boat.

“He shot out at the beginning of the race like a cannon. We were dumbfounded in our boat. He had over an hour lead over us in Gonzales. We caught up with him after that, but he was amazing for a guy who had never been down the course before. He had never raced that far before, he told me later.”

Kristin Daniel has been involved in Jay's teams as support crew since they started dating in 1996. In 2010, when they paddled the race together, they finished 32nd overall.

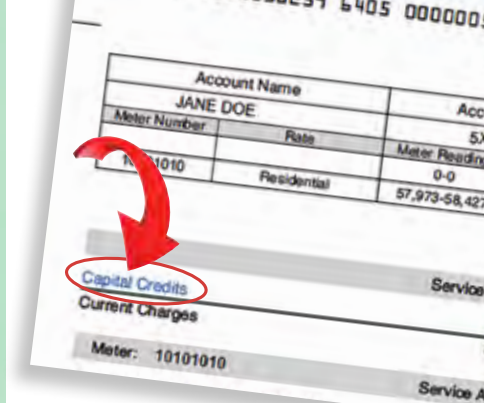
She's glad she raced that one time with her husband but said, “I'm really not a paddler. What comes second nature

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Coming in September: Texas Junior Water Safari

For paddlers at least 13 years old (with an adult racer in the boat) or 18-year-olds as solo paddlers, there is a 16-mile sprint version of the water safari race scheduled for Sept. 21, 2019. The younger competitors begin in San Marcos City Park and end at the FM 1977 bridge in Staples. Entrants can only register at 8 a.m. on the day of the race, at the starting location.



CAPITAL CREDITS

Cha-ching! Excess revenue returned to members

Most Bluebonnet members will see a credit on their bill this month. It's called "capital credits," one of the benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative.

The co-op shares with its members money it collects above what is required to run the business. The amount that members receive depends on how much electricity they used in the previous years and how long they have been Bluebonnet members.

Questions? Contact a member service representative at memberservices@bluebonnet.coop or 800-842-7708.

Continued from previous page

to Jay, making split-second decisions, doesn't apply to me. Instead, I've enjoyed being a team captain and holding seminars to teach others how to do that."

Last year she served as a team captain along with Tom Vandever, the son of a racer in Jay's boat.

"They were waiting for us every time we got to a checkpoint with everything we needed," Jay said. "I can't hardly imagine what it would be like to get there and not have them there."

Checkpoints serve a dual purpose. Volunteer officials wait there to record times and keep track of racers who otherwise are mostly out of sight on the rivers. Team captains drive to the checkpoints with the essentials for racers' hydration and energy. If the boats carried everything for two to four days and nights of paddling, that extra weight would slow down the paddling pace and delay finish times.

Kristin and Tom filled their cars with supplies and mapped out the 11 official checkpoints and a few other spots where they could reach Jay's boat during last year's race. In some places they had to scramble down steep riverbanks or trudge through heavily wooded areas to wade into the current.

Standing waist deep in the San Marcos River below the Zedler Mill dam in Luling, Kristin and Tom waited for a long 10 minutes, clutching water jugs and plastic bags full of food and ice. The current was a tricky swirl as they maintained



The Miller Creek Racing Team passes its long boat down the Staples Dam, upper left. Above, Heather Harrison, left, and Cecili Bugge maneuver their boat under another boat as they launch into Spring Lake at the start of the race. Upper right, the Cowboys, with John DuPont in front, launch their boat into Spring Lake. Right, Carley Morris and Kathy Hurst, reflected in sunglasses, wait for another team to pass under a bridge near Stairtown.

their footing while looking for Jay's team to approach the top of the dam. Kristin was relieved when the crew members came into sight and hopped out on a concrete apron to lower their boat down a rocky spillway.

The paddlers got in again and aimed for the captains. The bags of supplies were heaved into the boat. In a minute or two, the crew was back to racing.

"Because we're handing off six water jugs,

food bags and electrolyte mix bottles for each racer, it takes two captains at each supply point to do it quickly. We have a basic schedule of when they expect to be at each checkpoint, but some of it is random depending on conditions," Kristin said.

Traffic jams from spectators in vehicles on roads along the San Marcos River, particularly near viewing points from Martindale to Luling, can cause problems for the



resupply team. "And there's an occasional accident. I like having a backup with another captain in a different vehicle," Kristin said.

Crowds of viewers turn out to watch the race through San Marcos and at accessible spots downstream to Luling, but below there, the distances and times between boats widen and it's harder to catch a view of many boats before nightfall.

Jay and Kristin's 17-year-old daughter hopes to join the family sport someday. Kassy, a student at San Marcos High School, watched last year's race among spectators at Cottonseed Rapids, the site

of a long-gone cotton mill in Martindale. She cheered as her father and crew plunged through water pouring over and around boulders.

She said it's a race her high school friends know little about. But for her it's a natural, especially since the family moved to Martindale.

Now, living on the river, she can easily put in a boat to test the flow and practice her paddling skills. When her race day arrives, Kassy will find out if she's got what her father said is his key to enduring the race — "a whole long streak of stubborn." ■

Accurate contact information helps us restore power

Whether it's a cell phone or land line, make sure that we have the correct phone number that is tied to your account. When you have a power outage and you call from that phone number, it immediately links us to your address in our system. That helps Bluebonnet to more quickly locate your outage and restore power. There are three ways to update your contact information:

ONLINE: Log in at bluebonnet.coop or on our mobile app, go to the Preferences tab, and make changes in the Contact Info section. Then save those changes.

BY PHONE: Call member services at 800-842-7708 anytime between 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

BY MAIL: Fill out the form that is part of your billing statement, and mail it back along with your payment.

Bluebonnet is celebrating its 80th anniversary in 2019 by visiting some of the cooperative's earliest commercial members. This month we feature one of the many churches that joined the cooperative in 1939. See a complete list with this story at bluebonnet.coop (click Community, then News).



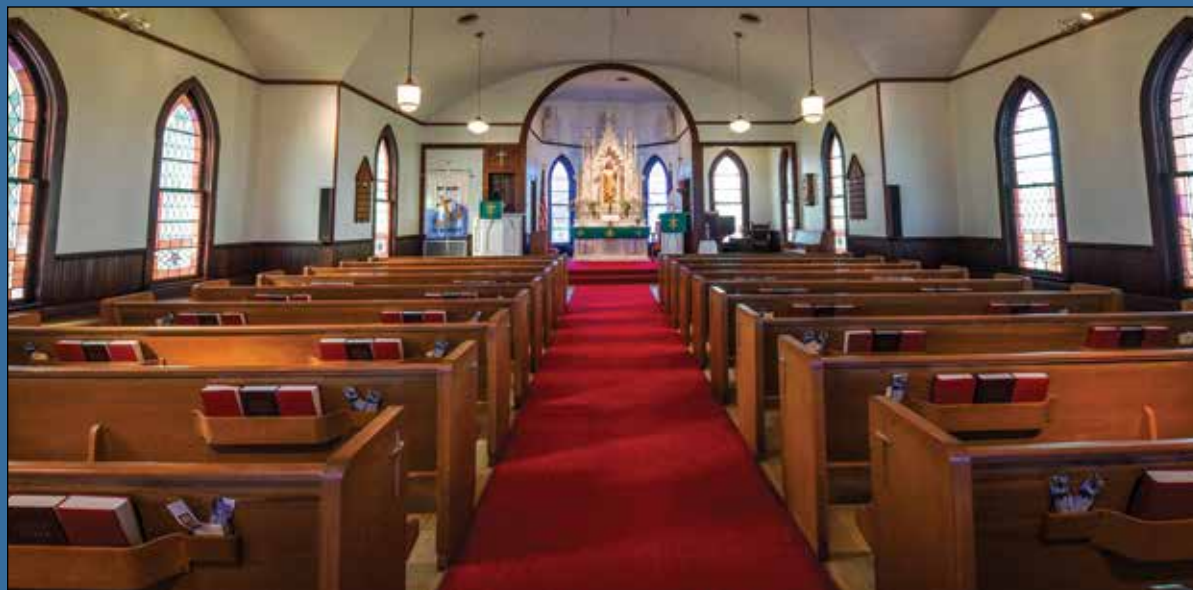
ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH



BLUEBONNET MEMBER SINCE 1939

Historical Texas-German church continues to draw members

St. Matthew Lutheran Church exemplifies a traditional Texas-German Lutheran church, with features such as a carved wooden altar with a statue of Christ and narrow stained glass windows. Sarah Beal photos



By Clayton Stromberger

As you head into gently rolling ranch and farm land northeast of Brenham, just after you turn onto FM 50, you'll notice a sign on the right in a big patch of grass that four Lutheran churches welcome you.

The four distinctive white-steepled churches dot the landscape of this undulating stretch of Washington County countryside. They stand as ongoing places of worship and as historic sites marking the centers of small — and now mostly vanished — rural communities where German immigrants gathered to farm and carve out a rugged new life in the late 1800s: St. John in Prairie Hill, Immanuel in Wiedeville, Bethlehem in what was known as William Penn and, perched in the middle of a triangle made by the other three, St. Matthew on the rise of land known as Sandy Hill.

St. Matthew is one of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's oldest members. Located on

FM 2621 about halfway between Brenham and Independence, the church once had a family grocery store next door and a little schoolhouse across the road.

Now nature has almost overgrown the old store, and the school is long gone, made obsolete in the early 1950s when school buses began taking children to Brenham.

It's a peaceful spot with a view of surrounding hills and ranch land. The old cemetery lies behind the white clapboard sanctuary, and a Bluebonnet substation rises behind the dilapidated store.

Every Sunday, dozens of members file into the sanctuary, which — like the simply designed but handsome exterior — has

many of the elements of traditional Texas-German Lutheran churches. The carved wooden altar, featuring a large statue of Christ, resembles the ornate front of a European cathedral.

"I grew up in an old German Lutheran church in Indiana myself, and it was a bigger church, with a much bigger altar, but it was the same design," Pastor Kris Brower said.

Narrow stained glass windows bathe the arched ceilings in a gentle natural light, while a warm glow comes from an original and ornate gold-colored chandelier with glass globes that hangs over the center aisle. And of course there is an organ — a newer all-electric one since the older half-electric one was fried a few years back when lightning hit the steeple. There is also a marble baptismal font (a piece of furniture that holds water used in baptisms) and a raised wooden pulpit off to one side, perched slightly above the congregation like the prow of an old sailing ship.



with *Pastor Kris Brower*

On a recent cold and windy morning, we dropped in on St. Matthew to visit with Brower during his weekly office hours and get a glimpse back in time. Brower came to the congregation from the Dallas-Fort Worth area in 2012 as a newly ordained pastor after leaving a business career to follow a calling to the ministry.

Tell us about the history of this beautiful building.



The original sanctuary was built in 1891 a little further down the hill, and it was blown down by a big storm in August of 1915. The congregation decided to rebuild, and this one

was dedicated in December of 1915 — so it only took them three months to build it. The only thing they were able to salvage from the wreckage was the bell and the baptismal font, and we still use both of those. The building here is pretty much as it was then. The old church had two of these big oil lamp chandeliers; I don't know where the other one got off to, but we still have one. Now it's electric. So it was pretty poorly lit in those days, and you probably wanted to wear heavy clothes



in the wintertime. They didn't have air conditioning in this building until the '90s, I think, so they used to be able to open these stained-glass windows from the top down or bottom up. We've got them sealed now to keep the wind and bugs out.

You must get a lot of requests from folks who want to get married here.

Our congregation voted a few years ago not to have weddings for non-members. I did have one couple come in that was married here 50 years prior, and they wanted to renew their vows on their 50th anniversary, so that's what we did. They'd grown up here, and they live in New Jersey now.

How large is the congregation these days?

We're averaging about 55, 57, somewhere in there. It used to be up over a hundred many years ago. But with the general

decline in church membership — too many other distractions in life — it's been down some. We've held steady now for the last 20 years. Our average age is somewhere in the upper forties. When I first came here seven years ago, there were a lot more older people. Probably the bulk of the active members are older; the younger people have a tendency to come and go. When I first came here, people (were) telling me, "This church is dying; we're going to close our doors," and I said, "Well, that isn't necessarily true." We've got a highway out here that's paved, didn't used to be. At one time, the attendance was confined to people who lived in the immediate area because they walked to church or rode a horse. Now we have people who come from 25 to 35 miles away. They tell me it's because we teach the Bible, and they like the friendliness of the people.

You have a remarkable wall of confirmation class photos in the parish hall.

The earliest picture here is from 1899. There are some missing because when the church blew down, some of the photos were destroyed. So I went back and found the names of those who were in the classes before that and posted them here. This is like a family tree. Folks come in here and say, "Well that's my grandpa, and that's my grandma, and that's my mom, and that's my dad!" And of course a lot of these people are buried back in the cemetery here. I have put all these photos on the computer here, so when people see their family members, I can say, "Well, if you like that picture, I can email you a copy of it." ■

80th ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL MEETING

May 14, 2019

Annual Meeting Notice

Dear Member:

You are invited to the Annual Membership Meeting of Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, Inc., which will be held on May 14, 2019, at 2:30 p.m. at The Silos on 77, formerly the Sons of Hermann Hall, 1031 CR 223, Giddings, Texas. Registration will begin at 1:30 p.m. and close at 2:30 p.m.

Four of the 11 seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors are up for election this year. Three of the incumbent candidates — Milton Shaw, District 1, representing Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties; Ben Flencher, District 5, representing Burleson County; and Ken Mutscher, District 7, representing Washington County — were unopposed and are re-elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. There are four candidates for the District 3 seat, representing Bastrop County: incumbent Debbi Goertz and contenders Juanita Valarie Neidig, Ron Spencer and Matthew Weilert. Other business that may come before the meeting will also be addressed.

Sincerely yours,

Roderick L. Emanuel

Roderick L. Emanuel
Secretary/Treasurer
Bluebonnet Board of Directors

2019 Annual Meeting Agenda

1:30-2:30 p.m. Registration and Voting

2:30 p.m. Welcome and Introductions

Call to Order — Ben Flencher, Board Chair

Invocation and Pledges of Allegiance — Roderick L. Emanuel,
Board Secretary-Treasurer

Chairman/President's Report — Ben Flencher, Board Chair

Secretary-Treasurer's Report — Roderick L. Emanuel, Board Secretary-Treasurer

- Read Notice of Annual Meeting
- Read Affidavit of Proof of Mailing
- Read Certification of Number of Members Receiving Service
- Read Certification of Number of Members in Attendance
- Read 2018 Annual Meeting Minutes (or ask for a motion to waive reading of minutes and ratify Board's approval)

General Manager's Report — Matt Bentke, General Manager/CEO

Unfinished Business — Matt Bentke, General Manager/CEO

New Business — Matt Bentke, General Manager/CEO

Door Prize Drawings

Ballot Canvassing Results — Sarah Newman-Altamirano, General Counsel

Adjourn

2019 ANNUAL MEETING & BOARD ELECTION FAQ

Whether you plan to attend the Annual Meeting, be sure to get your completed proxy voting form to us in time. It must be postmarked no later than May 7, 2019, or hand-delivered to a member service center by **5:30 p.m. May 7**. If you need more information after reading the questions and answers below, call 800-842-7708 between 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, or email memberservices@bluebonnet.coop.

What is the Annual Meeting, and why is it important to attend?

Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting is one of the many benefits of being a member of an electric cooperative. The meeting, held each year in May, offers members the opportunity to meet the Board of Directors, the general manager and the co-op's executive staff. Members hear a "State of the Co-op" message, elect directors and attend to any business that may come before the membership.

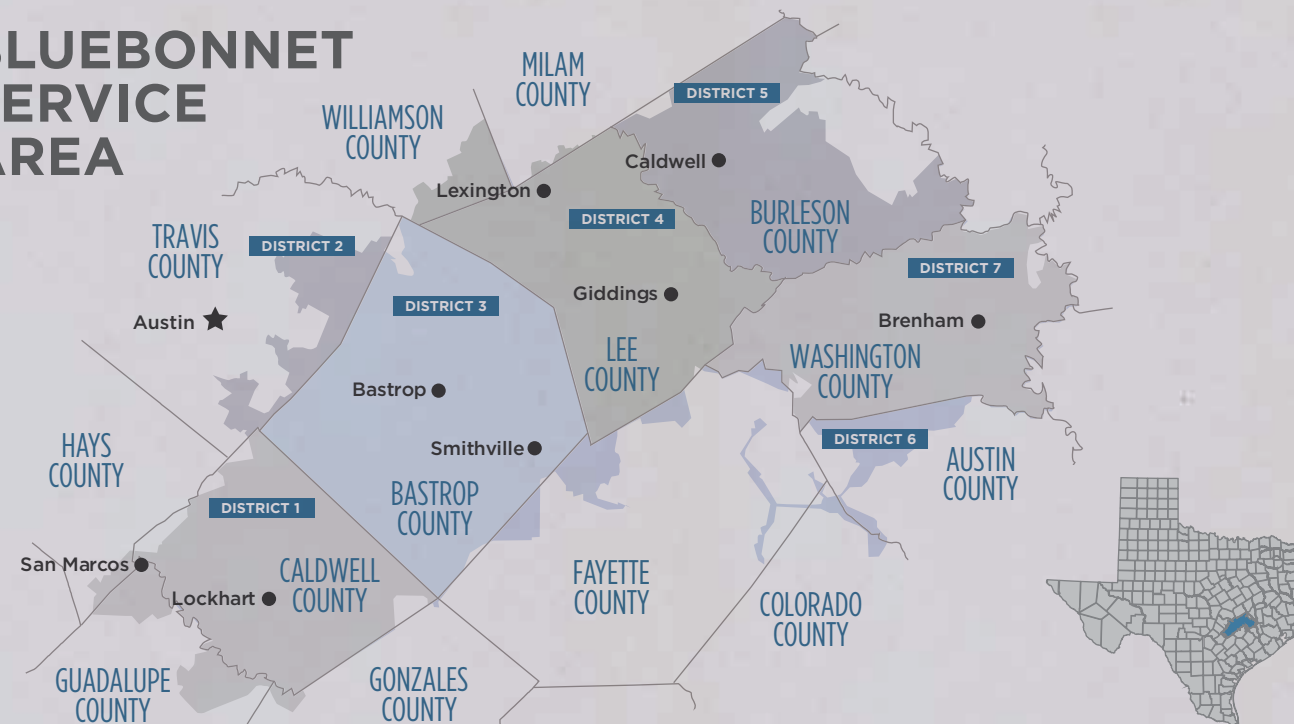
Bluebonnet's service area is divided into seven districts. Can I vote for candidates in all districts or just the district in which I live?

During contested Board elections, co-op members can vote for directors in all districts. The districts in the co-op's service area were drawn along Bluebonnet's service area boundary and county lines. The seven districts are represented by one to three directors based on, among other things, the number of meters in each district.

How many Board of Director seats are up for election?

Four of the 11 seats on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors are up for election this year. Three of the incumbent candidates — Milton Shaw, District 1, representing Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties; Ben Flencher, District 5, representing Burleson County; and Ken Mutscher, District 7, representing Washington County — were unopposed and are re-elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws. There are four candidates for the District 3 seat, representing Bastrop County: incumbent Debbi Goertz and contenders Juanita Valarie Neidig, Ron Spencer and Matthew Weilert.

BLUEBONNET SERVICE AREA



What are my voting options?

There are four candidates for the co-op's District 3 Board seat. There are currently no additional ballot items to be voted on this year. However, items can be added to the Annual Meeting agenda that would require a vote by members. Those items would have to be added no later than 10 days before the Annual Meeting. Your proxy could be used in that vote, which is why your proxy selection is important.

What is proxy voting, and how does it work?

Proxy voting allows members who cannot attend the Annual Meeting to designate another person to vote in his or her place. On the proxy, members can assign their vote to either Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee or to an individual. Proxies are counted together with those registered at the Annual Meeting to ensure at least 1 percent of Bluebonnet's membership is present in person or represented by proxy to constitute a quorum.

Who serves on Bluebonnet's Proxy Committee?

The Proxy Committee is composed of all Bluebonnet Board members whose terms are not currently up for election. This year's Proxy Committee members are Roderick Emanuel, Byron Balke, Shana Whiteley, Bryan Bracewell,

Russell Jurk and Robert Mikeska.

How do I vote by proxy?

Complete the proxy form and return it by mail or drop it off at any of Bluebonnet's member service centers in Bastrop, Brenham, Giddings, Lockhart or Manor. If you misplace the proxy form, stop by a member service center to pick one up or call 800-842-7708 and ask a representative to mail one to you. Proxies must either be hand-delivered to a member service center by 5:30 p.m. May 7, 2019, or mailed to:

**Bluebonnet Elections Processing
c/o Election Services Co.
P.O. Box 9020
Ronkonkoma, NY 11779-9822**

Mailed proxies must be postmarked by May 7, 2019.

Can this proxy be used again at future Annual Meetings?

No, the proxy is valid only for the meeting specified on the proxy form.

Can I vote at the Annual Meeting if I sent in a proxy form?

When you register at the meeting, you may revoke your proxy and then vote in person.

What information do I need to bring with me to register at the Annual Meeting?

You will be asked to verbally recite two pieces of information that are on

your account. This account verification process is identical to the one performed any time members would like to transact business on their accounts. You can simply tell the member service representative at the registration desk any two of the following pieces of information about your account: the name(s) listed on the account, your Bluebonnet account number, your birthday, last four digits of your Social Security number, your driver's license number or your mailing address.

Who administers the election?

Election Services Co., which is a third-party, independent vendor that specializes in administering corporate elections nationwide. It has the skills, experience and equipment to efficiently and accurately tally proxies and votes while adhering to the Federal Trade Commission's Red Flag requirements that protect members' confidential account information.

Can I change my address or do other business at the Annual Meeting?

Bluebonnet's member service representatives at the information booth will be able to help members with most of their co-op business and answer any questions they would normally handle at any member service center or through the call center.

2019 NOMINEES FOR BLUEBONNET'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ben Flencher District 5 (Incumbent)



Flencher, chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric co-op's Board since 1987. He is an ex-officio member of Bluebonnet's Board committees — Audit & Finance, Employee Services, Energy Services, Legal & Governance, Member Experience and Technology. He grew up in a banking family in Somerville and began his lifelong banking career by rolling coins and filing checks as a young boy at the bank where his father worked. He was officially hired when he was in eighth grade and continued to work at the bank while in college. Today, he is president of that same bank — Citizens State Bank, Somerville — a position he's held since 1981. Under his leadership, the bank has grown to six locations. Flencher graduated from Texas A&M University in 1974 with a degree in finance. He is a lifelong member of the First Lutheran Church in Somerville. He and his wife Betsy, have four sons: Aaron and Cory, who work in the banking industry; Ryan, who works in commercial real estate; and Josh, who owns a dirt contracting company. The Flenchers have five grandchildren, with another due this spring.

Kenneth Mutscher District 7 (Incumbent)



Mutscher, vice chairman of the Bluebonnet Board of Directors, has been on the electric co-op's Board since 1998. He has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certifications and Director Gold credential through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. He chairs Bluebonnet's Employee Services Committee and is a member of the Technology Committee. He also serves as an ex-officio member of the Audit & Finance, Energy Services, Legal & Governance and Member Experience committees. Mutscher was an investigator for the state's Board of Pharmacy, a National Guard officer and owned a financial services business in Brenham. He is retired and lives in Brenham. He was an all-around athlete at Brenham High School, lettering in football, baseball, basketball and track. He attended Blinn College on a baseball scholarship and graduated from the University of Texas at Austin in 1965 with a business administration degree. He has worked with several community organizations, including the Brenham Lions Club, the Chamber of Commerce, the Coastal Conservation Association, Washington County Little League and the Bluebonnet Beef Breeders Association of Washington County. He is a director of the Blinn College Foundation Board and has held numerous offices as a member of Grace Lutheran Church. Mutscher enjoys golf, fishing, hunting, traveling and raising Brangus cattle. He and his wife, Sarita, have a son, Kevin, who is an attorney in Brenham, and one grandson.

Debbi Goertz District 3 (Incumbent)



Goertz has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2017. She has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certifications through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. She chairs Bluebonnet's Technology Committee and is a member of the Energy Services and Legal & Governance committees. Goertz has been an attorney in Bastrop since 2004, representing clients in civil matters including trusts and estates law, and some Medicaid issues. She was born in Kilgore and grew up there and in Bryan. After graduating from Bryan High School, she received a bachelor's degree in education and a master's degree in merchandising from Texas Tech University in Lubbock. She worked at Bloomingdale's in Dallas as a department manager before opting for a career change. Goertz attended Baylor Law School in Waco and earned her law degree in 1993. After graduation, she moved to Bastrop and has been a Bluebonnet member since 1998. Goertz worked briefly in a Bastrop law firm before beginning a career with the Texas Department of Public Safety, first as a hearing examiner, then as Texas' administrator for school bus safety. She has worked with numerous Bastrop and Smithville nonprofit groups, including Samella Williams Angels Unaware Ministry, Children's Advocacy Center, Bastrop County Historical Society and Family Crisis Center, and was a Girl Scout leader for 10 years. Her daughter, Abby, is a student at the University of Texas at Austin.

Ron Spencer District 3



Spencer grew up in Houston, where he graduated from high school in 1974 and then attended technical school to become a certified welder. He moved up the ladder during six years in the oil rig industry. In 1980 he joined his family's business, International Management Services Inc., a Houston-based consulting firm specializing in helping companies work in America's free-trade zones. During his 10 years with IMS, Spencer worked at a subsidiary, overseeing procurement and logistics of medical supplies and pharmaceutical materials. In 1990, he moved to Austin and began working at Dell, where he worked in the procurement department and was responsible for all mass storage products. At Dell, Spencer developed the framework for a new supply chain design and inventory management system. He became global senior manager, overseeing the procurement of the company's mechanical devices and power supplies. In 2000, he left Dell to set up his own consulting practice, working with global suppliers of electronic components. After living in Florida for three years, he returned to his Texas roots, moving to Bastrop in 2011. He is semi-retired, but is an active investor in real estate and restaurants. He has also been an avid pilot for 15 years. Spencer is on the board of directors for the Bastrop Economic Development Corp. and on the advisory board for the Smithville Airport. His son, Justin, is a University of Texas at Austin graduate working in the Austin restaurant industry. Spencer has two grandchildren.

Juanita Valarie Neidig District 3



Neidig is an accomplished business owner with more than 30 years of experience in the electric supply industry. In 2002, she started LTH Enterprises Ltd. and is the managing partner. The company provides electrical, plumbing and custodial materials for new and remodeled construction projects, as well as maintenance and operations supplies to clients that include schools and universities as well as city, county and federal governments. She was born and raised in east Austin, graduated from Johnston High School, and immediately went to work at an electrical distribution company. She held positions in several electric supply companies, gaining 14 years of experience and knowledge that led to the start of her successful business. She serves on the Elgin ISD Board of Trustees and the Elgin Education Foundation. She is active at Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Elgin High School's scholarship committee, athletic booster club, and baseball & softball fundraising committees. Neidig is a proponent of Blue Santa, Coats for Kids in Austin and the Ronald McDonald House charities. In her spare time, she is an avid runner, qualifying for the Boston Marathon, completing five marathons and more than 50 half marathons and triathlons. She and her husband of 22 years, Harlan, have two children: Jacob, who will attend Stanford University in the fall, and Emma, who is active in Elgin High softball and volleyball. They live on their working cattle ranch that straddles Travis and Bastrop counties.

Matthew Weilert District 3



Weilert has more than 30 years' experience in corporate safety and risk reduction. He is a decorated Navy veteran who grew up in Bastrop. His father was CFO of Austin Meter, a maker of boiler turbine generator control systems. Weilert graduated from Bastrop High School and earned a degree in safety engineering from Texas A&M University in College Station in 1985 on a Navy scholarship. In 1996, he founded Systems Thinking Institute, which brings field-tested process improvement concepts to international businesses. Companies that have used those concepts include Battelle, GM, United Defense, Kratos Defense and Panera Bread. The concepts have been taught in the U.S., Canada and Malta. The institute uses structured questions within day-to-day business operations to help companies improve their bottom-line results. Weilert moved the institute from New Hampshire to Texas in 2010. He set aside that work for nearly two years to care for his father in hospice until September 2018. Since then, Weilert launched a startup he hopes will "disrupt Amazon" by building a team that will deliver authentic, individual interactions for online shoppers and put a personal face to that process. Weilert, an Eagle Scout, has been active in Boy Scouts in Austin, Bastrop and Pensacola, Fla. He has been a member of Ascension Catholic Church in Bastrop since childhood and was part of a team that introduced a men's leadership program to more than a dozen Catholic churches in the Austin diocese. He has a son, 9-year-old Stephen Carl.

Milton Shaw District 1 (Incumbent)



Shaw has served on the Bluebonnet Board of Directors since 2010. He has earned the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership certifications and Director Gold credential through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Shaw is chairman of Bluebonnet's Legal & Governance Committee and is a member of the Employee Services and Member Experience committees. He grew up in Luling and traveled America during a 30-year career with Shell Oil Co. He and his family moved to six states while he managed marketing of Shell's real estate assets and oversaw multimillion-dollar budgets. Shaw has decades of experience in community relations and customer service. After graduating from what is now Texas State University in San Marcos in 1962, Shaw managed a store for Western Auto and later was a manager in the Sears department store chain's management development program. He retired from Shell in 1998 and returned to Luling with his wife and high school sweetheart, Judy. They run a few head of cattle on 46 acres in Caldwell County. Shaw is active in his community, including service over the years in the Luling Chamber of Commerce, Community Action, Inc., Kiwanis Club, Caldwell County Development Board, Polonia Water Supply Corp. and McNeil Baptist Church. He and Judy have three sons: Milton Jr., a worldwide customer service manager for Shell; Mark, executive vice president — chief legal and regulatory officer for Southwest Airlines; and Michael, partner in the Jackson Walker law firm in Houston. The Shaws have seven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.



Vote and you could win great prizes!

Anyone who votes either by proxy or in person at the Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 14, will be entered in a drawing to win a **2010 Ford F-150** being retired from Bluebonnet's fleet, above. Anyone who votes by proxy will be entered in a drawing for more prizes. Get more information at **bluebonnet.coop**.



ALL ABOUT METERS

Bluebonnet
80th
ANNIVERSARY

Where did all the **meter readers** go?
A lot of them are **still at Bluebonnet**
and happy to share their **many stories**

By Mary Ann Roser and Melissa Segrest



At top: one of Bluebonnet's newest meters, a solid state microprocessor. Kyle Boer, above, supervised meter readers in Brenham. Today he is superintendent of engineering services and a 37-year Bluebonnet veteran.

Do you remember the friendly person dressed in a tan shirt who walked up your drive to your house every month? He or she peered at your electric meter, decoding its dials, numbers and circling arrows. The person quickly typed numbers into a curious black device and then left, only to return the next month.

They were Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative's meter readers, the human point of contact for thousands of co-op members every month. They worked from 1985 until 2007, when the cooperative fully converted to automated electric meters that use power lines to transmit power consumption information directly to Bluebonnet's system.

After the conversion, many meter readers stayed on with Bluebonnet. Several dozen still work at the co-op, holding various jobs, from line workers to crew supervisors, control room operators to line construction planners.

"That was the cool thing about it," said

Kyle Boer, Bluebonnet's superintendent of engineering services. "All of our meter readers were exceptionally loyal, and we didn't want to lay anybody off."

This year, Bluebonnet is celebrating its 80th anniversary. With auspicious timing, in April the cooperative topped the 100,000 meter mark, which establishes it as one of the largest electric co-ops in the nation. Today's electric meters are state of the art, and new versions are replacing older meters. In 2018, 4,000 of them were installed, and this year, crews plan to replace another 3,000 older meters.

Continued on page 20



Carla Bates when she was a meter reader, at left, and today, above. She became a Bluebonnet employee in 1999 and recalled a few encounters with wasps, bees and spiders, including one black widow spider that gave her a nasty bite. Now she works to design the location of power lines, poles, equipment and meters for members receiving new service.

Sarah Beal photos

Topping 100,000 meters is a milestone for Bluebonnet

By Will Holford

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative celebrated a new milestone in April when it exceeded the 100,000-meter mark for the first time in its 80-year history.

"This is a significant achievement for Bluebonnet and our members," said Ben Flencher, Bluebonnet's board chairman.

"Exceeding 100,000 meters puts Bluebonnet in elite company and the next tier in terms of size among electric co-ops across the country, something few co-ops have accomplished."

The number of meters on a utility's system is an important metric used to measure utilities.

As of 2018, fewer than 35 of the more than 800 electric cooperatives in the United States have more than 100,000 meters. Five of those co-ops, including Bluebonnet, are in Texas.

Bluebonnet's meter growth has accelerated during the past two years, adding nearly 4,000 meters per year.

"While we have experienced unprecedented growth in recent years, we have and will always remain committed to

Exceeding 100,000 meters puts Bluebonnet in elite company and the next tier in terms of size among electric co-ops across the country.

— Ben Flencher
BOARD CHAIRMAN

providing outstanding, reliable service to our members and being an integral part of the communities we serve," said Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet's general manager.

Bluebonnet's growth has been the result of a boom in housing on the western side of its service area and significant industrial growth in its central and eastern regions. Large subdivisions and apartment complexes have been built in Travis, Bastrop, Hays and Caldwell counties. Commercial growth is spread across Bluebonnet's entire service area, but large-scale oil and gas production, water wells and pipelines are concentrated more in the cooperative's mostly rural eastern regions. This di-

versity of growth means the cooperative is not overly reliant on one type of member for revenue.

"We have managed the growth that we have experienced so that it not only has paid for itself, but has benefitted our current members," Bentke said. "We have the financial capacity to build the infrastructure needed to serve our new members without raising rates."

Three lucky new members who helped push the cooperative over the milestone meter count were welcomed with gift baskets. (See videos of them on facebook.com/BluebonnetElectric, in the videos section.)

As Bluebonnet celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, its legacy of member service, community support and safe, reliable electric power continues to grow.

"This is an exciting time in Bluebonnet's history," Bentke said. "Our future is bright due in large part to the members, directors and employees who, during the past 80 years, helped build Bluebonnet into one of the largest cooperatives and best utilities in the nation. Their dedication and legacy pushes us forward."

BACK IN THE DAY

Before meter readers, Bluebonnet members read their own electric meters and wrote down how much electricity they used on cards that were sent to the cooperative.

"It was an honor system," said James Jordan, who runs the meter distribution shop at the cooperative's Giddings service center. He has worked at Bluebonnet for 23 years. If a member's consumption numbers looked a little suspicious, an employee would stop by and check the meter.

In the early 1970s, Bluebonnet had far fewer meters across its 3,800-square-mile service area and almost all of those were residential, said Donnie Graham

of Lockhart, a former supervisor of meter readers who retired in 2005. At that time, the co-op staff was so small that after 5 p.m. and on weekends, Graham said he would just transfer calls about power outages to his home phone.

By the end of the meter-reading era, the cooperative had dozens of meter readers, each trying to read at least 100 meters a day. Although meter readers had radios to communicate with supervisors, they relied on paper maps in large bound volumes, looking for dots that pinpointed meter locations.

Reaching a meter wasn't just a stroll up a driveway. Sometimes, a meter reader had to drive a mile, go through multiple locked gates and make a long trek on foot just to reach a single meter. They carried heavy rings of 50 or more keys to unlock gates on members' property to



Marti Wright, superintendent of contractor operations, was a meter reader for about a year. She always made her rounds with a big bag of treats to appease angry dogs but occasionally had to fend off attacks with her heavy hand-held data recorder.

access meters.

Philip Grimm recalled how rain and mud could make roads impassable for their two-wheel drive trucks. Many meter readers carried long lengths of chain for the inevitable stuck-in-a-rut moment. Driving through oil fields and muddy roads with only AM radio and no air conditioning was a challenge. Grimm gets to be pickier about Bluebonnet's vehicles today: He is the cooperative's fleet supervisor.

"We were very rough on trucks," said Carla Bates, a former meter reader still working with Bluebonnet.

Bates first read meters for a contractor, then as a Bluebonnet employee starting in 1999. Today she helps plot the locations of poles, lines, equipment and meters for new homes of new cooperative

members. That job is important, but "when we were the meter readers, we were the most important people at Bluebonnet," she said with a grin.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Some Bluebonnet members loved to see the meter readers. Others made it clear they didn't want them on their property.

"Almost all of our members – 99.9 percent – were, and are, really great people," said Boer, who has worked more than three decades.

Doug Schlemmer was a Bluebonnet meter reader for years. Today he is a crew supervisor out of the Giddings service center. He remembers receiving holiday cookies from members and having long conversations with members who rarely had visitors. One older man always of-



Doug Schlemmer

fered a Dr Pepper. Another man refused to pay his monthly bill until someone came to his house, when he would gladly pay a late fee for the chance to chat.

It was no surprise that many Bluebonnet members, especially the seniors, were sad to learn meter readers would no longer be dropping by.

Sometimes meter readers noticed problems: a gate that had been cut, a house that had been broken into, a big water leak. They fixed the occasional flat tire for a member or helped an older couple move furniture.

But the job was not all cookies and compliments. Some ornery members

Continued on page 23

AN ELECTRIC METER TIMELINE

Timeline continued on next page



1872

Samuel Gardiner Jr. of New York City takes out first known patent for an electric meter. It uses a clock mechanism to indicate on a dial when the electric current is active.

1879

Thomas Edison develops a meter with two rods of copper submerged in a jar containing a zinc-sulfate electrolyte solution. As electricity flows through the jar, it dissolves zinc off the positive plate and deposits it onto the negative one, which can then be weighed.



1882

Hermann Aron of Germany constructs a meter with two pendulums wrapped in coils. One pendulum accelerates and the other slows in proportion to the current. A gear measures the difference in speed between the two clocks.



1886

Edward Weston develops a moving-coil galvanometer that becomes the standard for amp, volt and watt meters for more than 100 years.

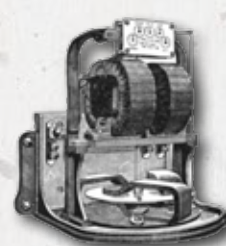
1888

A laboratory accident leads Oliver Shallenberger at Westinghouse to develop the first alternating-current-measuring meter.



1883

Edison Electric Light Co. earns first payment. A dollar from Ansonia Brass Co. to pay part of its \$50.40 electric bill is endorsed with a commemorative note by Edison engineer Charles L. Clarke. In 2014, it sells at auction for \$15,000.



1890

Future MIT President Elihu Thomson invents the first watt-hour meter to measure and record electric power as it flows through a circuit. A counter displays kilowatt-hours on dials.



1889

Hungarian Otto Titusz Bláthy develops a device containing a rotating metallic disk or cylinder, which is acted upon by two magnetic fields displaced in phase from each other. Bláthy's design became the first commonly used electric meter. Many of the kilowatt-hour meters used today operate on the same principle.

1890s

The International Electrical Congress creates standards for measurement of electricity.

1898

Association of Edison Illuminating Co. creates Committee on Meters. The trade association is a leader in the electric energy industry, with a Meter and Service Committee.

1899

General Electric introduces a new concept in electric meters: a prepayment device that allows collection in advance for electricity service.



1918

During World War I, more than 23 percent of American women work, many holding jobs traditionally awarded to men, including these four meter readers for Minneapolis General Electric Co. in Minnesota.

1920s

Electric meters get redesign to maintain accuracy in a range of temperatures. Seasonal fluctuations no longer throw off meter precision, a glitch that had required meter readjustments.

In with the new: Bluebonnet meters

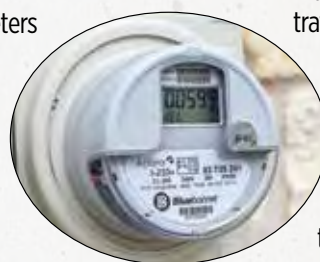
There are two types of meters on Bluebonnet's system, older electromechanical meters and new solid state microprocessor meters.

THE MODERN METER

The newest residential meters, right, are made by Landis+Gyr or GE and feature a digital display and no visible moving parts.

STILL WORKING

Older meters still on the system have dials and a rotating dial. The flow of electricity through the meter turns the dial and registers consumption. They are no longer manufactured and are being phased out.



DATA ON POWER LINES

Both types of meters send data through a powerline communication system to a Bluebonnet substation, and from there data travels through microwave or fiber optic networks to Bluebonnet's control center.

TRANSITIONS

Thousands of the older meters on Bluebonnet's system, like the one at far left, have been or will be replaced with the solid state digital meters, which can perform more functions and provide more data. With these 'smart' meters, members can see their own energy use and costs online.

SAFE DEVICES

Bluebonnet's meters do not communicate via a radio frequency and they have a small electromagnetic field. A microwave or hair dryer in use has a stronger field than a meter.



James Jordan, a 23-year employee at Bluebonnet, today runs the 'meter shop' at the co-op's Giddings service center. There, he distributes and tracks hundreds of meters that move through that department.

Continued from page 21

locked out the meter readers or refused to provide gate lock combinations. No one recalls being hurt by an annoyed member, despite the occasional threat and drawn gun.

A few members went to great lengths attempting to tamper with their meters to try and avoid paying bills – which was, and still is, illegal.

LIONS, TIGERS AND DOGS

Animals and insects posed the biggest problems for meter readers. Most agreed their scariest encounters were with dogs. Even with dog treats, distraction tactics, sprays, "bad dog" warnings, requests for help from dog owners and the occasional stick as a defensive weapon, there were a few dog bites but mostly near misses.

Marti Wright, now superintendent of contractor operations, kept a large bag of dog treats in her truck and always had some handy in her pocket. She said that if a dog was chasing her, one of her strategies was to toss a few treats as a distraction to allow her to jump back into the truck.

Bees, wasps and spiders caused problems, too. Bates once reached over a fence and was bitten by a black widow spider. Occasionally, meter readers were chased by surly geese and turkeys, too.

And yes, there really was a lion, a tiger and a panther, according to Schlemmer. They lived on property near Birch Creek. Schlemmer will never forget one big cat that tried to sneak up on him. He heard the unmistakable hiss of a cougar hot on his heels and barely escaped an attack, even though the big cat was chained.

On that day, the promise of high-tech automated meters never seemed so good. ■

AN ELECTRIC METER TIMELINE

Continued from previous page



1930s

New design in meters allows electric utilities to move meters outdoors so they can be read without entering customer premises.

1934

Meter makers improve designs to prevent outdoor meters from running too fast after power surges from lightning storms. At right, employees of the meter manufacturer Sangamo Electric Co. of Springfield, Ill., in 1932.



1934

Landis & Gyr develops the Trivector meter, which can be configured to measure various types of energy.

1939

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is created (originally as Lower Colorado River Electric Cooperative). An honor system lets members read their own electric meters and submit cards showing their electric use for the month.



1960s

Meter readers in Cincinnati — following a tradition that began in the 1800s — carry up to 10 rings of house keys on their belts to enter homes to read meters. By 1970, more than 60,000 customers entrust house keys to Cincinnati Gas & Electric (CG&E).



1973

U.S. Marine officer Jim Sovaiko finds old electric meters in a scrapyard while home on leave. After pizza and handshakes, he and two friends invest in the future Arcman Corp. in Throop, Penn. The company makes unique lamps from 1920s residential electric meters that still work.



1980s-2000s

Bluebonnet meter readers, including Marti Wright, above, drive routes by relying on volumes of maps with hand-drawn dots designating the location of each electric meter.

2001

Hand-held Kill A Watt device is offered by P3 International of New York to allow consumers to measure amount of electricity used by home appliances. Plug an appliance into today's model of the meter to see how much electricity an appliance uses. Some public libraries loan out Kill A Watts.



2010

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative introduces its Energy Tracker, a digital portal where members can see information about their electric bill and energy use, tracked by week, month or year.

2017

Almost half of U.S. electricity customers have smart meters. The meters measure and record electricity use at least every hour and provide data to residents and utilities at least once a day. Some meters show real-time electric use.



2018

Texas residents pay average of 11.69 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity, compared with 32.46 cents in Hawaii (highest in U.S.) and 9.11 cents in Louisiana (lowest in U.S.).

Timeline researched and written by Denise Gamino and Gretchen Heber; designed by Joe Stafford and Gretchen Heber. For photo credits, see this story on bluebonnet.coop, under the News tab.

2019 SCHOLARSHIPS OF EXCELLENCE

Scholarships awarded to Bluebonnet-area students

Each recipient gets \$2,500 for college, trade & tech studies

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative awarded \$150,000 in scholarships to graduating high school seniors from across the cooperative's service area. Each scholarship was \$2,500.

In April, the cooperative awarded 30 academic scholarships to students who are pursuing bachelor's degrees. Bluebonnet also awarded 30 scholarships to students pursuing a trade or technical certificate or associate degree in a vocational field.

Among those students' areas of interest were electrical power and control, dental hygiene, welding, pilot training and sonography. Texas A&M University, the University of Texas, Baylor University and Trinity University are among the colleges that academic scholarship recipients said they plan to attend. Among their areas of study are animal science, agricultural business, nursing and biomedicine.

The cooperative has given out more than \$600,000 in scholarships in the past five years. Look for applications for 2020 scholarships on bluebonnet.coop by Nov. 1.



2019 Trade and Technical scholarship recipients, from left, front row: Dakari Saldana, Sierra Ramsey, Arron Whisenhunt, Kylie Goertz, Quinn McGee, Simone Marroquin, Tomas Garza, Katy Nava, Blane Ashorn, Wendy Zuniga, Faith Stork and Karli Shupak; back row: Bishal Sapkota, Khaliah Butler, Alex Kwiatkowski, Brenda Flores Martinez, Zachary Muth, Annallely Nino Palacios, Colin Reue, Joe Kwiatkowski, Kaleb Roberson, Christopher Tores, Wesley Zumwalt, Shyler Mayfield, Isaac Colter and Paul Shaffer; not pictured: Alexia Brite, Jesus Otero and Kolton Swonke.



2019 Academic scholarship recipients, from left, front row: Bodie Furry, Rebecca Frazier, Qynton De Los Santos, Claire Seidel, Sierra Tyson, Sarah Ghormley, Jackson Wettstein, Yamilet Quezada, Madilyn Terrazas, Kallie Bartsch, Johnathan Ellard, Jenna Orsak, Savannah Knippa and Thomas Bates; back row: Caroline Heller, Cheyenne Byrer, Yoshira Guerrero, Emma Anton, Taylor Klatte, Megan Rogers, Katie Murski, Lilliana Gonzales, Katelyn Iselt, Aurora Berry, Amanda Branecky and Maria Perez Suarez; not pictured: Isaac Davila, Jacob Neidig, Brandon Watley and Aunnika Wittner. Sarah Beal photos

Bluebonnet

ANNIVERSARY

WHAT ARE THE 80 THINGS YOU LOVE?

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative is celebrating its 80th anniversary this year. We'll be having celebrations in August — which is our birthday month — so we are asking you to tell us the things that you love about our service area.

Nothing is too small or too big. Do you have a favorite eatery, hiking trail, historic site, park,

lake, store, civic event, grocery, coach, school, church or just a wonderful place to sit and watch the sunset? We want to know about it all. We'll pick a mix of 80 things.

Send your suggestions, tips or photos to Lisa Ogle at lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop and we'll publish 80 of them on Bluebonnet's pages in the August issue of Texas Co-op Power magazine.



Not a
big fan
of the
dog days
of summer?



Bluebonnet's 6 SIMPLE TIPS TO CONSERVE POWER

TURN IT UP

Set the thermostat to 78° (or 80° when not home), especially from 3 to 7 p.m. Save as much as 10% on your bill.

TURN 'EM OFF

Lights can eat up a chunk of your electric bill. If you're leaving the room, close curtains to block the sun's heat.

WISE UP

Upgrade to a programmable or smart thermostat to better control your temperature settings. A smart thermostat lets you remotely adjust the temperature and some can even learn and adapt to your habits.

TRACK YOUR USE

Log in to your online account at bluebonnet.coop or on our mobile app and see how much electricity you're using. Try the tips and see how much your power use drops.

KILL THE VAMPIRES

Gadgets silently eat electricity, even in standby mode. Plug them into an advanced power strip and turn them off when not in use.

LEAVE THE HOUSE

Can't stand 78°? Go someplace cool during the hottest part of the day: the library, grocery store, mall, gym, coffee shop.

 **Bluebonnet**
bluebonnet.coop 800-842-7708





WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

At its new location near Elgin,
Austin Wildlife Rescue will help injured,
ill or orphaned creatures — great and
small — at a rate of about 6,600 a year

RESCUED

Austin Wildlife Rescue

PHONE: 512-472-9453
(rescue hotline and inquiries)

HOURS: Every day, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.,
both locations

MAIN ANIMAL INTAKE CENTER:
5401 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Austin, TX 78721

NEW REHABILITATION CENTER:
111 Elbow Bend
Elgin, TX 78621

MAILING ADDRESS:
P.O. Box 302695
Austin, TX 78703

WEBSITE: austinwildliferescue.org

Story by Denise Gamino
Photos by Sarah Beal

Less than two weeks
after an area-wide
wildlife rehabilitation
center opened a
new state-of-the-
art headquarters in
Bastrop County, someone
brought in a majestic symbol
of America: a bald eagle. It was
injured and underweight.

X-rays taken at the spacious Austin Wildlife Rescue facility outside Elgin in April showed a BB pellet lodged in the eagle's right wing. Veterinarian Susan Skyler's exam found the adult male eagle was suffering from parasites and mites. Its wing wound was old and minor, but shooting a bald eagle is a federal offense punishable by up to

\$250,000 in fines or two years in prison.

"It's very frustrating," said Derek Rennspies, the Milam County game warden who rescued the eagle from a creek bed near the small town of Buckholts after a landowner found it. "The (BB) wound was so old, there were really no leads to go on. Bald eagles travel so much, there was really no way to tell where that eagle came from."

The game warden is just one of thousands of public workers and private citizens who contact Austin Wildlife Rescue for help in saving injured, ill or orphaned animals. The nonprofit runs a widespread operation that expects to aid 6,600 animals this year — an average of 18 a day — at its new Bastrop County headquarters. (Austin Wildlife Rescue has turned its former animal rehab center in east Austin into its main animal intake center. Every evening, volunteers drive that day's newly arrived animals to the far roomier Bastrop County rehab center.)

Austin Wildlife Rescue is not a 24-hour operation. But "they are always willing to come out and meet me when I'm in a bind,"

Continued on page 20

Hayley Hudnall, Austin Wildlife Rescue's executive director, right, with a 1-month-old raccoon after feeding time. Above, left to right:

- A great horned owl recovers from surgery due to neck abrasions.
- A yarn nest for sparrows only a week old.
- A 1-week-old fawn with its trademark big glistening eyes.
- A cluster of tiny days-old squirrels.
- A North American racer snake, kept in a tight hold.
- A baby porcupine, also known as a porcupette, that was brought to the Bastrop County center from Buda, where it was found wandering around a construction site.

What to do if you find a babe in the woods

If you spot a very young animal on the ground, Austin Wildlife Rescue workers advise that you first:

- 1) Take photos.
- 2) Check around the location to see if you can find a nest or an anxious mom.
- 3) Call the center and send photos before you touch the animal. The goal is to avoid separating the babies from their mothers.



Continued from page 18

the game warden said. "Every time I call them, they help me."

Austin Wildlife Rescue helps wild creatures great and small — from bobcats and deer to blink-and-you'll-miss-them hummingbirds, baby turtles no bigger than silver dollars, newborn squirrels that haven't opened their eyes, wounded beavers, and even the occasional porcupine or skunk. "You never know what's coming in," said Hayley Hudnall, the organization's executive director.

Austin Wildlife Rescue is the oldest and largest wild animal rehabilitation center in the booming Austin region. It began in 1977 as a shoestring volunteer hotline. Now it has spread its own wings after 15 years of saving money in a building fund. It had outgrown its center in a former three-bedroom house in east Austin. So in 2014, it used donations to buy 6.7 acres about 14 miles south of Elgin to build a large, modern rehabilitation facility.

"It's a dream we've had for so long," Hudnall said.

The new, \$655,000 center has a 7,200-square-foot main building, half of which is temperature-controlled with central air and heat. Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative provides the electricity. For the first time, the center has a surgery suite for volunteer veterinarians, a food preparation area, a quarantine space for contagious animals and individual rooms for each type of animal. Outdoors are a tall, 100-foot raptor flight cage, roomy deer pens, and cages for small mammals like opossums, foxes and skunks. Foundation grants helped pay for cages.

The mission of the wildlife center is rescue, rehabilitate and release. Volunteers recall the day a few years ago when a Ford pickup collided with a low-flying red-tailed hawk and the raptor got stuck in the truck's grille. The driver immediately diverted to Austin Wildlife Rescue's intake center in Austin with the entangled bird of prey. The wildlife staff freed the hawk and a volunteer veterinarian set its wing. After the hawk healed, it was re-

leased to the open skies.

On any given day, the animals at the rehab center may include a fawn covered in fire ant bites, a toad stuck in a sewer cover hole or a snake that swallowed a golf ball. Even local animal control workers stop by to drop off injured wild animals such as raccoons. Those workers alone bring in 500 to 600 wild animals a year.

The public can bring injured wild animals to the new Bastrop County facility even though Austin Wildlife Rescue's main animal intake center remains in Austin. Both locations are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., seven days a week.

"I don't ever want to be a center that turns animals away simply because we're full," Hudnall said. "We'll never turn them away. Where would they have gone if we didn't take them?"

Hudnall, who earned a master's degree in wildlife ecology from Texas State University, spends part of her time educating the public about why wild animals are worth saving. "We try to tell people cool facts and reasons why it's important, and how we can co-exist with them," she said.

Wild animals "were here before we were," she said. "We moved into their backyard, not the other way around, where they came into our house. Really, we came into theirs."

"There are so many people who want to know, 'Why do you need another raccoon?' or 'Why do you need to save another opossum?' We start out by explaining, 'Well, do

Continued on page 20C

Want to help?

Wildlife Rescue's wish list:

- Bounty paper towels
- Bleach
- Dish detergent
- Laundry detergent
- Black oil sunflower seed
- Wild bird seed
- Fresh fruits and veggies
- Plastic dog crates
- Rodent wheels
- Walmart gift cards

Eagle photos courtesy of Austin Wildlife Rescue

Wildlife rescue by the numbers

EVERY 20 MINUTES

How often baby songbirds must be fed, from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

3 TIMES A DAY

How often pigeons and doves are fed because they store food in a muscular pouch before digestion.

EVERY 4 HOURS

How often a baby squirrel must be fed.

\$300

Cost to rehabilitate a baby raccoon for 6 months.

14

Daily laundry loads.

\$20,000

Annual cost of formula for baby squirrels, deer, opossums, bunnies, raccoons and other small mammals.

\$200

Weekly grocery bill for the rescued animals

\$5,000

Cost of each new animal cage at the Bastrop County rehab center.



Fun facts

● In 2017, Austin Wildlife Rescue took in 7,700 animals, a record-breaking number prompted by Hurricane Harvey and a mild winter. The center received 400 animals in one week, including 250 squirrels. A rescue group from Amarillo helped out by taking 40 of those squirrels.

● Baby skunks don't spray humans, and most adult skunks spray only as a last resort to protect themselves. Skunks pounce with their front feet as a warning before they spray. However, the Austin Wildlife Rescue crew gets sprayed when releasing a skunk to the wild.

● Porcupines are not as aggressive as people think. But wildlife rescue workers must wear thick gloves and drape a towel around porcupines when handling them.

● Baby hummingbirds must be fed three times every hour with nectar from a medicine dropper.



One of the first animals to arrive at the new rescue center in Bastrop County was a bald eagle that had been shot with a BB pellet. The eagle was sent to a raptor rehabilitator in East Texas because the facility's raptor cage was not yet finished. The eagle will be released where it was found.

g Blvd., Austin, TX 78721

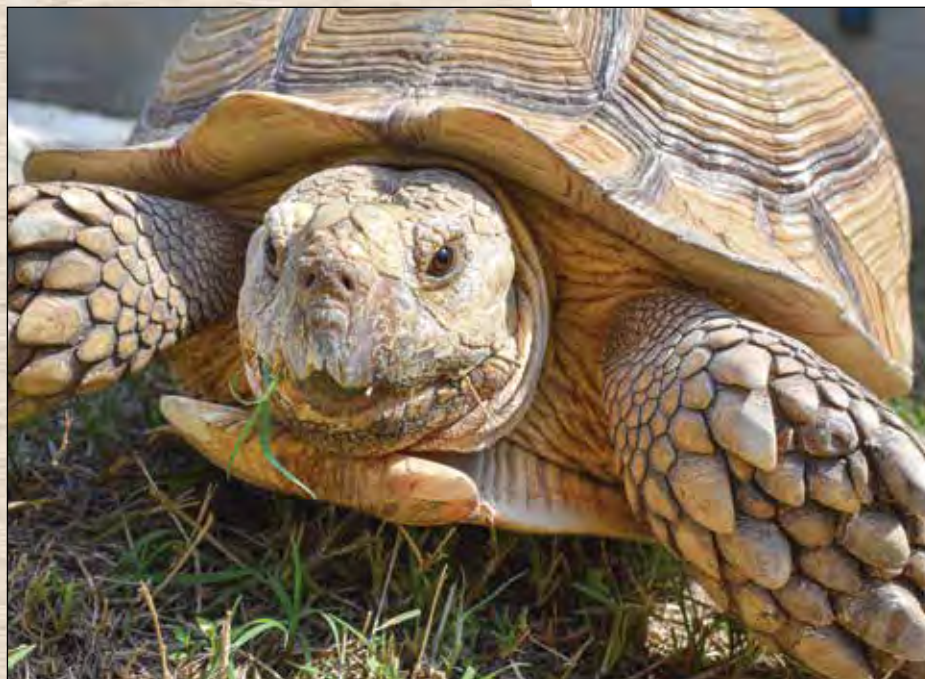
Courtney Antonucci, at right, an animal care technician at the new Bastrop County rescue center, marks labels for syringes of formula for the next shift of workers who will feed the animals. Above, from left, a rescued squirrel, a young opossum, a bald eagle, a baby skunk and a 1-month-old gray fox.



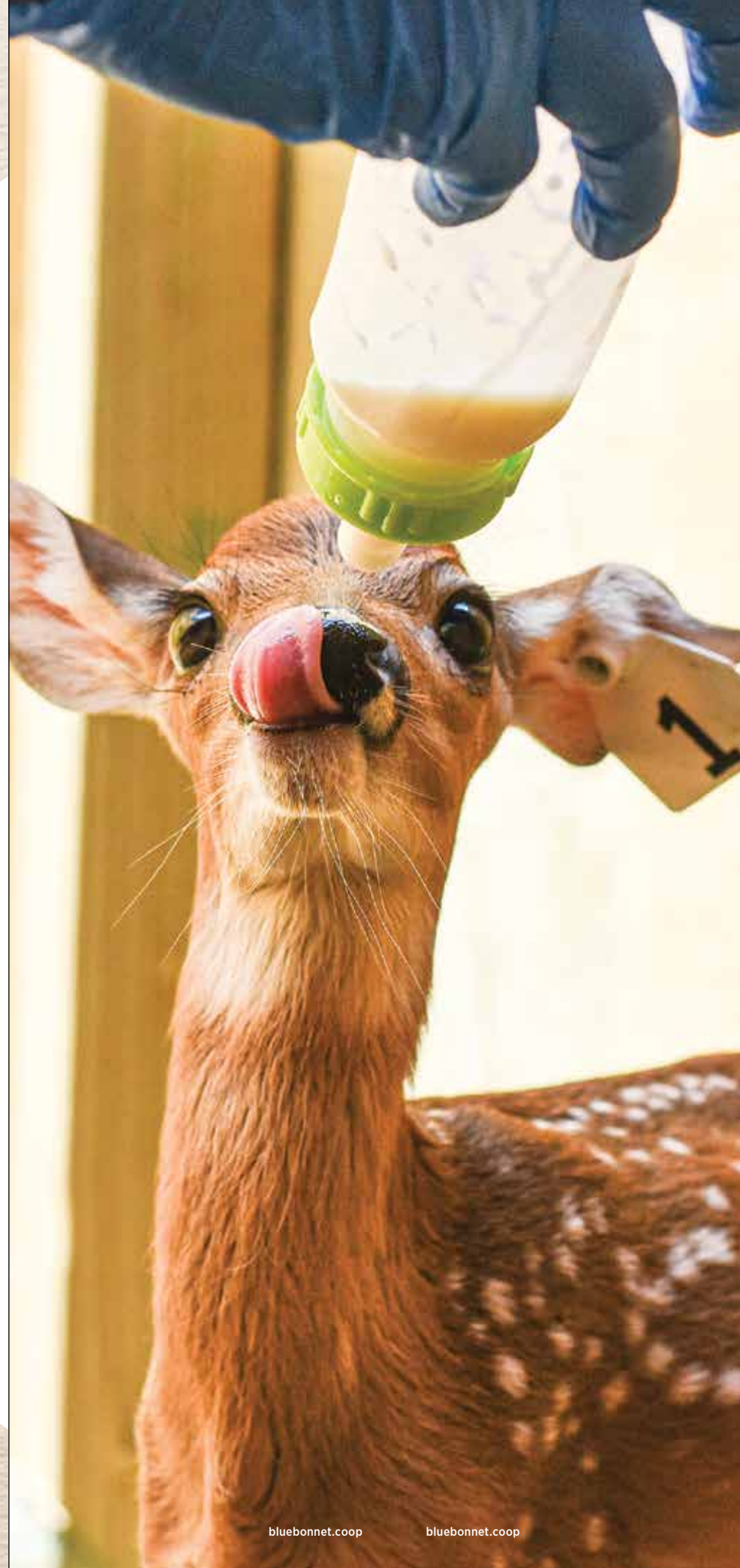
Khanh Phan, an animal care technician, prepares syringes of formula and medication for the next feeding cycle. With so many tiny mouths to feed, the technicians rarely get a break between feeding and caring for the hungry animals.

About the volunteers

About 100 volunteers — about half of whom are always working or available — help out each year. Volunteers logged 6,000 hours in 2018. Twenty volunteers are licensed wildlife rehabilitators. New volunteers are accepted in December and in the spring. Volunteers must be 18 or older and willing to work one shift per week, in the morning, afternoon or evening during the busy season (March-September) or morning or afternoon in the off-season (October-February). Applications for volunteers are available on the organization's website in December and in the spring.



Tito, a 35-pound African spurred tortoise, is a permanent resident of the new rescue center. He was found in Wimberley, but no one claimed him, so Austin Wildlife Rescue now takes him on the road for educational programs. At right: A month-old fawn can't wait to get some of the tasty formula offered by a technician.



Back to the wild: some curious raccoons being released after getting healthy at Austin Wildlife Rescue. The center has about 50 private property release sites of at least 100 acres each, far away from populated areas. Photo courtesy of Austin Wildlife Rescue

Continued from page 20

you know how important opossums are? Opossums eat bugs, including ticks that can carry diseases. They eat snakes that could be poisonous. They eat dead things, so they're cleaning up the environment.

"So having an opossum in your yard is never a bad thing. They have such a low body temperature, they rarely carry rabies even though most people think they can be rabid. They've been around since the dinosaurs, so they're doing something right. And they're marsupials; all their babies are in their pouch — up to 13 at one time."

The public also may not understand the importance of rescuing vultures. "Vultures are cleaning up the environment," Hudnall said. "It would be pretty stinky around here, with a lot more roadkill without the vultures."

And some people may consider squirrels to be nuisance animals that chew up patio furniture. But they are sowing trees that provide shade, food and clean air for humans. "They are good tree planters," Hudnall said. "All the pecans, all the acorns—they are not going back to all the nuts they buried, so they are planting all those trees for us."

Once animals are healthy, wildlife rescue workers release them back to the wild, but not on the property near Elgin. The animals are released on private property with permission from the landowner. The organization has about 50 release sites far outside city limits on land that is at least 100 acres and has a water source that never runs dry. Deer require a release site of 1,000 acres. Release sites are rotated and never used more than once a year. Volunteers sometimes drive up to two hours to get to a release site.

The bald eagle arrived at the new Bastrop County rehab facility before the \$50,000 raptor flight cage was finished. So Austin Wildlife Rescue contacted a licensed raptor rehabilitator in East Texas who brought the eagle back to health.

Once the eagle is healed, Rennspies, the

Animal safety warning

What wildlife rescue workers want you to know:

- People who put out rodent bait not only poison rats and mice, but also other animals that eat the bait, such as hawks, owls, foxes, and bobcats. This spring, Austin Wildlife Rescue saved a baby great horned owl that was sick from poisoning. Glue traps for insects and rodents also capture birds, snakes and lizards.
- Research shows that a wild animal that is trapped and relocated has an 80 percent chance of dying because it is unfamiliar with the new environment and doesn't know where to find food and water or how to cross roads in the area.
- Never rescue a wild animal and keep it as a possible pet. State and federal laws protect nearly all wild animals. It is against the law to keep an animal or bird or nests, feathers, or eggs without permits.

Milam County game warden, will work with Austin Wildlife Rescue to release it. "The bird will be released back where I found it," Rennspies said.

"We protect the natural resources," he said. "We want our future generations to enjoy the same natural resources that the past and current generations have enjoyed." ■

2019 ANNUAL MEETING

80 years and 100,000 meters

Bluebonnet celebrates milestones, members re-elect 4 board members

By Will Holford

More than 600 Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative members and guests filled The Silos on 77 event center in Giddings on May 14 for the co-op's Annual Meeting. They enjoyed live music and took home 40 door prizes, in addition to conducting important business that culminated with the re-election of four directors.

Board Chairman Ben Flencher opened the business portion of the meeting by thanking Bluebonnet's members for their support during the past 80 years.

"It is an honor for me and my fellow directors to serve on Bluebonnet's board," Flencher said. "In my 32 years on Bluebonnet's Board of Directors, this is the most exciting one so far. We are celebrating our 80th anniversary and an-

other important milestone we achieved last month, surpassing the 100,000-meter mark for the first time in our history."

Flencher told meeting attendees that the co-op's directors are an extension of Bluebonnet's members because they know them from church, school, work, sports leagues and other civic activities.

"Because we have those relationships, every action that we take, every decision that we make, every vote that we cast is done with your best interests first and foremost," he said.

Three incumbent directors in this year's Board election were unopposed and elected by general consent in accordance with Bluebonnet's bylaws: Ben Flencher, District 5, Burleson County; Kenneth Mutscher, District 7, Washington County; and Milton Shaw, District 1, Caldwell, Gonzales, Guadalupe and Hays counties. Incumbent Director Debbi Goertz, District 3, Bastrop County, defeated three challengers in her bid for re-election. Sadly, shortly after his re-election, Mutscher passed away after a brief illness. Read more about his life and tenure on the Board on Page 23.

"I am honored to have received so much support from Bluebonnet's members," Goertz said. "The last few years serving on Bluebonnet's Board has been a whirlwind. I am looking forward to continuing the wonderful work this Board and all the dedicated employees are doing to serve our members."

Bluebonnet is a member-owned electric cooperative governed by an 11-member Board. Bluebonnet's members elect their directors, who serve staggered three-year terms. One-third of the 11-member Board of Directors is up for election every year. More than 6,900 members participated in this year's Annual Meeting, voting by proxy or casting votes during the meeting.

Flencher also introduced a video tribute to his predecessor as Board chairman, Director Rick Schmidt, who died in February. "Rick was one of Bluebonnet's strongest supporters. He led Bluebonnet through some of the co-op's most difficult, challenging times. His presence on our Board will be missed and can never truly be replaced," Flencher said.

General Manager Matt Bentke closed out the business portion of the meeting with a report on the co-op's service to its members and communities, and its financial and operational strengths. Highlights of Bluebonnet's performance included saving members \$3.4 million in wholesale power costs in 2018, and more than \$8.3 million in the past

Bluebonnet member John Gardner, above, talks about the solar panels on his Brenham-area home with member service representative Brittany Hardy. Before the meeting began, members stopped by displays and information tables where they could see vintage appliances, learn about tree trimming, see linemen's equipment or update their contact information. At right, Rosalinda Serrano of Cedar Creek talks with General Manager Matt Bentke before the meeting. Below, a crowd of more than 600 attended the meeting.



At left, Bluebonnet lineman Matt Hollingsworth, dressed in full gear, poses for a photo with Gertrude Nowak during Bluebonnet's Annual Meeting on May 14. The canvas behind them features a 1945 photo of the co-op's original headquarters in Giddings. Above, Patricia Rodriguez of Cedar Creek votes in the Board election. Sarah Beal photos



three years. Bluebonnet worked hard to significantly reduce its annual operating expenses and return \$5.4 million in capital credits to members last year, Bentke said.

"Capital credits are what makes us a co-op," he said. "We charge no more than is necessary, we run our business very efficiently, and anything left over goes back to our members in capital credits."

Bluebonnet's record growth in the past two years has benefitted members, Bentke said, by enabling the co-op to reinvest in its electric grid, technology, employees and communities, without raising rates.

"We haven't had a rate increase in several years, and we presented our Board a five-year plan with no distribution rate increase in it," he said. "Our expectations are high; our performance standards are high. We will continue to work hard to control expenses and be more efficient for our members every single day." ■



At left, Bluebonnet Board Chairman Ben Flencher begins the business of the Annual Meeting. Above, the winners of a 2010 Ford F-150 truck are Manuel Rodriguez of Dale and wife Rosalinda. The vehicle was retired from the co-op's fleet and was awarded after a random drawing from among the more than 6,900 members who voted in Board elections, either by proxy or at the Annual Meeting.

BLUEBONNET
wishes to say

*Thank
You!*

Your generous
donations toward door
prizes helped make our
Annual Meeting
a success!

BDG Trees LLC

Bracewell LLP

Burlin Power Line LLC

Carlton Industries

Chemical Weed Control

Glasco & Co.

Irby Construction

KBS Electrical Distributors

KD Johnson Inc.

Linetec Services

McCament Consulting

McCord Engineering
Consulting

M&S Engineering

The Nitsche Group

Over and Under LLC

Phillips Painting Co.

Rudd and Wisdom Inc.

Schneider Engineering

Techline Inc.

It's rodeo time!

Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative will be sending two journeyman lineman teams, 11 apprentices and several judges, barbecue team members and other volunteers to the 23rd annual Texas Lineman's Rodeo at Nolte Island Park near Seguin on July 20. The event gives line workers a chance to compete against others across the state and showcase some of the skills they perform on the job. The competition includes a pole climb with a raw egg in a bag, a pole-top rescue of a mannequin the size of an injured lineman, mystery events and a barbecue cook-off. Cheer on our teams in person or keep track of their progress via Bluebonnet's Facebook and Twitter pages throughout the day. Learn more about the event at tira.org.

'Every year we strive to practice more, but we prioritize and our members come first. The rodeo just makes us better and more prepared linemen,' says Randall Bownds, coordinator of the co-op's rodeo team, shown at right competing at last year's event. *Sarah Beal photo*



You're invited to our
80th
BIRTHDAY
celebration

**Enjoy refreshments, check out a display of vintage
appliances, take a picture in our photo booth and enter
for a chance to win a prize!**

Stop by one of our five member service centers
between 2 and 5:30 p.m. on these dates:

Tuesday, July 30 — Brenham

Thursday, Aug. 1 — Giddings

Monday, Aug. 5 — Lockhart

Wednesday, Aug. 7 — Manor

Friday, Aug. 9 — Bastrop

BONUS: If you come by between 3:30 and 5 p.m.,
you can meet a lineman dressed in full gear!

KENNETH MUTSCHER (1943-2019)

21-year Board member remembered as respected business, community leader

By Melissa Segrest

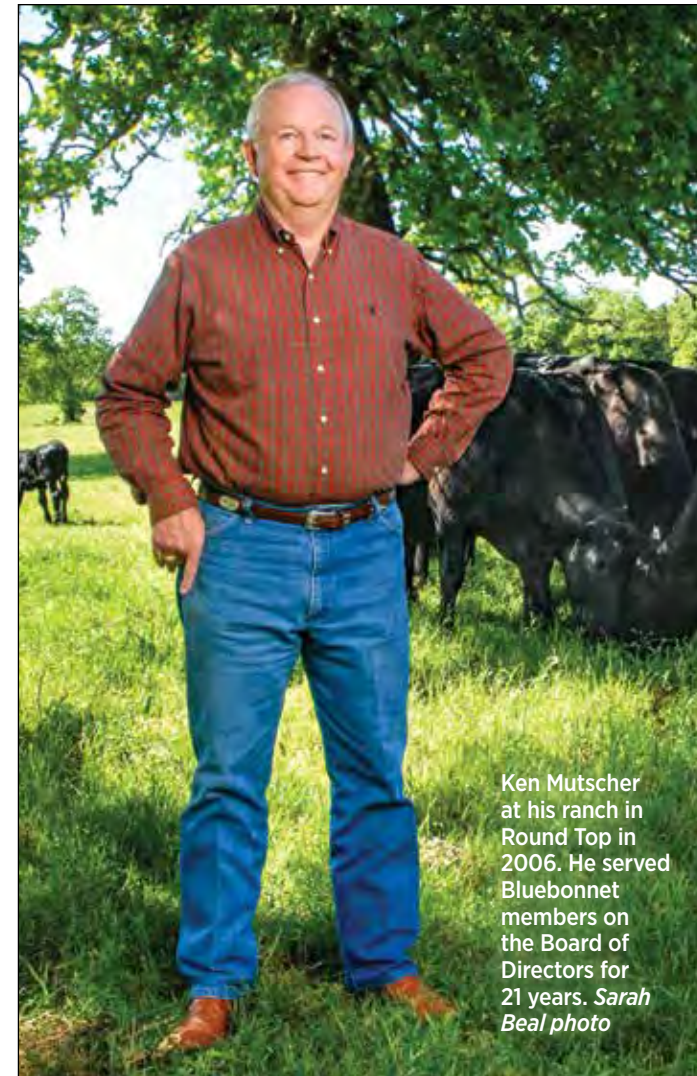
Kenneth Mutscher, a member of the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative Board of Directors for more than two decades and vice chairman since 2014, died May 20 after a brief illness. He was a respected business and community leader in Brenham and Washington County.

During his tenure on the Bluebonnet Board, he helped usher in significant technological advances in the face of rapid growth.

"Bluebonnet has lost more than 20 years of experience and history on our Board of Directors, but we have also lost a close friend," Board chairman Ben Flencher said. "Ken was so easy-going and level-headed. He was blessed with the ability to really think things through and make the right decision. That made him a valuable asset on our Board and for Bluebonnet's members. This is a tough loss for everyone who knew Ken."

Matt Bentke, Bluebonnet general manager and CEO, described Mutscher as "a kind and gracious gentleman. He was a tremendous leader and advocate for Bluebonnet's members. I will forever respect and miss Ken's thoughtfulness and the fiscally conservative approach he brought to every discussion and decision as a director."

Mutscher worked for the Texas State Board of Pharmacy, then established his own financial services business in downtown Brenham. After retiring from that job, he raised registered Brangus cattle on his ranch. Along with raising cattle, Mutscher enjoyed golf, fishing,



Ken Mutscher
at his ranch in
Round Top in
2006. He served
Bluebonnet
members on
the Board of
Directors for
21 years. *Sarah
Beal photo*

hunting, traveling and spending time with his grandson.

He was active in the region's community groups, including being a director of the Blinn College Foundation Board. He had served as president of the Brenham Noon Lions Club and director of the Washington County United Way. He was a tireless supporter of Washington County Little League and an elder and chairman of the building committee at Grace Lutheran Church in Brenham. Mutscher was an organizing member of the Bluebonnet Beef Breeders Association of Washington County and was

on a committee for the Washington County Fair.

He met his wife of 47 years, Sarita Dickmann, on a blind date to a Texas-Arkansas football game. Their son, Kevin, is an attorney in Brenham.

Mutscher had a strong work ethic, starting with a job cleaning the classroom at Grace Lutheran School, where he was a student. As a youth, he worked for a local furniture store and picked cotton in the summers.

Sports played an important role in his life. Mutscher lettered in football, baseball, basketball and track while at Brenham High School, where he gradu-

ated in 1961. He attended Blinn College for two years on a baseball scholarship and played on the school's first team to reach the National Junior College Tournament. That love for baseball led him to coach and manage Little League teams.

From Blinn, Mutscher transferred to the University of Texas at Austin, graduating with a degree in business administration in 1965. During his time at UT, he worked for the Texas Senate's sergeant-at-arms and, after graduation, worked for a year in the payroll department at Houston Lighting and Power. Then he returned to Brenham for an 11-year career as an investigator for the Texas State Board of Pharmacy. In that position, he traveled the state and worked with federal, state and local law enforcement. In addition to that career, he attained the rank of lieutenant during eight years with the National Guard.

Mutscher's knowledge of pensions, health insurance and auditing made him an invaluable member of the Bluebonnet Board. His goal was to represent Bluebonnet members and he believed it was the cooperative's responsibility to provide excellent service and low-cost power. He spoke of setting good policies and employing the best people as a win-win for Bluebonnet's members.

While on the board, he obtained the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Credentialed Cooperative Director status and completed the association's Board Leadership Program. Members had re-elected Mutscher to the Board at the cooperative's recent Annual Meeting.

He is survived by his wife, Sarita Mutscher; son Kevin Mutscher and his wife, Renee Mutscher; grandson Kaden Mutscher; sisters Rose Marie Prenzler and Carolyn Kuentler; and numerous aunts, uncles, nephews and great-nephews. ■

Bluebonnet, LCRA grants to benefit VFD, Burton playground

The Lower Colorado River Authority and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative provided grants to first responders and a school district in Bluebonnet's service area in May. The grants are part of LCRA's Community Development Partnership Program.

The Prairie Hill-Rocky Hill Volunteer Fire Department is buying a new all-terrain vehicle and other firefighting and rescue equipment thanks to a \$21,025 CDPP grant. This will mean improved access to rural areas during emergencies. From left are Evelyn Quebedeaux; Suzette Von Gontard; Emma Quebedeaux; Ron Arnold, firefighter; Doug Zwiener, deputy fire chief; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Delphine Moehlmann, firefighter; Doyle Dahmann, fire chief; Kelly Strader, firefighter; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet community representative; Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board member; and Kate Holman, LCRA regional affairs representative.



Children having fun at a popular community playground will receive some relief from the Texas sun this summer thanks to a \$10,000 CDPP grant. The Burton Independent School District will install a shade cover at Burton Elementary School's playground, which also is open to the community. Standing, from left, are Robert Mikeska, Bluebonnet Board member; Kate Holman, LCRA regional affairs representative; Kyle Merten, Bluebonnet community representative; Melinda Fuchs, Burton Elementary principal; Kirk Hanath, Washington County commissioner; Lori A. Berger, LCRA board member; Joy Fuchs, Washington County commissioner; Teresa Shuey, Burton ISD Parent Teacher Organization vice president; Dr. Edna Kennedy, Burton ISD superintendent; Felicity Shuey, student; Rachel Harmel, PTO secretary; Adison Harmel, student; and Augustus Shuey, student. Seated are students Devlin Douglas, Camryn Douglas and Austen Bostain.



Photos from the Lower Colorado River Authority

Share your cherished family heirloom recipes!

As Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, part of our focus has been the kitchen. It's the heart of the home, where rural Central Texans first added electric appliances in the 1930s and 1940s.

We want to share the wonderful recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation in your family. Send your most beloved recipe — an appetizer, a main course, a side dish or a dessert — with a short explanation of what it means to your

family to Lisa Ogle at lisa.ogle@bluebonnet.coop, 512-332-7968 or c/o Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative, 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop, TX 78602.

The deadline for recipe entries is Sept. 6. We'll publish many of your recipes in Texas Co-op Power magazine and online at bluebonnet.coop.

Need some incentive? We'll give away dozens of copies of "The Best of Typically Texas Cookbook" from the publishers of Texas Co-op Power magazine to recipe entrants.



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