

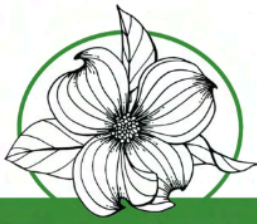
Issue 24
Winter 2024

East Texan

Texas Longhorns
The Old West's living symbol

Museum explores evolution
of Texas prisons





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The 2024 Best of East Texas winners will be announced in the spring edition of the East Texan. Scan the code to vote for your favorite people and places across East Texas.

For contest questions, concerns, or for more information please contact Ashley Keenan at ashley@polkcountypublishing.com



Dear readers,

As the new year approaches, we are encouraged to take another look at life and the parts we can play for ourselves, in our families and in our communities. Every new year feels like we're getting a bunch of fresh maps, showing us new places to check out and new ways to get there.

The new year isn't just about changing the date on the calendar; it's like a friendly suggestion saying, "Why not take a different path?" It's time to think about what really excites us and be open to finding some unexpected cool things along the way.

So here's to the new year—a big chance to add some new twists, create exciting stories, and discover awesome things about ourselves that we didn't know were there.

In all the excitement, let's remember that life's journey is like a colorful tapestry with different threads, each contributing to our unique experiences. As we step into the new year, let curiosity be our guide, leading us to unexplored corners and hidden treasures.

May the upcoming year be filled with resilience, curiosity, and the joy of discovery. Embracing the unknown allows us to welcome the beauty of surprises into our stories.

So, let's start this journey with gratitude for the lessons of the past, appreciating the wisdom gained from the twists and turns that have shaped us. By doing that, we can navigate the future with intention, carrying the richness of our journey.

Here's to the adventure ahead—a journey marked by exploration, discovery, and the potential for growth. May the new year unfold with resilience, wonder, and the pursuit of our most authentic selves.

Cheers to the journey ahead,

*~ Debbie Dickerson
East Texan editor*

On The Cover



Meet the staff

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Madison Bland

Becky Byley

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East Texan

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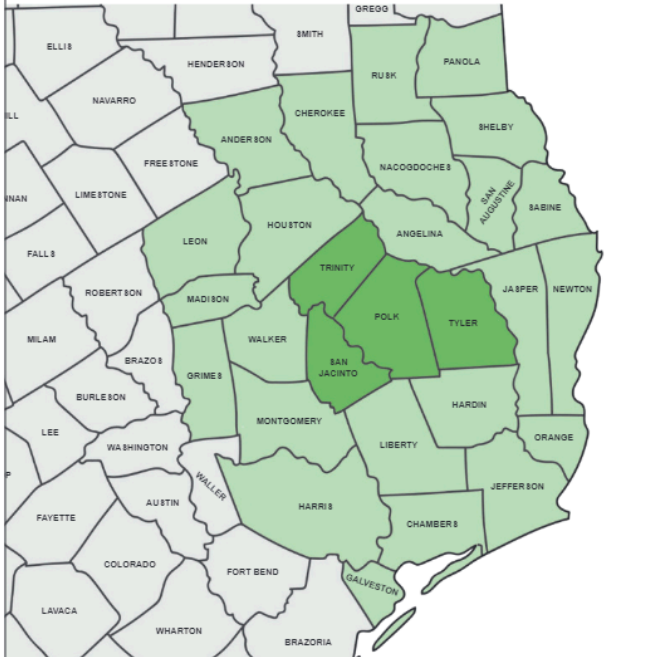


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I've driven by the Texas Prison Museum in Huntsville hundreds of times while en route to other places, always saying I'll stop and check it out one day. That day finally came and it was truly a fascinating experience. If you are a fan of the macabre, then this is your place. Or, if you are more like me, just interested in history with a healthy curiosity about what makes people tick, then this place is definitely for you.

The self-guided tour starts with an optional four-minute video narrated by Jim Willett, a retired senior warden and retired director of the Texas Prison Museum.

Following the video are a number of displays that explain

the evolution of the Texas Prison System into the modern-day Texas Department of Criminal Justice. It begins with "The Early Years" (1848-1871), when the Texas State Legislature passed an act that called for the construction of a state penitentiary in Huntsville. The first prisoner, a convicted cattle thief, entered the partially completed Texas State Penitentiary in 1849. The facility housed three prisoners by the year's end. The number grew to 75 in 1855, and by 1860, the population totaled 82 felons.

Next is "The Convict Lease Period" (1871-1912), when severe economic problems following the Civil War led to leasing the Texas Prison System to the highest bidding private company. "The Post Convict Lease Period" (1912-1948),





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saw the first attempt at reform when Marshall Lee Simmons was appointed general manager of the Texas Prison System and attempted to improve living and working conditions for both inmates and guards. Next is "An Era of Reform" (1948-1972) when the Texas Prison System was renamed the Texas Department of Corrections, the general manager's title was changed to director and an unprecedented era of prison reform occurred. Ironically, it was around this time that an inmate named David Ruiz filed a lawsuit against TDC, claiming that his eighth amendment rights that protect against cruel and unusual punishment were being violated, a lawsuit that plagued TDC for the next two decades.

"TDCJ: The Modern Penal System" (1972-present), tells of the beginning of a custody level known as administrative segregation, as well as overcrowding which led to the legislature embarking on the largest prison-building program in history. It also addresses the significant administrative change that occurred when the Texas Department of Corrections was merged with the Board of Pardons and Paroles and the Texas Adult Probation Commission to form a super agency called the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. The new agency coordinated corrections under the management of one board and an executive director.

The most interesting exhibit is called "Famous & Infamous Texas Inmates" which includes extensive information about Annie Lee Simmons, David Crosby, Juanita "Mama Candy" Barrow, Huddie Ledbetter, John Wesley Hill, Clyde Thompson, Henry Lucas and Bob Hope.

An exhibit on inmate uniforms features mannequins wearing several of the uniforms that have been worn over the years. There is also a display featuring several books that have been written by convicts, one published as far back as 1895.

Most of the exhibits are interesting, like the one with the old cameras used for mugshots, the fingerprinting contraption and the license plate-making machines. However, others are somewhat disturbing, such as the one that shows the various forms of shackles, padlocks, leg irons and ball and chains that have been used over the years and another that illustrates the myriad ways that inmates devise weapons using common everyday items.

The exhibits on "Capital Punishment in Texas" are especially chilling. Three forms of execution have been used since the founding of the Texas Prison System





in 1849. The first form of execution was hanging, which took place in the counties rather than the Texas Prison System from 1849 to 1924. The second was the electric chair, also known as "Old Sparky", which was used from 1924 to 1964 to execute 361 men. The third and last form is the lethal injection. The three-step process was used from 1982 until 2012. Hearn Yokamon was the last person to be executed using this method. A one-step lethal injection process continues to be used since 2012.

There is an entertaining exhibit on the Texas Prison Rodeo which was held from 1931-1986. What began as recreation for the inmates and entertainment for the prison staff and their families, over time grew into an annual event dubbed "The Wildest Rodeo in Texas." Held every Sunday in October, the event also drew an impressive list of celebrities, including Tennessee Ernie Ford, Brenda Lee, Jimmy Dean, Willie Nelson, Reba McEntire, John Wayne, Steve McQueen, Minnie Pearl, Freddy Fender, Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn, George Jones and Tammy Wynette, just to name a few.

Over the years, the Texas Prison System has embarked on numerous agricultural and industrial operations, from making bricks and license plates to crafting furniture, millwork and leather goods. Examples may be seen throughout the museum.

There is a display on the Windham School District, named for the late James M. Windham of Livingston, a 24-year member of the Texas Board of Corrections which is the school district's board of trustees. Today, the Windham School District offers

more than 40 career and technical programs designed to assist with the transition of reentering the community following incarceration.

Another interesting exhibit is the array of various items made by convicts. There is a complete chess set carved from soap, several pieces of statuary carved from soap, a basket and lid made from popsicle sticks, a guitar made from matchsticks, a cross made from matchsticks and even a handmade Prisonopoly board game. ■

- The Texas Prison Museum is located at 491 Hwy. 75 North in Huntsville. The telephone number is 936-295-2155 and the website is tprisonmuseum.org.
- Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays.
- Admission is \$7 for adults; \$5 for seniors 60 and over, active or retired military, first responders, TDCJ employees and SHSU students; \$4 for children six to 17; and free for children five and under.
- There is also a gift shop that features an array of books, clothing, woodwork, leather goods, metal works and other miscellaneous items.



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It ain't dying I'm talking about, **IT'S LIVING**

Melody Daigle is the proprietress of Black Creek Ranch, located on 50 acres of rolling hills and scenic beauty in Warren. The land has been in Melody's family since her daddy, C.C. Haygood, bought it back in 1975, and generation after generation of Haygoods, Seagos and Daigles have lived, worked, laughed, cried and loved there since the beginning.

It was Melody and her late husband Paul Seago who were the impetus for what Black Creek Ranch is today. They had a construction business and had a home in Beaumont. On the weekends, they would go to Warren to work on clearing the land, with the ultimate goal of retiring there. Paul died in July of 2000. Melody found him lying on the ground one morning. He had passed from a heart attack. She lost her son Daniel the following year in August. She spent some time crying over Paul and Daniel until she met her "swamp man," Steve Daigle, in 2006. She said "I started laughing, mainly because I couldn't understand what he was saying, his accent was so thick. I couldn't stop laughing, and I've been laughing at him (and with him) ever since."

Steve had lost his wife of 25 years in 1999 and was having a hard time. Melody said, "You don't expect to lose your soulmate. Steve and I both walked on the wild, and literally, crazy side until 2006. We started out pretty rocky, but here we are, 17 years later."

Melody recently mused, "We all have highs and lows in life, some certainly more than others, but we are all just trying to make it. No matter how big your car is, or how much money sits in your bank account, we all bleed red and will eventually fade from this earth. Death has no discrimination, and neither should your life. Be kind to others. We are all here to serve ... be humble and keep the faith going."

Black Creek Ranch has been, and continues to be, a work in progress. Melody wanted to leave something positive and go out with a smile. "I want to know that I left something good, that I accomplished something. If I ever let modern in here at the ranch, it's going to kill the whole place. I want it say 1800s. I don't want anything to look modern. The sentimental value of this place can't be touched. It's just amazing what I see when I look at it. What makes it different is that everything that's been put here since Steve and I got married has either been given to us or gotten out of a junkyard or has come from his place in Louisiana after we tore it down. It's been years of weddings, reunions, showers, memorials and birthday parties to making sure all the Ts were crossed, but I would always get to the last thing and have to stop." She added, "Someone suggested that I open the ranch up and start doing things, but I wanted to make sure it was going to work. I was driving towards something, but I really didn't know what. The heritage that's here is mind blowing. There's not a place that I can point that doesn't have a story, where it came from, or what's behind it."

**"Life is good
here at
Black Creek."**

~ Melody Daigle





Melody stopped long enough to hold an official grand opening with a ribbon cutting in March of last year with the Tyler County Chamber of Commerce. She commented at the time, "Giving back to the community is what it's all about. All we have to do now is enjoy the fruits of our labor."

When Melody says "our" she is including Steve, her son and daughter-in-law Michael and Kim, and her grandson Michael II (affectionately known as Two). This is indeed a family affair. Michael and Kim have lived in the house that Melody's daddy built on the property many years ago and raised their two children there, Michael II and Lindsey. Lindsey made Melody a great grandmother with the arrivals of Addison in 2015 and Emerson in December 2023. Grandson Michael was born on his daddy's birthday. "I've called him Two since the day he was born," Melody added.

Family has always been the most important piece of the puzzle for Melody. Haygoods, Seagos, and Daigles have

claimed "Haygood Hill" as their own for five generations. Melody added, "This has always been known as Haygood Hill."

Visitors can tread trails to the past at Black Creek Ranch. Melody has succeeded in creating her own east Texas version of Lonesome Dove. She said, "The movie Lonesome Dove was so special to me and Paul. He was 14 years older than me and all the things old Gus would say in the movie resonated with us. Paul reminded me so much of Woodrow in the movie and then fast forward, here's this old coonass (Steve), that reminds me of Gus. All my critters are named for the show. One of the signs I made is at the Fort Worth Stockyards. I painted the dove over the cabin, and I was always told you couldn't tell mine from the original."

Melody and Steve invite you to come and discover the rustic beauty and charm of Black Creek Ranch. The open-air pavilion and Lonesome Dove cabin are awaiting your arrival. The Daigles have pulled out all the stops to make this a visit you

[above far left] "Free Range" Longhorns on the ranch.

[above left] Inside the pavilion; bar top designed and created by Terrell Haygood.

[below left] The Lonesome Dove Bridal Cabin at Black Creek.

[below] Black Creek sign welcoming visitors to the ranch.

Photos courtesy of Melody Daigle and Black Creek Ranch



will remember always. Black Creek Ranch is steeped in history and surrounded by rolling hills and a scenic lake. It is truly like you have stepped back in time. Melody has orchestrated everything down to the authentic cow skulls and barbed wire decorating the pavilion to ensure her guests experience the old west in the 21st century. Black Creek Ranch is not just a venue, it's a partner in creating your special day. Black Creek Ranch doesn't just host events, they create unique experiences, ensuring every detail tells a part of your own unique story. They create the magic, you create the memories.

Black Creek boasts a spacious open-air pavilion, the "Hitchin' Post," a party cabin, the "Lonesome Dove," the Silver Dollar Showroom, a full-service kitchen, the "Chuckwagon," and an outdoor lounge with firepit, the "Winchester." A new gathering space, the "Longhorn," is scheduled to be completed this summer. Don't be surprised to see peacocks roaming the property. They have traditional colored ones, and a pair of beautiful white peacocks. Melody raises Great Pyrenees. The breeding pair are Gus and Maggie, and they love to great visitors upon their arrival. There are longhorns, chickens, pigs and even donkeys. Black Creek is a working

ranch, and everyone has a job to do. Melody and Steve live on the property and are almost always available to answer any questions.

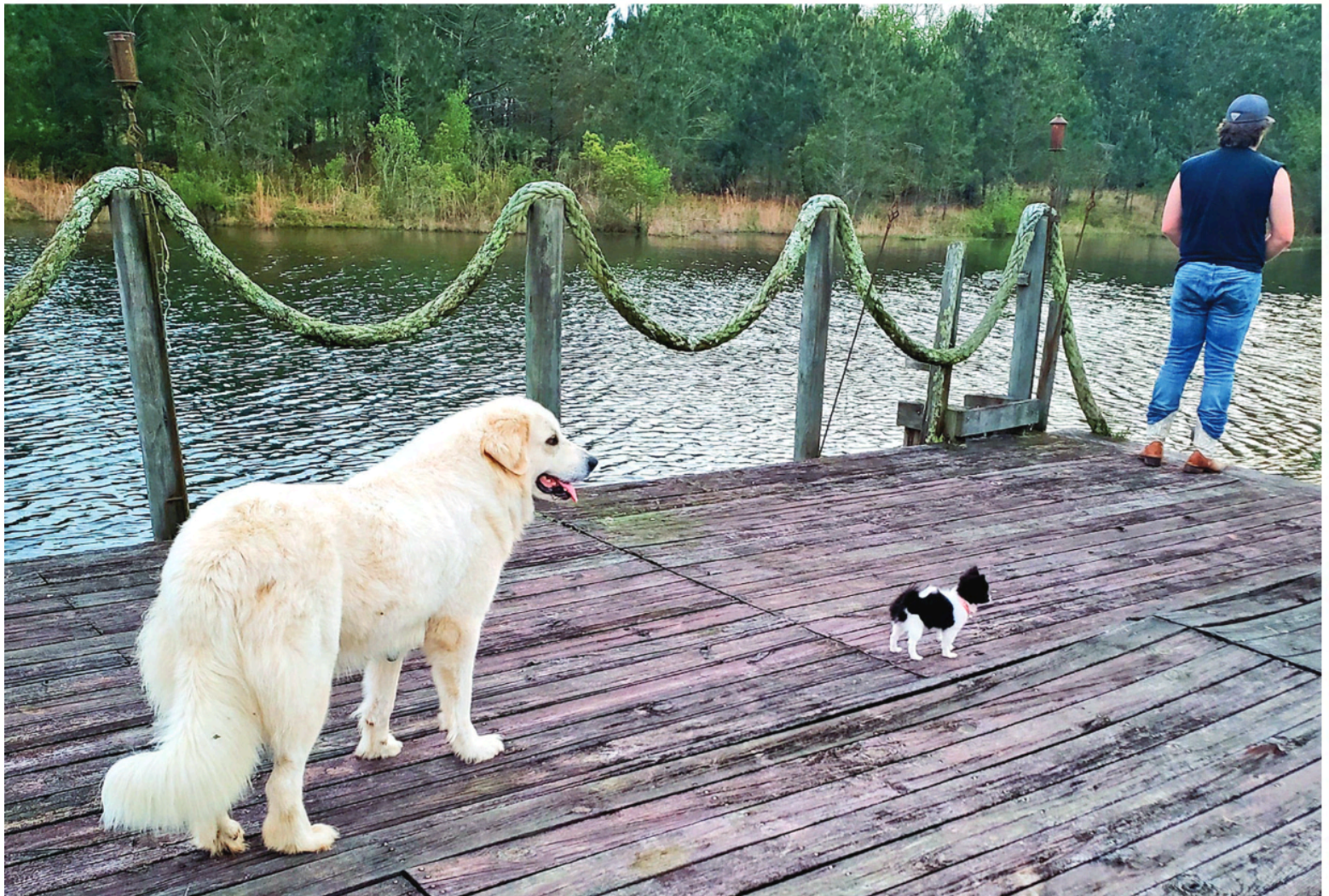
Melody has a sign leading up the drive to the ranch. The front is the logo for Black Creek Ranch. The other side of the sign, which you see upon leaving, says simply, "It's been quite a party, ain't it, Woodrow?" ■

Black Creek Ranch is located at
358 CR 1525 in Warren.

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for more information.

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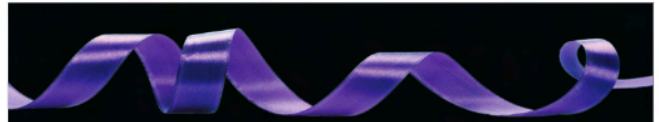
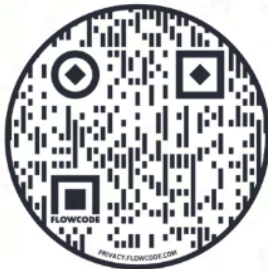
Maggie and friends fishing at the pond. Photo courtesy of Melody Daigle and Black Creek Ranch





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There's GOOD FOOD in all directions

No matter which direction you may be headed in the new year, I'm going to share with you some restaurant suggestions and tell you about some excellent meals that I've enjoyed recently in New Caney, Woodville and Waco.

Heading south?

One rare Saturday with nothing on the calendar, we drove down to New Caney to see a couple of movies – “Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour” for me and Daughter and “Killers of the Flower Moon” for Hubby. We wanted to get a quick bite first so we went to Dave's Hot Chicken, a fairly new place in Valley Ranch Town Center that we'd been wanting to try. The menu itself is pretty simple and straightforward. Basically, there are chicken tenders and chicken sliders and you choose your level of heat from the following – no spice, lite mild, mild, medium, hot, extra hot or reaper. Sides from which to choose include fries, cheese fries, mac and cheese and kale slaw. Various combos of all of the above are available.

I opted for Dave's #3 which was one tender and one slider with fries. The tender was served with sliced bread, pickles and Dave's sauce and the slider was served with kale slaw, pickles and Dave's sauce. We love anything hot and spicy and pride ourselves on our ability to withstand high levels of heat so we all ended up selecting 'hot' as the level of heat for our chicken.

We certainly didn't leave disappointed. The meal was absolutely fabulous. The chicken pieces were huge, crunchy and cooked perfectly and the heat level was just right in a 'hurts so good' kind of way. We all agreed that if we'd opted for the 'extra hot,' we probably wouldn't have been able to eat it. Every component was just perfect – the bread, the sauce, the kale slaw. And I'm not a big pickle person, but these fresh, thick-cut pickles were wonderful. Daughter said the mac and cheese was hands down the best mac and cheese she's ever had

at a fast food place.

I'm definitely looking forward to a return visit. Hubby and Daughter went back on a recent Saturday on their way to see another movie, “The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes.” I would have loved to have gone with them, but was facing impending deadlines for several different projects so I stayed home and worked.

Heading east?

Knowing that I'm a longtime fan of musical artists Shake Russell and Dana Cooper, when a co-worker discovered that Dana would be playing a show at the Emporium Stage in Woodville one Wednesday night not long ago, he made sure to let me know. Dana Cooper in Woodville? No way! We don't typically go out on weeknights, but with Woodville only a 30-minute drive away, we decided to go, knowing that we'd be able to get home at a decent time. We were meeting two other couples and were going to get some supper before the show. Our friend suggested either Red Tailz Woodville or Elijah's Cafe. We weren't familiar with either so we said it made no difference to us. We ended up at Elijah's Cafe, a down home country-cooking cafe serving scratch cooking, daily specials and hearty dishes like fried catfish, chicken fried steak and pot roast. Most of the entrees come with two sides and there is a plethora from which to choose – baby carrots, baked potato, black eyed peas, broccoli, broccoli and cheese, corn, fried okra, fries, green beans, hot cinnamon apples, squash casserole. I opted for the “Sweet Heat Grilled Catfish,” which was grilled catfish topped with mango habanero sauce and homemade pico de gallo over a seasoned bed of rice. For my sides, I selected black eyed peas and squash casserole. Hubby ordered chicken and dumplings. One person selected the pot roast, another fried catfish and another the burger basket. Everything was amazing and I would recommend Elijah's to anyone heading to Woodville and looking for a home cooked meal.

[right] Dave's #3 is one tender and one slider with fries. The tender was served with sliced bread, pickles and Dave's sauce and the slider was served with kale slaw, pickles and Dave's sauce. Photo by Emily Banks Wooten





Heading northwest?

We spent the Thanksgiving holidays with my brother and sister-in-law at their beautiful place, HiBanks Ranch, south of Waco. Everyone contributed something for the delightful Thanksgiving meal that we thoroughly enjoyed. However, ready for something different from the standard Thanksgiving fare the following day, we decided to have brunch at a relatively new place in old downtown Waco called Maria Mezcaleria, next to the historic Waco Hippodrome Theatre. The renovated old building was beautiful with deep peacock teal-colored walls and golden accents. As it was brunch and we were "on holiday," several in our party ordered mimosas. Hubby and I, however, each selected one of our guilty pleasures, Mezcal Old-Fashioneds, and they were absolute smoky perfection.

One person selected the lunch carnitas, one the enchiladas suizas and a couple ordered the omelets Mexicano. I ordered chilaquiles en salsa verde de frijol which were fried corn tortilla strips served in a black bean and green chile salsa, topped with queso fresco, red onions and sour cream, two eggs over easy, refried beans and potatoes. I can honestly say that meal was one of the best meals I've ever eaten and I truly look forward to going back next time we're in Waco. And my Mother, who is a bit of an omelet aficionado, said the eggs in her omelet were cooked the best of any omelet she's ever eaten.

I definitely recommend all three of these places if you find yourself in that particular area and would love to hear about any places, new or old, that you may have discovered lately. ■

• Dave's Hot Chicken is located at 21690 US Hwy. 59 Ste. 100 in New Caney.

• Elijah's Café is located at 810 S. Magnolia St. in Woodville.

• Maria Mezcaleria is located at 724 Austin Ave. Ste. 102 in Waco.



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Not long ago, amid the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, Hubby and I found ourselves at Fredonia Brewery. As we walked up to the entrance right as it was opening at 5 p.m. on a Wednesday, there was already a line to get in. We took that as a good sign.

Located in historic downtown Nacogdoches, the oldest town in Texas, Fredonia Brewery opened to the public on March 4, 2017 and is the first brewery in the town since the 1850s. The brewers and beertenders will proudly tell you that everything they offer is “brewed with the independent spirit that created Texas.”

It is open Wednesdays through Sundays, offering a variety of beers on tap to enjoy on-premise as well as to-go six-packs and growlers to take home and enjoy. After reviewing the extensive selection, Hubby selected Bull Pine Pale Ale, an American pale ale with a 6.3% ABV (alcohol by volume). It was described as “like a strong tall pine tree standing out from the others in the forests of East Texas. Copper in color, strong and smooth American Pale Ale with a hops line up including Warrior, Columbus, Centennial, and of course Cascade.” I chose the Nine Flags Amber Ale, an American amber ale, also with a 6.3% ABV. It was described as “red brick main street, red dirt of Nacogdoches, red of the Fredonia and Texas flag, this amber ale pays tribute to them all as well as the nine flags that have flown over Nacogdoches throughout the last 300 years. Bold malt forward, mahogany red in color, with a solid hops finish to balance out all those beautiful crystal malts.”

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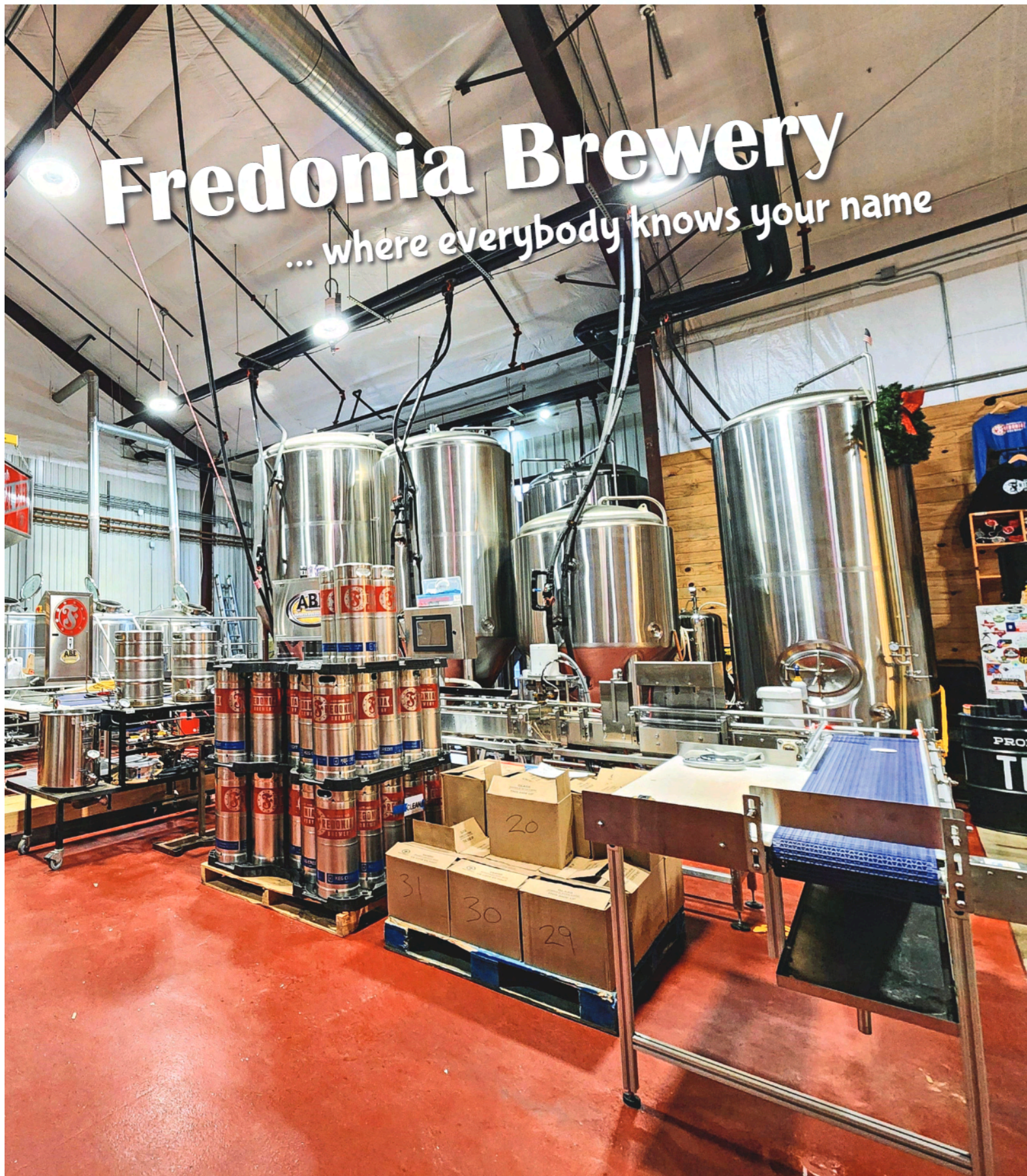
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Fredonia Brewery

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The taproom is beautiful and immaculately clean. There's a black walnut bar, pine trim throughout and gorgeous handmade tables to sit and enjoy your selection and watch the production floor which is fully visible from the climate-controlled seating area. There's even a selection of board and card games on hand and an impressive collection of over 2,400 cans displayed in a glass wall, collected since 1959 by John Allerding and his family from Loudonville, Ohio. The outdoor beer garden has covered seating on the patio and under the pergolas.

Rebellion Pizza Kitchen, located onsite, is open Thursdays through Saturdays. There is also a rotation of food trucks that come out Wednesdays through Sundays. You may check the event calendar on the website to see which food truck will be there on what day. In fact, the event calendar provides a wealth of information, including reminders of trivia night on Thursdays and who will be providing the live music on Fridays and Saturdays.

In addition to the two that we chose, other brews offered year round include: Professional Texan, Banita Blonde, Angry Axe IPA, Hefeweizen, Curb Feeler, Pine Cove, Macho Milk, Invictus, Le Bombe Saison, Purple Lights, College Haze and Big Ricky. Seasonal brews include: Brewberry, Marzen, Stone Fort, Lanana Lager, Frickengruven and Maureen Irish Red. Limited releases include: Funky Dunkie, and Fruiter McGavin.

We truly enjoyed our visit and will most likely return. We were amazed at the number of people there on a Wednesday evening. Most were locals, a few college students and several folks that looked like possible retirees. There was even a couple there who had come all the way from Wisconsin to sample the brews. ■

Fredonia Brewery is located at 138 N. Mound St. in Nacogdoches. Hours are 5-9 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, 4-9 p.m. Fridays, noon to 10 p.m. Saturdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays. The brewery is both kid and dog-friendly, although they ask that dogs be kept on a leash for safety. The phone number is 936-305-5125 and the website is fredoniabrewery.com.

[left] This is just a portion of a collection of over 2,400 cans collected since 1959 by John Allerding and his family from Loudonville, Ohio that is displayed in a glass wall.

[above right] Bull Pine Pale Ale, an American pale ale with a 6.3% ABV, and Nine Flags Amber Ale, an American amber ale, also with a 6.3% ABV.

[lower right] Merch offered for purchase includes a variety of T-shirts, as well as to-go six-packs and growlers.

Photos by Emily Banks Wooten



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Bloom where you are

In this day and age of a democratized model of how musicians get their music out to the public, regional scenes have thrived, and many uber-talented bands and artists have made a comfortable living without even leaving the borders of their home states.

The trade-off is that in addition to the heavy lifting of songwriting and performing, as well as bankrolling and producing their own records, acts have to wear a head-spinning array of hats, oftentimes, to make ends meet.

Promotion, booking, bandleading, etc., etc., often fall on one or two musicians. Beaumont's Courtney Hale-Revia has taken that model of multi-tasking to another level. Not only is she immersed in all of the above, and not only does she have a brilliant new record out, but she has managed to open her own venue, and create a haven for great songs and songwriters in the region.

Her latest creation, *Growing Pains*, is, in essence, the kind of work that those who work in the medium of the written word would kill to write. The record, which is her third long-player, through its slate of 12 songs, has all the qualities of a really great novel of development. In a way, it's her memoir, set to melody, but through its songs, resonates with a barrage of universal truths.

At the center of it all is a message of "blooming where you are," Hale-Revia said. It is mentioned in several songs on the album, and Hale-Revia said that everything in her artistic acumen goes back to that sentiment, which comes from a song written by her father, a late, great tunesmith named James Truman Hale.

Hale died in 2021, from complications arising from COVID, but his life was as rich as many of the more than 2,000 songs he penned. Hale-Revia said that watching him play live all his life inspired her to become a singer-songwriter herself in an area of Texas that, she said, needs more venues for original artists.

She also has drawn inspiration and influence from the many other hats she has worn through her years of being a mother, a wife, a friend and a teacher. "Blooming where you are" has been a message running throughout her life since her father wrote a song around that very idea, and it's a thread running through many of her songs, including "Rainbows at Night" and "One Way Out," both on *Growing Pains*. "It's best to bloom where you're found," Hale-Revia sings on the latter tune.

Another song on her album, "Coffee Beans," speaks to her developmental steps as a songwriter. It uses a free-wheelin', almost Dylan-esque style to showcase a paean to a popular Beaumont musicians' hangout, The Logon Café, which has hosted a long-running Wednesday night open mic, where

**“Our motto is ‘no empty seats.’
Everyone should feel comfortable
visiting with the performers and
getting to know them.”**

Hale-Revie said was the first place she shared her music outside of church. She said the venue “holds a special place for many and I’m glad to finally record this song written 20 years ago.”

In that process of blossoming, Revie took her lifelong love of music and observations of the southeast Texas area’s need for more songwriter-friendly venues to heart and did something about it. She and her husband Lance opened the 7 Oaks Event Garden in LaBelle, near Beaumont, which offers an oasis to music lovers in a personal setting. The venue has hosted such notable artists as Drew Kennedy, Walt Wilkins, Susan Gibson and many others, as well as more regional favorites like Chad Richard and Britt Godwin.

The centerpiece of the property is a house that Lance’s grandfather built in 1932, in which the couple began hosting house concerts in 2018. Hale-Revie said that an epiphany of sorts came to her after she played a gig opening for Austin-based singer/songwriter Bob Schneider in 2016 at Courville’s in Beaumont. “I realized what it felt like to truly be heard as a singer/songwriter. I no longer wanted to play in bars and restaurants,” she said.

Coupled with her young years of listening to her father craft original songs, those experiences led her to providing a place for singer/songwriters to ply their trade. Over time, the venue expanded and a building was constructed in the garden on the property to accommodate more people.

“Our motto is ‘no empty seats,’” she said. “Everyone should feel comfortable visiting with the performers and getting to know them.”

Everything around 7 Oaks has a homegrown feel, and it is evident that Courtney and Lance have both expended a tremendous amount of love’s labor into every aspect of the venue, and it’s a whole vibe that extends to the booking schedule that is curated. All of the artists who play 7 Oaks put the art of songwriting first and foremost.

That focus, so essential to Hale-Revie, puts her in a sort of rarefied air of venerated venue owners and promoters who know good songs because they, themselves, are songwriters. The late Kent Finlay, of Cheatham Street Warehouse in San Marcos as well as Wrecks Bell, the former proprietor of Galveston’s Old Quarter Acoustic Café, spring to mind as spiritual brethren. More recently, another younger artist, Dallas Burrow, opened the Redbird Listening Room in New Braunfels, which, incidentally, Hale-Revie has played, and Burrow has performed at 7 Oaks.

Courtney Hale-Revie has the goods as an artist, in her own right, and *Growing Pains* is full of displays of that. The record, which was recorded at studios in Beaumont, Houston and Port Neches, showcases a variety of moods; weaving “from serious to fun and back again,” according to musician and promoter Donnie Courville, who helped establish the annual Big Thicket Hogs and Strings Festival, at which Hale-Revie has performed.

Courville said of the album’s sound that it creates “just the kind of place that someone would want to travel to if they had to go and figure out life’s intricacies.”

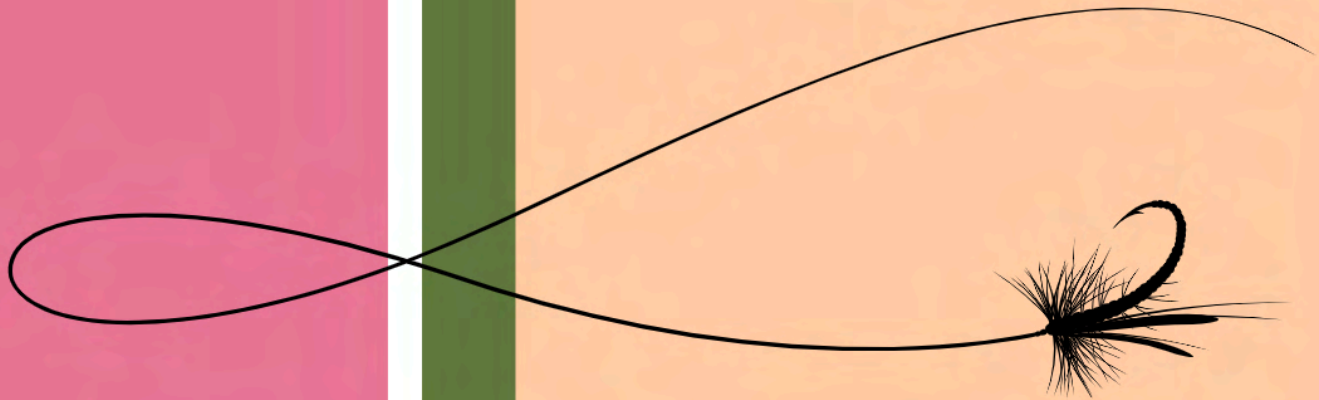
On the record, there is an autobiographical song about home (“7 Oaks”) that sprung from a conversation Hale-Revie had with songwriter Susan Gibson, who asked her why she was doing what she was at 7 Oaks. “I told her ‘when the road out of town doesn’t pave itself like you thought it would, you learn to bring the world to you,’” she said. ■

- Courtney Hale-Revie’s latest record “Growing Pains” is available from all major digital music services.
- 7 Oaks Event Garden is located at: 14865 Garner Rd, Beaumont, TX 77705; phone: 832-594-7526. Check out the venue’s website 7oakseventgarden.com for info on shows or other particulars.





FOR



A flash of silver and pink broke the surface of the pond and the small hook and bait went airborne on a flight of fantasy – twisting, flipping and jumping. The Rainbow Trout rose, giving the young angler the thrill of a lifetime. Others in the family soon repeated the scenario. During the prime late fall/early winter all over Texas, this scene repeats itself annually with the Texas Parks and Wildlife (TP&W) Rainbow Trout stocking program.

Usually starting in mid-November, TP&W stocks local freshwater streams, rivers and ponds with Rainbow Trout.

They do this to provide a winter fishery and recreational opportunities for anglers. During the 2023-24 season, TP&W intends to stock 350,000 Rainbow Trout between eight to 12 inches throughout the state. TP&W hatcheries purchase the trout they stock as the fish prefer a temperature range of 32- to 70-degree water conditions – something

*A trout is a moment of beauty
known only to those who seek it.*
Arnold Gingrich



the Texas climate cannot provide. Purchased fishing licenses with freshwater stamps provide the funding for this undertaking.

Rainbow Trout have been commercially farmed since 1870. They live four to six years in the wild, but the trout stocked in Texas waters (with the exception of the tail race of Canyon Lake on the Guadalupe) will either be caught and eaten, or dead at the end of the season. The largest Rainbow Trout ever caught (and this was not in Texas) weighed in at 57 pounds. Rainbows in the wild spawn in the spring of their third or fourth year and can produce 200-8,000 eggs.

The John D. Parker East Texas Hatchery located in Jasper County just below the Sam Rayburn reservoir will be stocking the area ponds. According to their website, this hatchery came online in 2012 and produces up to 5 million fingerlings (Florida largemouth bass, channel catfish, blue catfish and sunfish) each year for stocking the state. They offer hatchery tours each Thursday at 2 p.m. and Friday at 10 a.m. for groups of 10 or fewer. But call before you go (409-698-2052) and let them know you are coming.

November 21 was the day the Parker East Texas hatchery received their quota of Rainbow Trout. From the hatchery, the fish will be distributed to area bodies of water. For times and locations, please check the TP&W website: https://tpwd.texas.gov/fishboat/fish/management/stocking/trout_stocking.phtml

There is no size limit but and the bag limit for the Rainbow Trout per person is five. Check the website for tips and updates on the stocking schedule.

Rainbow Trout are wonderful to eat. They have a mild flavor and delicate texture, are a lean protein chock-full of Omega-3 fatty acids and are nutrient-dense. You don't even need to scale them. They are great for teaching kids how to fish. There's nothing on a rainbow trout that can hurt you so they are great for young anglers. On light tackle, they pull on the line like a freight train.

So, what do you need if you are on the hunt for a Rainbow Trout dinner? First, you need to purchase a freshwater fishing license and a freshwater stamp. Children under 12 do not need a license. Roy and I always used ultra-light tackle with a very small hook. We preferred a circle hook rather than a treble hook



that some websites recommend, since Rainbows feed just off the bottom, but not on the bottom. So, use a small weight to get the bait down, but with small floating bait on the hook itself. Or, you can fish under a bobber. We've had luck both ways. You can purchase all kinds of commercial bait, Berkley Power Bait, salmon eggs, etc. but I recommend

something really simple you probably have around the house. Take a small can of corn, put it in a bag, add about a tablespoon of salt and the same of vanilla extract. (The salt makes the corn tougher,

so it stays on the hook longer, and the vanilla provides the scent.) Let the concoction sit at least overnight in the refrigerator before your planned trip. Now grab a handful of mini marshmallows. Bait your hook with a couple of grains of corn and add a marshmallow. Go fish.

I recommend locating the body of water you want to fish in and be there EARLY – right after the stocking. Rainbows do not bite well in direct sunny days – so morning and evening or cloudy days will help you catch your limit. The fish, once acclimated, will either have voracious appetites and you can limit out quickly – or they get lockjaw, in which case, come back the next day. They are slippery, so bring a towel to hold them with when unhooking them. Bring an ice chest to put them in and don't forget your license.

I'm not going to tell you how to clean them, because most of you know that already, but you can check out how to do it online if you don't. Rainbows can be cooked any number of ways. I've had them with lemon juice, a little butter and salt and pepper cooked over a fire in a foil boat, and I've made Trout Amandine at home. I've also had them fried in cornmeal. Just a warning though, for those of you who don't like bones – Rainbows have 272 of them – so beware of those when you are eating. The bones are pretty easy to miss so you have to be aware and work around them. And as in all salmonoids, there is a trick to getting the spine (and most of the rib cage) out of the fish with one tug. But that's another story.

The Rainbows will be waiting, so find your closest pond, gather your kids and go fishing. Enjoy. Tight lines! ■

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MAGA

A few years ago I caught sight of something in the parking lot of the local retail temple known as Walmart that stuck with me.

It was a slogan, rendered in red, white and blue lettering, on a white background. “Make America Grateful Again” is what it said.

The phrase was an obvious callback to the campaign slogan/mantra of the cat who was in the White House at the time, and the font utilized signaled to me that it was a bit of merchandise from that most jammin’ and unique of American roots/psychedelic/rock bands, the Grateful Dead.

Now I’m something of a fan of the Dead; I mean who couldn’t love Workingman’s Dead and American Beauty, right? This sticker, though, transcended my fairweather-Deadhead self.

Later on, in a show of serendipity, I ran into the owner of said bumper sticker (I knew this, or assumed it, because he had a shirt stating the same statement, rendered in the same font with the same skull motif) and made his acquaintance. Even had that chance meeting not occurred, the bumper sticker would still have left an impact.

I love stickers, and to me, they are right up there with newspaper advertising as an effective, and occasionally thought-provoking, medium by which to convey a message.

I come from a DIY background of promoting music gigs and found that getting stickers printed up for shows was always an essential part of a band or artist’s promotional toolbox. I can’t count the number of bands/artists and venues I’ve gotten curious about (and later checked out) because I saw a logo or name printed upon a sticker.

As I write this, we’re deep into the holiday season, and

nearing the homestretch that’ll find us all “Auld Lang Syne-ing” off on another year while clutching flutes (or plastic red Solo cups) full of champagne. One of the holidays we celebrate as a nation is the officially sanctioned, solitary day that all good taxpaying Americans are required to sit down, break bread and wax faux-emotively about what all they’re thankful for, golly gee. The problem is that limiting the celebration of gratitude to one holiday that, let’s face it, is just a mandate by the cranberry and turkey lobbies, is disingenuous at best.

Yet here we are. So many of us seem to only mouth words of gratitude at the dinner table on Thanksgiving or at Christmas, only to return to wallowing in woe-is-me pronouncements as soon as the last piece of pumpkin pie is gobbled down and the last corny joke from that weird uncle who smells kinda funny is chuckled at.

Several years ago, a leading scientist, Robert Emmons, wrote that being grateful is good for our bodies as well as our minds. Emmons has studied the effects of gratitude on the physical health of humans for more than a decade and posited that a host of benefits were possible with those who practice gratitude, such as stronger immune systems, fewer aches and pains and lower blood pressure. In the mental health column, Emmons reported findings of higher levels of positivity, optimism and happiness.

Celebrate the present, for it’s all we know that we have for sure and hail the good around you. Let’s be grateful for one another and this time that we are afforded. “Make America Grateful Again,” indeed.

Whether it’s a bite-size little koan on a sticker or a parable spelled out in scripture, there are wise words all around us -- reminding us what it means to be human -- that would do us a universe of good to consume. ■

Chipotle Lime Twice-Baked Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes aren't just for the holidays. They are a healthy and versatile addition to the menu any time of the year. These cheesy, flavorful but not-too-spicy sweet potatoes are super easy to prepare, hearty enough to be a meatless main dish and taste great!

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 3 medium sweet potatoes, cleaned and pierced in several places with a fork | 2 green onions, chopped (plus extra for topping) |
| 1/3 cup plain Greek yogurt (non-fat is fine) | 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro (plus extra for topping) |
| 1 chipotle pepper, minced (from a can of chipotle peppers in adobo sauce) | Zest and juice from 1 lime |
| 1 tablespoon of the adobo sauce (from the can of peppers) | 3/4 cup freshly-shredded Cheddar cheese |
| | Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper to taste |

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place the prepared sweet potatoes on a baking sheet that has been lined with foil and bake for 45-60 minutes until tender. Allow potatoes to cool slightly.
2. Cut the potatoes in half lengthwise and scoop the filling into a bowl, leaving about 1/4 inch border around the skin.
3. In the bowl, mash the sweet potato filling. Stir in Greek yogurt, lime zest and juice, green onions, cilantro, chipotle, adobo sauce, 1/4 cup of the cheese and salt and pepper. Divide the filling evenly back into the potato skins. Top with the remaining cheese and place back in the oven for 15-20 minutes, until the cheese is melted and the filling is heated through.
4. Top with extra chopped green onions and cilantro and, if desired, with a little Greek yogurt or sour cream.





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TEXAS LONGHORNS

The Old West's living symbol

Texas history is, in many ways, defined in the minds of those who drink in the state's illustrious past, by iconic images. Those indelible sights color in so many ways how Texas and its people are viewed around the world. A pre-eminent example of this is the Texas Longhorn, the living symbol of the Old West.

The breed has been hoofing it through the Lone Star State for centuries now, and its origin here likely dates back to the late 17th century, when Texas longhorns descended from cattle imported by Spaniards. As explorers and settlers tamed the Texas frontier and more cattle arrived, more cattle escaped, and it is from these animals that the longhorn began its history in Texas.

Longhorned Iberian cattle first appeared in North America in the late 15th century, when Spanish settlers who accompanied Christopher Columbus brought a few of them into the Antilles. Gradually, over time, they migrated with the Spaniards, as the explorers, settlers and mission priests arrived in Texas. In the early 1700s when Franciscan missionaries began building a chain of missions through the San Antonio River valley out to Goliad, they brought plenty of livestock to sustain them during travels, but also as seedstock for settlers.

Written accounts from travelers in Texas from that time period include stories about feral cattle, which were considered game animals, but said to be difficult to hunt. These were first referred to as "Texas cattle" and later "Texas Longhorns" by travelers, and after Texas won its independence from Mexico in 1836, the cattle continued to roam, wild and free, without human intervention, until the end of the Civil War.

The legendary J. Frank Dobie's classic work "The Longhorns" documents this history, of how long-horned cattle first entered Texas. Dobie writes that by the late 18th century, the missions' influence had declined greatly and cattle-raising was mostly the purview of private ranchers, many of whom had acquired land grants. It has been estimated that by 1860 between four to six million feral long-horned cattle could be found in Texas. The longhorns were often hunted for their meat and hides, like deer and buffalo, and this likely helped to evolve the breed's wild habit and instinct.

[right] Always a friendly, very Texan sight - longhorn cattle in East Texas. Photo by Donna Hammer

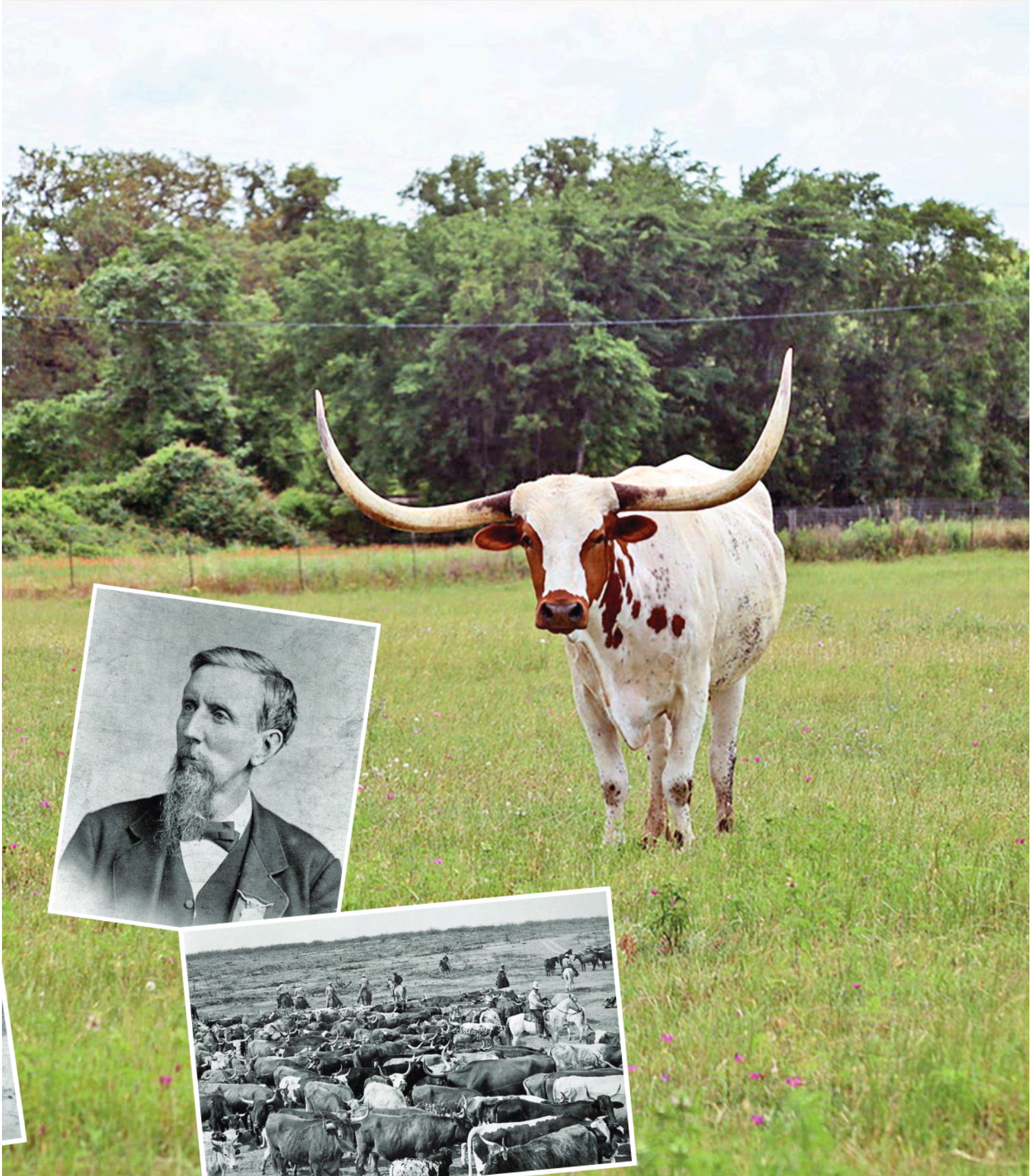
Inset photos sourced from the Schreiner Collection:

[left] Cowboys and cowgirls alike have helped shape the longhorn's iconic status in Texas.

[center] Joseph "Cowboy" McCoy was a 19th century businessman who was a chief transporter of Longhorn cattle from Texas to the eastern United States.

[right] The field of longhorn cattle is just that, a field of longhorn cattle watched over by cowboys.









Following the conclusion of the Civil War, when returning soldiers found Texas overpopulated with long-horned cattle, many of them were rounded up and driven up trails to Kansas City to be shipped east. The animals' cunning instinct required that skilled cowboys would be needed to round up and manage herds of them, but they endured the drives well and would even gain weight if afforded plentiful grass. An estimate available states that in the years between 1867 and 1880 in excess of 10 million head of longhorn were driven north to market, which proved a boom for the Texas economy in an otherwise grim post-war setting, and helped Texas recover from the Civil War.

Those cattle drives along trails such as the Chisolm and Goodnight became the stuff of Texas legend, and helped romanticize the image of the Texas cowboy. However, a huge decline would soon be seen in the longhorn population. One of the strengths of the longhorns, their immune system, worked against them. While longhorns could survive while carrying ticks on their hides, the ticks carried the Cattle Tick Fever disease, which devastated other breeds not immune to it. When the other breeds began to see decline due to Cattle Tick Fever, large-scale decimation of the longhorn breed occurred.

In an article written by Dwight G. Bennett, from the Feb. 1999 edition of *Western Horseman* about Cattle Tick Fever, he attributed the decline of longhorns to pressure from cattlemen who were set on protecting their herds from "Texas cattle," which were "poisoning their [pasturelands]" and killing their breeds of cattle. The truth was that the disease-infected ticks dropped from their longhorn hosts after feeding, laid eggs on the ground and then promptly died. The cycle was carried on when the ticks attached themselves to passing cattle. Also, by this time period, European breeds, which yielded more beef per animal, were more popular at market.

By the year 1910, the breed was considered nearly extinct, and in 1927, the U.S. House of Representatives allocated funds to establish a herd of purebred Texas Longhorns. In the process of establishing this herd, rangers from the Texas Forest Service inspected more than 30,000 head of cattle to find 20 cows, three bulls and four calves that were purebred Texas Longhorns.

Those animals were used as seedstock for what became the Wildlife Refuge (WR) herd at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge near Cache, Okla. Most present-day Texas Longhorns are descended from those herds and six others that were then known to exist at the time of the WR herd's collection.

In 1964 the first registry was created to track breeding records and to confirm the purity of bloodlines for longhorn breeders. The numbers of Texas Longhorn cattle soared, and by the late 1990s, exceeded a quarter million head. Its increase was due to the many traits that made the breed so desirable in the boom post-Civil War years – longevity, strong immune systems, foraging adaptability and calving ease.

So important to Texas' history is the Texas Longhorn that the state maintains a herd of traditional longhorn cattle to allow visitors, as well as residents, to experience them up close at Fort Griffin State Historic Site in Albany, which has housed the herd for more than 60 years and is jointly maintained by the Texas Historical Commission and Texas Parks and Wildlife. A few head from this herd can also be found at Copper Breaks State Park, Abilene State Park and Palo Duro Canyon State Park.

Visitors and residents can see that the Longhorn – a living part of our state's history – is an integral and magnificent part of our story. ■

A sculpture of a longhorn bull shows how iconic the animal is to Texan culture. This longhorn, titled "Paladin," was built by Bettye Hamblen Turner in 2006 from a variety of recycled stainless steel and chrome car and motorcycle parts. Some parts are allowed to rust so that the sculpture changes over time. It stands on display at the 145-acre Benini Sculpture Ranch near Johnson City. Photo by Donna Hammer

Proper etiquette at the ramp and on the water will keep things pleasant for everyone



Recreational boat sales are through the roof and fishing is becoming increasingly popular among people of all ages. With boating and fishing seasons approaching their summer peaks, timing is ripe for some lessons in boat ramp manners and fishing etiquette.

It's hard to imagine folks getting crossways over a launching lane at a boat ramp or a fishing-looking spot on a public waterbody. Sadly, it happens more often than you might think.

Most altercations begin with foul language and escalate from there. Not every tiff ends in childish behavior, but some of them do. I've heard of stories about grown men getting into fist fights, guns being brandished and personal property getting damaged over something as silly as a brush pile cloaked in 25 feet of water.

There is no formal guide for launching vessels at public boat ramps, or how anglers should conduct themselves on public waters. However, there are a passel of unwritten rules that apply. Most are built around common sense and everyday courtesy.

Boat Ramp Advice

Hang around a public boat ramp on a busy weekend and you are liable to witness a comedy of errors to illustrate just how uneducated some people are when it comes to launching and loading a boat.

I've seen tow vehicles sink and boats get dumped on concrete ramps bustling with people. Such shows might be amusing to a casual onlooker. Not so much for other boaters waiting in line and eager to get on the water.

Here are a few ways to avoid becoming the center of attention at the boat ramp.

Learn to Back a Trailer: One of the most common mistakes occurs when a driver backs the trailer down the ramp and winds up taking up multiple lanes instead of one, blocking others from access. I've seen trailers jackknifed so badly that it damaged the tow vehicle and boat.

A crowded boat ramp is no place to learn how to back a trailer. Practice and learn how to properly back a boat trailer before you go to the lake. A roomy parking lot with visible stripes is perfect.

Practice backing the trailer into the slot from odd angles.

It is easier for some to learn by looking over their shoulder instead of relying on the vehicle side view mirrors. Once you learn how to back up looking over your shoulder, master the process using the mirrors. It's easier to line up the lane markers and see the trailer fenders.

Pre-Launch Inspections: Just because the boat ran fine last time out is no guarantee it will next time. Be sure the boat's battery is fully charged and other critical parts like the bilge pump and running lights are working properly before you head to the lake. Clear the ramp immediately if the engine won't crank.

Making Ready: Don't wait until you back down the ramp to transfer gear from the tow vehicle to the boat. Do it in the parking lot. Check your boat for all necessary equipment like life jackets, fire extinguishers and kill switches. Make sure the boat's drain plug is in place, and that all winch/transom tie-down straps are removed before backing the rig into the water.

Launching the Boat: Launching can be performed alone, but it is much easier (and quicker) with two experienced people – one driving the tow vehicle and one handling the boat.

The tow vehicle driver should always make sure the boat is completely free of the trailer before pulling out.

Loading the Boat: Loading a boat is essentially the same process as launching, except the steps are in reverse order. Always be sure the trailer is backed into the water just far enough that the nose of the boat reaches the winch roller with a goose of the throttle, and that the boat is straight while the bottom is at rest on the trailer bunks. Back the trailer in too far and the boat may float off the trailer and possibly damage the fenders.

Fishin' for Ethics

How anglers conduct themselves on the water is a reflection of the sport that can make an everlasting impression on others, especially the watchful eyes and attentive ears of a youngster.

Ethical fishing behavior goes far beyond abiding by state fishing regulations like buying a license and not exceeding daily limits on sport fish. It means respecting the rights of others, including private property owners, as well as other anglers who are sharing the water.

Sadly, there are a bunch of potlickers around who need to clean up their acts. Here are a few examples of good fishing ethics and how lines sometimes get crossed.

Don't Be a Hole Jumper: Nobody likes a hole jumper. He's the guy who watches you catch one or two fish, then attempts to hedge in on the sweet spot while you are still sitting there. It's alright to join in the fun if another angler invites you in. Otherwise, find your own fish.

Don't Cut People Off: Getting cut off is a common complaint among bass anglers. It happens when one angler is fishing down a vacant shoreline. Another angler motors past then cuts in on the same shoreline, 50-75 yards ahead of the other fisherman. It's similar to cutting in line at the grocery store check-out counter.

It's Not Your Brush Pile: It is hard work sinking brush piles to attract fish. It's also pretty easy for other anglers to locate them using modern electronics. Frustration sometimes sets in when the angler who built the brush pile arrives and finds a stranger already locked down on the spot.

There is no such thing as a private fishing hole on public water. Once a brush pile leaves an angler's boat it automatically



becomes fair game for anyone to fish. It's usually best to move on and find another spot rather than risk getting into an argument. Anglers who harass or interfere with others on the water are in violation of state law.

Don't Ditch Plastics or Line: Used soft plastics should be retained and disposed of properly once you get to shore. Do the same with old fishing line. Discarded fishing line can take years to deteriorate. It can cause serious outboard problems by causing prop shaft seals to wear prematurely should it get wrapped around the propeller.

Keep Boat Lanes Clear: Boat lanes are meant for navigation, not fishing. Always be prepared to clear the way for approaching boat traffic.

Give 'Em Some Room: When motoring from one spot to another, avoid motoring close to other anglers who are actively fishing. The courteous thing to do is reduce your speed to idle, rather than blowing past others at high speed.

Boating and fishing are supposed to be fun. Using some common sense and courtesy around ramps and on water will help keep it that way for everyone. ■

Crappie anglers frequently sink brush piles away from the bank to concentrate fish. Tempers sometimes flare when anglers collide around the sweet spots. It's generally best to move on to a different spot rather than risk a confrontation.



CAJUN BLACKENED CATFISH TACOS



Ingredients

- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 Tablespoons Blackened seasoning
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 4 (4 ounce) catfish fillets, skinned
- ¾ cup olive oil
- Tortillas

Instructions

Watch the Wild Game Cooking: Blackened Catfish Tacos video

In a bowl, mix together the black pepper, kosher salt and blackened seasoning until thoroughly combined. Press

the catfish fillets into the spice mixture in the bowl and coat thoroughly.

Arrange a portable heat source outdoors, such as a butane burner or side burner of a gas grill. Light the burner and place a skillet onto the burner over high heat. Pour the olive oil into the skillet covering the entire cooking surface.

When the oil in the skillet is hot, lay the catfish fillets into the skillet. Cook until the spices are seared onto the fillets and the catfish is opaque and flaky inside, about 3 minutes per side. Don't breathe smoke from burning spices.

To serve, place the fish on the tortillas along with toppings.

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I should have been well-prepared for 2024. I mean, the world has always been a little screwy.

Early on, I was taught that hiding under a desk would protect me and my young classmates from a nuclear attack.

Nixon wasn't a crook. He said so.

I have worn both girdles and garters.

During the early days of the hair wars of the 60s, I personally stayed on the traditional side, surviving pin curls, plastic hair rollers that felt like sleeping on a bag of rocks, and getting high on Toni home permanents. I later got myself straightened out.

I watched as others burned their bras. I was brought up better than to set fire to a perfectly good Maidenform.

I have run out of gas while waiting in a long line at a gas station.

I have encountered countless politicians. Many were good, decent people. Others I secretly wished I could catch in a crosswalk. It has always been that way.

Through it all, I held on to the belief that things work out, eventually.

So I'm not sure why, as 2023 wound down and yet another election year loomed, I suddenly felt like I was at the starting line with my shoelaces tied together, destined to fall flat. I didn't notice at the time, but I think it was at that point that I became a hands-on-her-hips, finger-wagging nag. I became my Aunt Millie.

I never met Aunt Millie, she died years before I was born, but she remains firmly planted in family lore as the mother of negativity. She apparently didn't like anybody or anything.

Whenever anyone in our household got all grumpy and started complaining too much they would inevitably be told, "Good Lord, you sound just like Aunt Millie." And, even though you never met the woman, you knew that wasn't a good thing.

In Aunt Millie's eyes, not only was the glass half empty, it was half empty because it was leaking and it was going to leave a mark on the table that could never be removed and if she had to sell that table just to keep a roof over her head, which she would probably have to do because of all of the bad stuff that was going to happen, she would never get a decent price because of that half-empty glass that had leaked....

You get the idea. I like to

think that her reputation has been embellished over the years, but maybe not.

I didn't realize how Aunt Millie-ish I had become until I recently had a long, rambling conversation with an old friend. We are famous in our small circle for our long, rambling conversations, during which, because we are so darn smart, we solve many, if not all, of the world's problems.

We started out talking about all the bad things going on. That took a while.

Having managed to talk ourselves down to the bottom of the dumps, we decided to move onto lighter topics. That worked for one of us.

After a few more minutes of rambling, she abruptly said, "Will you just listen to yourself?"

I thought back to the comments I had made as we discussed topics ranging from Artificial Intelligence ("It will mean the end of civilization!") to our favorite salads ("You can't find those cute little cherry tomatoes anymore; now they're the size of Easter eggs!") to self-checkout ("I remember when you had to practically wrestle with the bag boy to be able to carry your own groceries to the car. Now we're the cashier and the bagger!"). I complained about not being able to find a pair of pants that are truly comfortable ("They are either cutting me in two or make me look like Urkel!"). And then there was my personal favorite: "You're more likely to see me doing a handstand in Walmart than see me driving an electric car! They keep catching fire!"

I even had the nerve to complain about how older folks used to be stereotyped as grumpy people glued to their easy chairs, but now, if you believe the commercials, we are supposed to be riding horses on a pristine beach at sunset, long hair blowing in the breeze, with a significant other who looks like someone from the cast of "The Golden Bachelor." That is, if your doctor has had sense enough to prescribe some eight-syllable drug.

Sigh.


When I actually started listening to myself, I had to laugh, which is something I vow to do more of this year.

I have no idea what Aunt Millie might have endured to make her the way she was, but it is bound to have been more than pin curls and politicians. She would have been even more ill-prepared to handle whatever 2024 brings than I am.


If I could, I would thank Aunt Millie for the wake-up call. She'd probably hate that. ■



"I hope you have new complaints, because mine are all the same."



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Downtown Jacksonville is changing, as old buildings become inhabited by entrepreneurs intent on making a living while providing an experience to their customers. An inviting mural on the side of a brick building is the perfect photo opportunity, and TikTok famous “Dr. Parkinstine” offers car rides for \$10 per person in a wonderful old-fashioned 1928 Durant made by General Motors. An old-fashioned soda fountain, Ritual, uses all fresh ingredients. They make their own soda for ice cream sodas and fountain drinks, and you can watch them spin sugar for fresh cotton candy while you wait. This same business has a restaurant across the street. A gated plaza for outdoor eating and musical events adds to the welcoming feel of the area. I highly recommend a day of shopping, eats and drinks in downtown Jacksonville. There is so much more to explore ... I will be back again soon.



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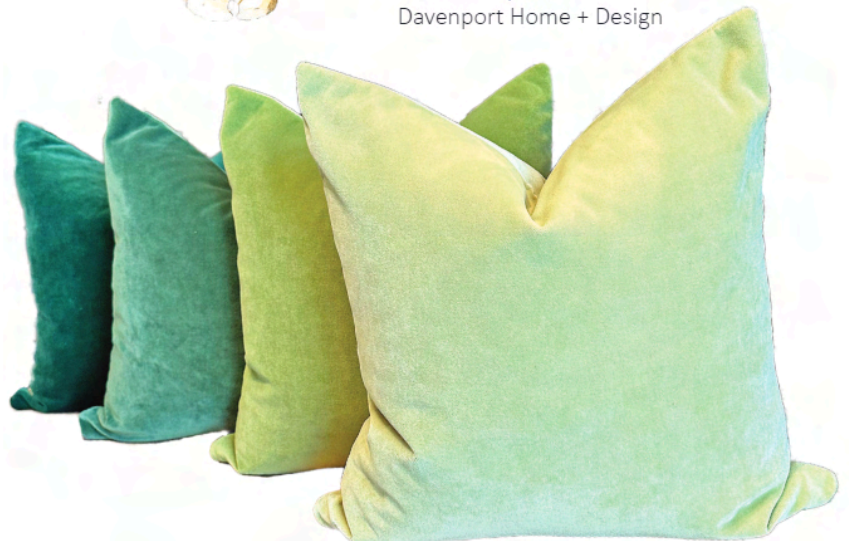


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TURKISH MUSLIN ROBE \$165
Ritual On Main

CUSTOM GREEN OMBRE PILLOW
\$150
Davenport Home + Design





SHOP EAST TEXAS



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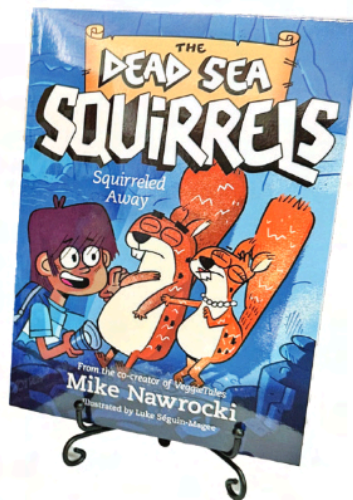


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HEAD WRAP) \$55
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2024 PLANNER \$32
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WATER CUP \$25 EACH
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CALENDAR

JANUARY

Galveston

Townes Van Zandt Wake/Old Quarter Acoustic Café
JANUARY 1

Lufkin

Festival of Trees/Museum of East Texas
JANUARY 1

Houston

Tina: The Tina Turner Musical/Hobby Center
JANUARY 6

Lufkin

On Your Feet/Temple Theater
JANUARY 10

Galveston

Yaga's Chili Quest and Beer Fest/The Strand
JANUARY 12-13

Houston

Houston Marathon Health and Fitness Expo/G R Brown Center
JANUARY 12-13

Livingston

Tri City Comic Con/Polk County Commerce Center
JANUARY 13-14

Houston

2024 Houston Marathon/Downtown
JANUARY 14

Lufkin

Voices of Classic Soul/Pines Theater
JANUARY 18

Houston

Texas Home Show/G R Brown Convention Center
JANUARY 20-21

Galveston

The Oak Ridge Boys/Grand 1894 Opera House
JANUARY 21

Houston

Monster Jam 2024/NRG Stadium
JANUARY 21

Nacogdoches

2nd Annual Chili Cook-off/Fredonia Brewery
JANUARY 21

Houston

Ed Sheeran, Luke Combs/Minute Maid Park
JANUARY 23

Houston

Houston Auto Show/NRG Center
JANUARY 23-27

Sugarland

Ludacris/Smart Financial Center
JANUARY 26

Houston

PBR-Unleash the Beast/Toyota Center
JANUARY 26-27

Crockett

Collin Raye/Crockett Civic Center
JANUARY 27

Sugarland

George Lopez at the Smart Financial Center
JANUARY 27

Lufkin

The Greatest Love of All: A Tribute to Whitney Houston/Temple Theater
JANUARY 28

Woodville

Bridal Expo at Legends Salon, 1-4 pm
JANUARY 28

Lufkin

East Texas Bridal Showcase/Pitser Garrison Civic Center
JANUARY 28

FEBRUARY

Houston

Harlem Globetrotters World Tour/NRG Arena
FEBRUARY 3

Houston

Brick Fest Lego fan Experience/NRG Center
FEBRUARY 2-3

Crockett

Lee Rocker of the Stray Cats/Civic Center
FEBRUARY 2

Beaumont

Golden triangle Home & Garden Show/Ford Park
FEBRUARY 2-4

Orange
Pretty Woman at the Lutch
Theater
FEBRUARY 3

Marshall
Lee Rocker of the Stray Cats/
Memorial City Performance Hall
FEBRUARY 3

Longview
Frankie Avalon/Belcher Center
FEBRUARY 3

Beaumont
Mardi Gras Southeast Texas/
Crockett Street
FEBRUARY 8-11

Sugarland
Stomp/Smart Financial Center
FEBRUARY 9-10

Tyler
Sing & Swing: A Jazz at Lincoln
Center Presents Production/UT
Tyler Cowan Center
FEBRUARY 10

Conroe
West Side Story at the Crighton
Theater
FEBRUARY 11

Galveston
Fat Tuesday/The Strand
FEBRUARY 13

Houston
Houston Fishing Show/G R Brown
Convention Center
FEBRUARY 14-17

Orange
Little Women at the Lutch
Theater
FEBRUARY 15

Lufkin
The Langston Hughes Project/
Pines Theater
FEBRUARY 15

Houston
The Eagles: The Long Goodbye/
Toyota Center
FEBRUARY 16

Conroe
2024 Texas Medieval Merriment
Festival/Walker County
Fairgrounds
FEBRUARY 16-18

Crockett
Hotel California : A Salute to the
Eagles/Civic Center
FEBRUARY 16

Beaumont
Cirque du Soleil/Ford Park
FEBRUARY 17-18

Tomball
Rev. Horton Heat/Main Street
Crossing
FEBRUARY 17

Port Arthur
YMCA Mardi Gras 5K on the
Seawall
FEBRUARY 18

Houston
World Championship BBQ
Contest/NRG Stadium
FEBRUARY 22-24

Humble
Houston Gun Collectors Show/
Humble Civic Center
FEBRUARY 24-25

Houston
Houston Livestock Show and
Rodeo/NRG Stadium
FEBRUARY 26-MARCH 16

Tyler
Charlottes Web/UT Tyler Cowan
Center
FEBRUARY 29

MARCH

Houston
At Last: A Tribute to Etta James/
Jones Hall
MARCH 3

Beaumont
Gusher Marathon
MARCH 4

Lufkin
Drum Tao at the Temple Theater
MARCH 4

Tyler
Terry Bradshaw at UT Tyler
Cowan Center
MARCH 5

Beaumont
Monster Nation at Ford Arena
MARCH 8-10

Houston
Beetlejuice at Hobby Center
MARCH 9

Lufkin
Amy Grant at the Temple Theater
MARCH 9

Houston
Texas Bridal and Wedding Expo
2024/G R Brown Center
MARCH 16-17

Galveston
Corvette Chevy Expo/Galveston
Island Convention Center
MARCH 16-17

Livingston
Trade Days at Pedigo Park
MARCH 16-17

Houston
St. Patrick's Day Parade and
Celebration/Downtown
MARCH 17

Lufkin
Angelina County Fair/Expo Center
MARCH 18-23

Beaumont
South Texas State Fair/Ford Park
MARCH 21-31

Woodville
Festival of the Arts/Heritage
Village
MARCH 23

Colmesneil
Easter Walk with Jesus/Victory
Camp Colmesneil
MARCH 23

Crockett
Pure Prairie League/Crockett Civic
Center
MARCH 23

Lufkin
Music of Mancini at the Pines
Theater
MARCH 24

Nacogdoches
Nacogdoches Pro Rodeo/County
Expo Center
MARCH 25

CALENDAR

Houston
Madonna: The Celebration Tour/Toyota Center
MARCH 28-29

Woodville
Western Weekend Parade and Rodeo
MARCH 29-30

APRIL

Orange
Annie at the Lutcher Theater
APRIL 4

Tomball
Janie Fricke at Main Street crossing
APRIL 5

Beaumont
Zack Williams: A Hundred Highways Tour/
Ford Park
APRIL 5

Woodville
81st Annual Dogwood Festival and
Parade
APRIL 6

Port Arthur
Cajun Heritage Festival/Bob Bowers Civic
Center
APRIL 6

Mineola
Eclipse Texas Festival 2024
APRIL 6

Conroe
The Buddy Holly Story/Crighton Theater
APRIL 7

Nacogdoches
Red Dirt Mud Run
APRIL 8

Houston
Lauren Daigle at the Toyota Center
APRIL 11

Conroe
Montgomery County Fair
APRIL 11-21

Conroe
CPRA Professional Rodeo
APRIL 12-13

Lufkin
The Great Dubois at the Pines Theater
APRIL 19

Gladewater
39th Annual Gusher Days
APRIL 20

Beaumont
World Ballet Series: Swan Lake/Jefferson
Theater
APRIL 20

Houston
The Cher Show/Hobby Center
APRIL 20-21

Orange
Mauriceville Crawfish festival Crawl 5K
APRIL 22

Conroe
Texas Mineral and Fossil Show/Lonestar
Expo center
APRIL 26-28

Houston
The Sound of Music/Worsham Theater
Center
APRIL 26-MAY 12

Houston
Kane Brown at the Toyota Center
APRIL 27

Houston
Jane Eyre at the Alley Theater
APRIL 27-30

Sugarland
Celtic Woman/Smart Financial Center
APRIL 28

Lufkin
Angelina Civic and College Symphonic
Bands/Temple Theater
APRIL 28

Port Neches
Port Neches Riverfest Fun Run
APRIL 29

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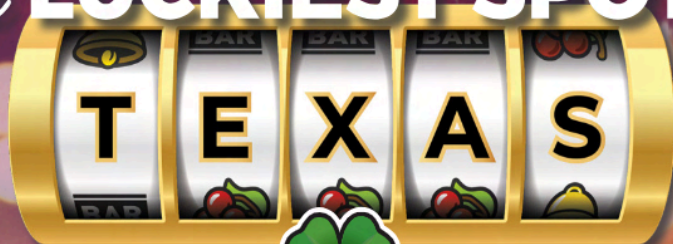
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