Spring Comes Into Bloom

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Your chamber of commerce thrives by promoting “Shop at Home” and “Buy Local.” There are many advantages to following their advice when it comes to garden centers and landscapers. These businesses all deal in living plants that have to bloom where they are planted.
Local soil, climate, pests, exposures, etc. all must be managed using local experience if the gardener is to be successful.

Getting your gardening advice from national home and garden magazines, non-regional books, big box store garden centers, Chuck-in-a-Truck landscapers, many radio/TV personalities and out-of-area garden writers seldom yields successful results.

Even professionals like landscape architects are unreliable if not familiar with local conditions. Architects from outside this region may be good at design, integration of permanent features, utilities and irrigation, but often their choice of plant species, placement and density come up short.

When I have consulted on plans from out-of-region landscape architects, there are always errors to be corrected.

As I have traveled our country visiting public and private gardens, arboretums, nursery stock growers and plant trials, I always recognize one fact – a nurseryman who is 500 miles from home usually finds himself in a horticultural fog. The plants are unfamiliar, the climate is different, soils vary and daily problems have different solutions.

All these reasons support why you should rely on your local nursery experts. They know what works in the short and long term.

Always get their advice before you invest time and money in a landscape project that needs guidance. The advice is often free, especially if you are buying supplies there. If a paid consultation is in order, the cost will always be less than the cost of the problems avoided.

The overriding key to gardening success hinges on the concept of “Right Plant in the Right Place.”

There is nothing more important.

Before you approve a landscaping work order, ask for references. Look at recent jobs.

Look at jobs five or more years old. You are looking for plants growing to a size appropriate to the space. You want to see plants doing well in properly-prepared planting beds. Observe that plants have the right exposure to sun or shade. Seek comments from the owner about how easy the plant care can be when the job
is designed and installed correctly.

Discuss the facts of your life schedule.

Do you have time to care for the landscape? Does the landscape need to survive with minimal care? Do you plan to contract for monthly maintenance?

Each answer dictates a different design approach.

In our county, we are fortunate to have growers of trees, shrubs and annual and perennial blooming plants.

These growers attend industry field days to learn which plants are new and better than before. Then they trial grow the plants themselves to check for true local performance.

Once the plants have a proven record, production begins to provide the proven plants for you.

Spring is just ahead and most homeowners will be planting blooming plants to create bright attention-grabbing accents in their landscapes. Don’t scrimp and scatter your baby plants. Create significant planting areas that will stop traffic all summer.

A poll of local nurseries results in this list of top spring and summer performing plants that will make your neighbors envious:

• Angelonia – Serena, Serenita
• Vinca/Periwinkles – Cora, Cora Cascade
• Zinnia – Profusion, Zahara
• Petunias – Wave, Supertunia Vista, Charms
• Pentas – Graffiti
• Verbena – Enduroscape, Home-stead Purple
• Coleus – Cutting grown
• Impatiens – Sunpatiens
• Purslane and Portulaca
• Begonias – Dragon Wing, Baby Wing, Whopper

... and the list continues.

These plants all share something in common: they all grow strongly and vigorously. In our Texas summer heat and humidity, anything less will dis-appoint.

Visit your garden center with a notebook and pen in hand. Take notes on what you see and need. Ask lots of questions. Take home lots of answers.

Similarly to shopping for food, work from a carefully planned list. I have watched nursery shoppers picking up one of this and that at random, obviously responding to their eyes and not their plan.

Your local nursery people have a vested interest in your success.

Ask for their help and take their advice. If you fail, they fail, and they know that.

They all want to still be in business 20 years from now. Their staff wants to do the job right. Reputations are at risk. Repeat business is at risk. Recommendations from friends are at risk.

– Leon Macha is a consulting certified horticulturist/arborist with 40-plus years of experience in our region.
Oliver Gilmore of Wharton

How long have you lived in Wharton County?
Four years.

What is your profession? How long have you been doing it?
I’m retired. I worked at the Continental Can plant for 43 years.

Why do you live in Wharton County?
I moved to Wharton County with my son when my wife passed away four years ago.

What do you enjoy most about the community you live in?
I like my church. We like the trail. I just enjoy living here.

What would you like to see added to your community?
A swimming pool.

What’s one thing about you most people don’t know?
My poor reading ability. I always kept that to myself and I’d fake it.

What’s your favorite hobby?
I never did have a real hobby. I always kept my mind on my work.

If you could travel anywhere, where would it be and why?
I’d go back to Colorado.

If you had to move and could only take three items with you, what would they be? Why?
I’d take photos, my tools and my lawn mower, so I could mow lawns wherever I go. It has that zero-turn and I love it.

What’s your favorite song and why?
Gospel music. I don’t even listen to the radio anymore.

In your opinion, what’s the most important issue in America today?
Education.

What’s your favorite family memory?
The time we went on vacation to Estes Park. The biggest elk came down off the mountain. We looked up, and they were all staring at us.

Rachel Reyna of Wharton

How long have you lived in Wharton County?
All my life.

What is your profession? How long have you been doing it?
I’ve been baking for 17 years in my house. My restaurant in Hungerford will be open three years in July.

What do you enjoy most about the community you live in?
Serving the community.

What would you like to see added to your community?
I’m not sure. I feel like we have everything we need.

What’s one thing about you most people don’t know?
I’m a giving person.

What’s your favorite hobby?
Spending time with my granddaughter.

If you could travel anywhere, where would it be and why?
Somewhere tropical because my husband and I never had a honeymoon.

If you had to move and could only take three items with you, what would they be? Why?
My family, my company, friends. I mean, I would hate to go somewhere and not have anyone to share it with.

What’s your favorite song and why?
“Good Morning Beautiful” by Keith Urban because my husband says that’s the way he feels about me.

In your opinion, what’s the most important issue in America today?
We need to try to all get along and make it a better a place.

What’s your favorite family memory?
When I was having my first born son and my mother was next to me. I was scared because I was young and my dad showed up before I had him. They were there to share it with me and my firstborn.
Shannon Fuechec of El Campo

How long have you lived in Wharton County?
I was born in El Campo and lived here until I graduated from El Campo High School. I moved from El Campo to attend college. After college, I got married and lived in Brenham for 10 years until we moved back to El Campo in 2003. We have lived here since.

What is your profession? How long have you been doing it?
I have been in education for 21 years. I taught for 12 years, and while working in the special education department for four years, I completed my master’s degree. I have been a licensed specialist in school psychology working in El Campo ISD for four years.

Why do you live in Wharton County?
My husband, Todd, and I moved back to El Campo with our two boys because of a job opportunity as a school administrator for my husband. It also was a move that enabled us to be close to our family.

What do you enjoy most about the community you live in?
I enjoy living in the El Campo community because of the size of the community. It has been a wonderful place to raise our two boys, Blaine and Tate. I cannot imagine my children having to grow up in a large city. Also, I am in awe at how this community comes together to help those in need when others have experienced difficult times in their lives.

What would you like to see added to your community?
I would like to see a bigger variety of restaurants.

What's one thing about you most people don't know?
From kindergarten through 12th grade, I was involved in rodeo. I participated in barrel racing, pole bending, goat tying, ribbon running and breakaway roping.

What's your favorite hobby?
My favorite hobby is saltwater fishing and spending time at our family bay house.

If you could travel anywhere, where would it be and why?
I would like to travel to an island in the South Pacific (Fiji, Tahiti or Bora Bora) or the Dominican Republic. Our family enjoys destinations that consist of beach and salt air.

If you had to move and could only take three items with you, what would they be? Why?
I would take my family because they ARE my life, our family pictures/keepsakes and a credit card so I can buy what I need.

What's your favorite song and why?
My favorite song is “I Can Only Imagine” by Mercy Me. This song makes me think of how our current life is merely a short journey to our Eternal Kingdom. Although it will be sad to leave those that we love and those that love us, how wonderful it will be to experience what we have been promised by Him.

In your opinion, what's the most important issue in America today?
For me, the most important issue in America is truly a global issue. I am unnerved with the rising problems with the terrorist organizations, and it is worrisome to think about the possibility of these horrible acts bleeding further into our country. Additionally, a more domestic problem is the inability of our two major political parties to truly work together for the good of our country rather than in pursuit of accomplishing their own agendas.

What's your favorite family memory?
My favorite memory is Christmas 2004, the year it snowed. My mother always wanted to take a trip to a snowy destination during the Christmas season. That year, she was battling cancer and sadly it was our last Christmas with her. But, she did get her wish that year and she didn’t even have to leave El Campo!
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When I.O. Coleman was a child, he saw a glimpse of things to come when he was out with his father when work called.

His dad, I.O. Coleman Sr., and his family lived on Wharton’s west side of town – separated by railroad tracks from the east side. But his work took him to all parts of Wharton.

“My dad was an electrician. He was one of the first, black or white,” Coleman said. “He got business from everyone.”

In those days, African-Americans weren’t allowed to come in the front door, but not Coleman and his dad.

“We always came in the front door,” Coleman said. “He could fix anything. He only had a high school education, but he was in demand. My dad went on a lot of calls. He was my hero.”

Coleman had loving parents – his mother, Mattie L. Sanford Coleman, was a housekeeper – and they taught him well.

“He provided services for all colors,” Coleman said. “He didn’t discriminate.”

Many times, as it was back then, Coleman’s dad didn’t get paid in cash. A barter system was often used, as he received chickens or eggs. But the young Coleman didn’t mind.

“The eggs were good,” he said.

While his dad was welcome in the east side homes because of his knowledge of the electrical business, Coleman grew up questioning the division between east and west Wharton.

“The railroad tracks were separating the two – the have and have nots, the privileged and deprived,” Coleman said. “These things evolved over the years. I asked why? I couldn’t figure out why books we got were already used. They had someone else’s name written in them. I couldn’t understand separate. I never saw separate but equal.”

At that time, Wharton still had two high schools. Coleman graduated from Wharton Training High School in 1958 as class valedictorian, and with the help
of Principal T.L. Pink, he enrolled at Wharton County Junior College.

“I was always taught I could do anything I wanted if I applied myself,” Coleman said.

In his first semester at WCJC, he took English, literature, chemistry, biology and physics. If you think perhaps he applied himself a little too much that first semester, guess again.

“I didn’t have any problems with chemistry, but my first test in physics I got an F,” Coleman said. “But before the semester ended, I was exempt in all classes.”

Coleman, who grew up with four sisters, was the first in his family to go to college.

“I learned respect at an early age,” Coleman said. “I was taught the Golden Rule and to respect your elders.”

After two years at WCJC, it was off to Prairie View A&M University. As his dad was getting ready to take him off to college in his old pickup truck, friends and family members stopped by to give him going-away presents.

“I received boxes and boxes of sardines and vienna sausage,” Coleman said.

He had no idea why he received all of the food, but when he got to the university, he soon found out.

“The mess hall (cafeteria) may or may not be open on the weekends,” Coleman said.

Needless to say, the food came in handy during his stay there.

While he was grateful to receive the food, he also learned about giving and receiving.

“I always said that if I was in position, I would give back,” Coleman said.

Coleman graduated from Prairie View A&M in 1962 with a double major in biology and chemistry. He began his career at Hungerford High School, which no longer exists, and taught chemistry, biology and physics for five years.

After that, he found his home at Celense Chemicals in Bay City, where he worked for 30 years before he retired in 1999.

The plant had more than 600 employees.

“When I went to work, there was not a black supervisor on the plant site,” Coleman said. “Within a year, I became a supervisor.”

Coleman started with the company as a lab analyst and retired as a section leader in the safety, health and environmental department, reporting to the plant manager.

During his career, he remembered his college days and gave back to the community. One of his key involvements was being appointed to the Lower Colorado River Authority board of directors by then-Governor Ann Richards. He received a six-year appoint-
ment and served as the board chairman before his appointment ended.

Even back in 1997 and 1998, the board was talking about future water shortages.

“We knew it (water) was going to be a commodity and in short supply,” Coleman said.

It was always a battle between the representatives of the lower counties like Wharton and the counties near Austin and the Highland Lakes, he said.

“That problem has existed forever,” Coleman said. “They don’t want water to come this way. They want those lakes filled.”

Coleman said he knew it was important to keep communications open and come up with ideas.

“We’re seeing some of the results of that, especially with the (Lane City) reservoir coming,” Coleman said. “It was important to get them talking, get everybody at the table. I think communication is key to anything you do.”

He also took time to be involved in the Wharton Little League and the Babe Ruth League as his son, I.O. Coleman III, was growing up. He followed in his dad’s footsteps and was his class valedictorian at Wharton High School.

Coleman, however, was quick to credit his wife.

“He got a lot of his attributes from his mom,” Coleman said.

By the time their son went through Wharton ISD, the schools were fully integrated.

“His mom was a teacher here,” Coleman said. “He always felt he belonged.”

Coleman’s son graduated from Rice University with honors and is now a teacher and coach.

Despite the progress made in the country, Coleman says he still believes there is a wide gap between “the haves and have nots.”

Even though President Obama made history by being the first African-American man elected president in 2008 and was re-elected in 2012, Coleman pointed out there are only two African-American senators and none at the state level.

More African-American people need to go to the polls and vote on election day, he said.

“One of the problems is our voting,” Coleman said. “Most of us get amnesia on election day. Dad always instilled in me to vote. Mom and dad always voted.”

Coleman, who was at one time the president of the Wharton branch of the NAACP, recently saw the movie Selma, based on the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches led by James Bevel, Hosea Williams and Martin Luther King Jr.

“If you haven’t seen the film Selma, you should sure go see it,” Coleman said. “I’ve seen the full spectrum. I’ve seen it all.”

Coleman offered advice for young people centered around the word “respect” for each other.

“We’re more alike than we’re different,” Coleman said. “When we bleed, we all bleed the same color.”

Coleman said to find someone you can depend on, family members or friends, and “surround yourself with positive thinkers.”

“Be aware there is a supreme being, and when you wake up in the morning, pray,” Coleman said. “Get up, dress up and hit the door running. Help someone when you can and lend a helping hand.”

— By Keith Magee
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Gift Shop
Many Americans know each February is Black History Month – a month dedicated to observing the history of the African diaspora in several countries outside Africa. The month is meant to educate people about the culture of those, including African-Americans, who left Africa and celebrate their various achievements in all walks of life.

The origins of Black History Month can be traced to Harvard-trained historian Carter G. Woodson and minister Jesse E. Moorland. Woodson and Moorland founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, or ASNLH. This organization dedicated itself to researching and promoting the achievements of African-Americans and others of African descent.

In 1926, the ASNLH sponsored a national Negro History Week and chose the second week of February for the celebration for a very specific reason. The week coincided with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States who presided over the end of slavery, and Frederick Douglass, the famed former slave who rose to prominence as a social reformer, writer, orator, and statesman. Negro History Week proved inspiring to communities across the country, that organized local celebrations and established historical clubs to study the history of African-Americans while educating others as well. Negro History Week proved so popular that, by the late 1960s, it had evolved into Black History Week. Many credit the Civil Rights Movement for the change, which initially took place on college campuses.

In 1976, President Gerald Ford called upon the public to honor the history and accomplishments of African-Americans when he officially recognized February as Black History Month.

Since Ford’s official recognition more than 35 years ago, each of his successors has designated February as Black History Month. In less than 100 years, Woodson and Moorland went from honoring the history of African-Americans to joining the growing list of honorees who are celebrated every February.
A random presentation at a Rotary Club meeting more than 30 years ago paved the way for El Campo to form one of its largest and most successful fundraisers.
Changing the Face of Fundraising
Irvin Foytik was president of the El Campo Rotary Club in 1979-80 and invited a speaker from the Houston Northshore Rotary Club to present a program in EC.

The hope was to inject some energy and new ideas into the local club’s fundraising efforts.

“We were making only about $600 off our big fundraiser and we could barely afford to do much as far as giving back to the community,” Foytik said. “We wanted to see if we could do some different things and this guy had some really good ideas based on what their club was doing.”

Getting the entire club behind the idea took a little bit of cajoling, but Foytik and others were able to form the foundation of a successful event that year.

“We were doing things like a waffle supper and a beauty pageant and those were great, but we weren’t making much money,” Foytik said. “So we decided to put together a good meal and had folks donate items for the auction. It turned out pretty good.”

The first meal was fried catfish and boiled shrimp. A raffle was held for a grand prize Cadillac sedan. A total of 300 tickets were sold for $100 each.

Auction items that first year included old computers a local business had donated, Foytik laughed.

“We kinda had to start from the ground up, so we’d take whatever folks would bring us,” he recalled.

When the dust settled, the first fundraiser had brought in around $35,000 for the local club.

“We were ecstatic,” Foytik said. “Some of the ones who kinda doubted us at first got behind it and it’s really grown from there. All of a sudden, Rotary had made a name for itself and we saw our membership growing.”

Foytik said the El Campo Rotarians had discovered a winning formula: Serve good food and develop a series of projects that would benefit the community.

Over the years, the local Rotary Club has helped with projects such as renovating the old K-Mart into the present day Civic Center, the El Campo Aquatic Center, Rotary Park and most recently, the new Little League Legacy Fields baseball and softball complex.

“We had a guy from a Houston TV station come down after the Civic Center was completed,” Foytik remembered. “He was in complete shock that a town of our size could pull it off. We’ve made headlines over the years.”

The key to the success of the annual fundraiser is being transparent about your goals and where the money is going.

“One thing that our people have found out over the years is that if the Rotary Club here says they’re gonna do something, they do it. We’ve earned that trust that you have to have.”

-IRVIN FOYTIK
event has grown to raise more than $140,000 the past couple years. New initiatives began by former president J.J. Croix, who still plays a big role in the event, have seen it become increasingly more successful.

A grand prize drawing of $20,000 eventually replaced the Cadillac and Rotarians have done a “wonderful job” of selling all the raffle tickets each year, Foytik said.

Corporate sponsors have been secured in recent years, the Margarita Cup fishing event was started and both live and silent auction items have become more and more attractive and popular each year.

“We’ve got good folks in Rotary who love El Campo and put a lot of time into this event,” Foytik said. “It’s become something that the entire community can be proud of and that’s a great thing to see. We’re looking forward to doing it again this year.”

– By Jay T. Strasner
Find the 7 differences

Find the Twins
Which two are exactly alike?

Find the Differences

Connect the Dots
... and find the picture

List 10 words that rhyme with "book."

1. look
2. nook
3. brook
4. hook
5. rook
6. shook
7. snook
8. took
9. and
10. book

What Rhymes with…

Some answers: brook, cook, crook, hook, look, nook, rook, shook, snook, took

Jokes & Riddles

A: A hencyclopedia.
Q: Where do you go for more information on chickens?
A: A hencyclopedia.
Q: Why did the boy bring a book about ladders to school?
A: He thought it was a high school.

Book Challenge

There are many books written for kids. Here are some questions about some popular kids' books. How many can you answer correctly?

Answers: 1) Fiction, the boy's name is Max, 2) Fact, 3) Fiction, Alexander gets gum in his hair, 4) Fiction, Harold's crayon is purple, 5) Fiction, Pinkalicious turns pink and then red after eating too many pink cupcakes, 6) Fiction, Amos works at a zoo, 7) Fiction, the girl's name is Nancy, 8) Fact, 9) Fact, 10) Fact

Do you know the books about a young girl named Pinkalicious? Did you know the Pinkalicious books come from two sisters named Elizabeth and Victoria Kann. The Kanns are not the only siblings to work together on books. Have you ever heard of Grimm's Fairy Tales? The book is the work of brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. The brothers spent several months putting together the collection of fairy tales. They also worked on a dictionary together.

The Brontës were another family of writers. There were six children in all. The youngest four spent their childhoods writing together and became authors as adults. Charlotte wrote Jane Eyre, Emily wrote Wuthering Heights, Anne wrote Agnes Gray and their brother Branwell was a writer as well as a painter.

In the Family

While some authors write books for adults, others write books for kids and teens. Fill in the blanks to name some popular children's authors.

1) J. K. __O__W__L__N__G
2) S__H__L__ S__L__V__E__R__S__T__E__N
3) M__R__C__E__ S__E__A__E
4) B__A__T__I__X__ P__O__O__E__R
5) E__R__C__ C__A__E
6) J__D__Y__ B__L__M__E

Name That Author
Time to Color

Find the Seven Differences Answer Key:
1. Bows are a different color. 2. Ribbon on basket is a different color. 3. Pocket is missing. 4. Flower is a different color.
5. Flower on egg is different. 6. Stripes on egg are lighter. 7. Grass is missing.
How About Some Chocolaty Fun?

Every year the kids are practically bursting with impatience for Easter to arrive so they can enjoy lots of chocolaty treats. Make your kids happy by suggesting activities with chocolate in the starring role.

**Chocolate Painting**

Do your children like painting? Plan a session of finger painting using chocolate pudding.

**Chocolate Fondue**

Make your little ones happy by setting up a chocolate fondue. All you need is melted chocolate and some fruit pieces to dip in it. Yummy!

**Let’s Cook**

Melt some chocolate. Pour it into rabbit- or egg-shaped silicone molds. Garnish with candy. Leave the molds in the fridge until the chocolate is hard, and then it’ll be time for some tasting.

**Discuss & Enjoy**

Organize a discussion about chocolate with your children and include a taste test of the different flavors (black, white, milk, nuts, etc.).

**Chocolate Modelling Clay**

Innovate by preparing some chocolate modelling clay with your children. Mix 1 cup flour, 1/2 cup cocoa powder, 1/2 cup salt and 1/2 tablespoon of cream of tartar, then add 1 1/2 tablespoons of vegetable oil and 1 cup of boiling water. Stir quickly, mix thoroughly, and cook over low heat until the mixture forms a ball. Once the ball has cooled, knead the dough with your hands and create lots of scrumptious shapes.

Now you have all you need to spend a great day with your family, all while satisfying everyone’s sweet tooth. Have fun!
Rabbits make great pets and can certainly charm children with their long ears and twitching noses. They also know how to win the hearts of parents with their intelligence, calm nature and affection. Did you know that there are about 100 distinct species of domestic rabbits? The lop-eared rabbit is one of the better known ones and is easily distinguished by its long floppy ears and fluffy coat.

Adopting a rabbit, however, is a big decision to make. Even though these little creatures tend to be fragile, they can live for up to six or eight years in captivity. That is why it is important for all family members to agree to its presence in the home. Starting off with a young rabbit is a good idea, as it is less likely to feel stressed when in contact with human beings and will adapt more quickly to a new environment.

Rabbits can share a home with other family pets, although cats and dogs can be major sources of stress for them. You should perhaps check their compatibility before making any decisions.

The Easter Rabbit

The legend of the Easter rabbit began in Germany many centuries ago. A woman who could not afford to give treats to her children decided to decorate some eggs and hide them in the garden. In the morning, when the children woke, they saw a rabbit near the eggs; thus was born the Easter rabbit and the ever-popular Easter egg hunt.
For Audrey Wessels, taking the position of East Bernard city secretary was a no-brainer. It runs in her blood.

Born and raised in Louise, Wessels comes from a family of public servants. Her father was involved in county government for 18 years and her mother serves as a county clerk for Precinct 1.

“I grew up in government, so it wasn’t foreign to me,” she said. But after graduating from Texas A&M with a degree in business management, Wessels admits she didn’t know what the next step would be or where the road would lead.

“I didn’t have a clue,” Wessels said.

She decided to pursue a childhood dream and, in 2008, opened her own restaurant, the Kitchen Table, in Louise.

“I thought that would be wonderful and it was. It was a great experience, but there came a point in my life when I realized it wasn’t quite what I wanted for myself,” Wessels said. “I just felt like I could be doing more.”

She sold her business and stepped into the public sector, taking a posi-
tion as an executive assistant for the El Campo Chamber of Commerce. She felt like she was on the right path and relished in the tasks of running events and interacting with others. So when Wessels was approached to become the Wharton County Elections Officer, she was hesitant at first.

“I loved working at Chamber,” she said. “It was a hard decision to leave, but it was in my best interest to excel.” She learned the ins-and-outs of elections and, in the process, discovered her calling.

“That’s when I realized I really liked government and wanted to get more involved,” Wessels said. “Sure, elections is government, but I wanted to get more at the heart of it.”

She found the perfect opportunity to put together her two loves – community and government – in East Bernard, where she moved three years earlier to be closer to her sister.

On Dec. 8, Wessels took the position as secretary for the City of East Bernard confident that the skills from her diverse background would shine in her new role.

“I’ve taken bits and pieces of everything from my previous jobs and they’re really going to show off in this position,” she said. “It’s been very busy and fast-paced, which I love. I’m always up for a challenge. They have high goals for me. I have high goals for myself.”

Along with major street repairs and drainage issues, the immediate focus for city staff is to develop lines of communication with its citizens, addressing previous concerns about transparency. “They’ll feel like the city is finally listening,” Wessels said, assuring that her door is always open.

It’s an invitation she hopes to extend beyond city limits.

“We’re hoping to see more visitors come around and to make East Bernard a place that people want to get off the highway and come visit,” she said. “It’s a wonderful place to live, but it’s also a wonderful place to come and play.”

In collaboration with business owners, part of that initiative is to revitalize Main Street to become a focal point for the city.

“We are trying to prioritize and will be doing as much as we can, as much as financially possible,” she said. “We have a lot of ideas. We have a council that wants to see East Bernard prosper as well. I think with all of our attitudes in the right direction, we will go far.”

Wessels and her fiancé have plans to marry this year and begin their life together in the community she loves.

“We’ll make this our home,” she said. “We have a wonderful school district and that’s a huge factor, not just for me, but for people moving here, too. I feel like kids in East Bernard get that same quality of life that I got when I was little.”

Much of what Wessels and the city are striving to build rests upon the foundations of small-town charm.

“You don’t find that very often. I really want to preserve that feeling and see it prosper – to have people say, ‘wow, I really like that place. Those people are so lucky to live there,’” she said. “That is what I envision for East Bernard.”

– By Natalie Frels

“I’m always up for a challenge. They have high goals for me. I have high goals for myself.”

- AUDREY WESSELS
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A “hey, can you help me work a ticket booth” turned into four decades of volunteering.

2015 WHARTON COUNTY YOUTH FAIR
DEDICATED TO:
PATRICK & HELEN HLAVATY
And now, the 2015 Wharton County Youth Fair has been dedicated to Patrick and Helen Hlavaty of El Campo and their efforts to make the fair successful.

“They’ve put a lot of time in,” 2015 Fair President Mark Bain said. “They have been very supportive.”

The Hlavatys said the selection’s a true honor, but then quickly rattled off a list of others who should be chosen.

“There are more deserving people than us,” Patrick Hlavaty said, with Helen agreeing.

Getting Started

Lots of people give their time to the fair as children and grandchildren compete, but the Hlavatys don’t have any children.

“Pretty much everybody has kids in it, but we started with Wayne (Popp),” Helen Hlavaty said.

Even before he and Helen Roznovsky married, Patrick Hlavaty – an El Campo High School graduate originally from Louise – had been friends with Popp, so when his buddy asked for a helping hand, the answer was a quick yes.

Hooked On Helping

Helping at ticket booths soon led to more and more projects on the grounds and with fair activities.

Then, in 1976, their involvement with the WCYF became more official.

Patrick became the barbecue cook-off chair while Helen took over the Beer Garden.

“The year I took it over, there were 10 to 25 teams. My last year, there were 103,” he said of the decade-long effort. “I had a lot of friends that helped. It was not a tough job.”

Helen Hlavaty agreed, saying, “It wasn’t like work.”

She and Wayne’s wife Shirley Popp had a cook-off team most of the those years – The Pabst Blue Ribbon Queens.

And during the fair, she worked the Beer Garden – time off from her paying job at Kutac’s, a small family-style Bohemian bar she would later buy.

“I like the people. I like being around them as they come in to unwind,” Helen said, adding, “I’m like a fixture there and I like it. It’s just a good place to be.”

The Beer Garden profits go to the fair – more than $32,000 last year – but it operates separately as County Con-
The connection, an organization created by Vern Evanicky, Shirley Popp and the Hlavatys among others.

“Nothing could happen in that Beer Garden if we didn’t work as a team, and we couldn’t do what we do, if it wasn’t for everyone stepping up to the plate and helping out,” she said pointing out the efforts of Henry Jetelina, Keith Dornak, Vern Evanicky and her husband, among others.

By 1984, Patrick was the fair’s assistant treasurer and was later treasurer, but “We never quit the dirty work (maintenance projects),” he said.

**Starting Something Special**

For children who find fair competitions far too challenging, Helen created Special Friends Day in 2000 – an idea inspired by the late Johnny Corbett (Santa for many area children).

Fifteen came the first year. In 2014, however, 392 took part.

It “runs like clockwork,” Helen said. “I have Lloyd Klatt and his crew cooking the chili; Charlene Socha and her crew do the cold soft drinks; Kendra Charbula and a crew do the serving line; Brian Svetlik does the D.J.ing; and Taryn Socha (who is studying to be a Special Ed Teacher), Melea Socha and Emily Strnadael come in and dance with the clients.”

Now the greatest challenge is fund-raising.

**Years Go By**

Patrick Hlavaty served as fair president from 2004 to 2007 and remains a director.

“I am the organizer,” Helen said, “I get the project together, supplies, judges, etc.” She volunteers with everything from the Polka Fest to domino, washers and horseshoe events with the help of a long list of friends – and she still works the Beer Garden.

The two also volunteer with the El Campo Volunteer Fire Department and its auxiliary, St. Philip Catholic Church, chamber of commerce, Knights of Columbus and Veterans of Foreign Wars activities.
Time To Stop?

With more than four decades of giving to the fair, Patrick Hlavaty says he has no intention of retiring from his non-paying job.

He'll do it, he said, “Until I can’t physically do it.”

Helen agreed with Patrick adding, “I’d like to see more young folks get involved in operations, not only how it’s put on, but the grounds too.”

Working, giving among friends, she said, is easy.

Her husband agreed.

“If I had to do it all over again, I don’t think I’d do anything different,” Patrick Hlavaty said. “I’ve thoroughly enjoyed it.”

– By Shannon Crabtree
Slide into fun at the Wharton County Youth Fair!

The Wharton County Youth Fair returns this April with a few new attractions in addition to old favorites.
The goal, 2015 President Mark Bain said, is to draw more people to the fair which runs from Saturday, April 25 to Saturday, May 2 this year.

Keeping with its traditional format, the fair will open with all pageants and the junior college rodeo.

Animal competitions will take place throughout the week with days set aside to honor special groups like senior citizens, veterans, special friends and the students themselves.

As always, the highlight of the fair will be the Sale of Excellence Saturday afternoon where top animal and craft projects go on the auction block.

In between, entertainment opportunities abound from acts on the Midway, a carnival and the ever-popular Bull Blowout.

New this year, “we will have a kick-off dance the same night as the Queens Pageant,” Bain said. “We are trying to get more people to come out for the Queens Pageant and the junior college rodeo.”

Bain, a 1979 Louise High School graduate, was among the first participants in the WCYF showing an animal project. Since then, he has remained active in the youth project. “I’ve been volunteering my time ever since I got out of school,” he said, adding his three children have also participated in fair activities.

A Club Challenge is new this year, set for Friday in conjunction with Family Fun Night. Open to non-profit clubs, it pits teams of six (ages six to 18) against one another in a series of children’s field day games. Entry is $30 per team.

The competition winner earns a trophy, but the real prize ($250) goes to the team with the “loudest and biggest crowd cheering.”

**TEJANO NIGHT: APRIL 11**

New this year, the Crescent Hall event features an assortment of Tejano bands for attendees to enjoy.

**BARBECUE COOK-OFF: APRIL 17-18**

The deadline to enter this year’s event will be Tuesday, March 3.

Bragging rights will be up for grabs in five cooking categories as well as showmanship.

The Wharton County team earning first place brisket receives a $1,000 award and an entry into the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo’s cook-off.

While all cooking awards will be presented Saturday, the Most Colorful Contest judging takes place Friday night with the winner earning $500 along with bragging rights. Past winning entries have included decorative booths and costumes as well as song and dance routines.

**FAIR WEEK: APRIL 25 THROUGH MAY 2**

Aside from the competitions involving raising animals, the fair offers several more light-hearted events including pig or chicken chasing, mutton bustin’ and goat loading.

Youngsters wanting to compete must be registered by Friday, March 6. For entry forms contact the fair office at 979-677-3350 or look at their website whartoncountyouthfair.org.

The WCYF fairgrounds, formerly the Crescent school district, are located at the intersection of FM 960 and FM 961, north of U.S. 59 about 10 miles northeast of El Campo and nine miles northwest of Wharton.

Season passes good for both the cook-off competition days and the entire fair week – as well as one-day tickets are available. One-day tickets are $10 for adults and $5 for children ages 6 to 12. Children under the age of 5 are always admitted free.

Season passes for this year will be $30. With a season pass, visitors get unlimited access to everything from rodeo events to Midway fun and nightly music. Carnival rides require an extra fee.

– By Shannon Crabtree
Are you planning on spending some quality time with your family this summer? No matter what your destination, the length of the trip, or the age of your children, the success of this adventure depends on rock-solid organization.

Route, documents, insurance — everything has to be in order before departure day. Try and do your packing well in advance so that no essentials are forgotten, such as bathing suits, eyeglasses, and passports for crossing the border out of the United States. Make sure all the necessary reservations have been made for lodgings (hotel, motel, campground) and activities (zoo, day trip, amusement park).

Because the weather doesn’t always cooperate, be sure to have a few backup plans in place. You might want to scout out the nearest movie theater, bowling alley and shopping center, for example. This will help you avoid unhappy faces and grumpy moods. Keep in mind that travelling with children is a totally different ball game than travelling as a couple. This applies to both budget and activities for the road trip and once you’ve arrived at your destination.

You may think that admiring the beautiful countryside along the way is a nice way to pass the time, but your children are unlikely to feel the same way! Be sure to plan some activities for the car ride. Although you might want to travel as light as possible, don’t skimp on “survival material”: snacks, notebooks and pencils, books, toys, portable DVD player and movies, and a game console or tablet. Plan to do some singing together and brush up on your guessing games; these are great ways to help an impatient child endure the last few dozen miles of a long trip.

Just remember that the chances of your family vacation being a successful one will multiply exponentially if you create a fun and relaxed atmosphere as soon as you leave home. Have a great holiday!
**First Friday Luncheon:**
This monthly event is from noon to 1 p.m. Friday, Feb. 6 at the Wharton Chamber of Commerce, 225 N. Richmond Road, Wharton.

**Business Expo & Job Fair:** Wharton County Business Expo and Job Fair will be from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 17 at the El Campo Civic Center, 2350 N. Mechanic, El Campo. Free booth space is available for recruiters and employers.

**Plaza Theatre Performances:**
The Plaza Theatre will present “I Love You, You’re Perfect, Now Change” at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Feb. 13-14 and Feb. 22-21 with matinee shows at 2:30 p.m. on Feb. 15 and Feb. 22 at the theatre, 120 S. Houston, Wharton.

**Build a Bouquet Valentine’s Day:**
Monterey Square merchants will offer specials for Valentine’s Day on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 13-14 in downtown Wharton.

**Danevang Volunteer Fire Department (VFD) Dance:**
Danevang Volunteer Fire Department holds its annual dance from 7 to 10 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 21 at the El Campo KC Hall on Armory Road.

**Scandinavian Pancake Supper:**
First Lutheran Church hosts annual Scandinavian Pancake Supper from 5 to 7 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 22 at the church fellowship hall.

**Spot Bow Wow Dinner:**
Wharton County Stray Pet Outreach Team (SPOT) will have a chicken fried steak dinner from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 24 at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 2820 N. Fulton, Wharton. Tickets are available at Alamont or Wharton veterinary clinics.

**Sheriff’s Association Wild Game Supper:**
The Sheriff’s Association’s annual fundraiser features a wide range of wild game. Held at the Wharton County Youth Fair fairgrounds main hall in Crescent on Thursday, Feb. 26.

**Java Jam:**
Todd Janik, a soloist from The Washers, will perform at the monthly Java Jam from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 27 at the Milam Street Coffee Shop, 200 W. Milam, Wharton.

**Wharton County Day at the Capitol:**
Wharton County citizens will make their bi-annual trip to Austin to meet political representatives.

**Pancake Supper:**
Wharton Lions Club will have its annual Lions Pancake Supper Thursday, March 5 at the Wharton Civic Center, 1924 N. Fulton, Wharton.

**El Campo Chamber of Commerce Gala:**
The El Campo Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture will hold its annual Gala at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Mar. 5 at the El Campo Civic Center, 2350 N. Mechanic.
FIRST FRIDAY LUNCHEON: This monthly event is from noon to 1 p.m. Friday, March 6 at the Wharton Chamber of Commerce, 225 N. Richmond Road, Wharton.

KC COOKOFF: The Wharton Knights of Columbus Annual Cookoff will be held Friday and Saturday, March 6-7, at the KC Hall, 2820 N. Fulton, Wharton.

HISTORIC WHARTON FUN RUN: The Pilot Club of Wharton will host the second annual Historic Wharton 5K Fun Run, at 8 a.m. on Saturday, March 7 beginning at Guffy Park in downtown Wharton.

TEXAS GAME WARDEN FISHING TOURNAMENT: The Whiskers & Reds tournament begins March 12 at midnight. Final weigh in is on March 14 along with the Justin Hurst Memorial 5K Run from 9-10 a.m., children’s activities starting at 10 a.m. and a meal with live and silent auctions starting at 5 p.m. Brackenridge Event Center, Edna.

EL CAMPO ROTARY CLUB DINNER & AUCTION: Annual seafood dinner and benefit auction held at the El Campo Civic Center on Thursday, March 12 from 5:30 to 11:30 p.m. Live and silent auctions and drawings are featured.

EL CAMPO VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPT. APPRECIATION SUPPER: El Campo Volunteer Fire Department holds a donor appreciation supper from 5 to 10 p.m. Monday, March 16 at the El Campo Civic Center.

WHARTON CHAMBER BANQUET: Wharton Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture will have its 95th annual banquet at 6 p.m. Thursday, March 19 at the Wharton Civic Center, 1924 N. Fulton St., Wharton.


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SPAGHETTI COOK-OFF: The 100 Club Law Enforcement Spaghetti Cook-Off will be from 5 to 9 p.m. Thursday, March 26 at the Wharton County Youth Fairgrounds, Crescent.

LOUISE/HILLJE CHAMBER BANQUET: Annual banquet includes social hour, silent auction, dinner and a program. Citizen and Educator of Year awarded. The event is set for Thursday, March 26 at St. Andrew’s Church Hall in Hillje with the social hour starting at 6 p.m.

JAVA JAM: Duke Davis and the Pep Steppers, a trio that performs western and jazz music, will be the guest performers at the monthly Java Jam from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, March 27 at the Milam Street Coffee Shop, 200 W. Milam, Wharton.

CHOCOLATE WALK: Monterey Square merchants will have a Chocolate Walk Easter Sale that includes a $200 shopping spree from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 28 in downtown Wharton.

HOSPICE SUPPORT COOK-OFF: Heating It Up For Hospice barbecue cook-off. DJ entertainment and food at this one-day event benefits terminally ill patients and their families. Held Saturday, March 28 at the VFW Hall in El Campo.

FIRST FRIDAY LUNCHEON: This monthly event is from noon to 1 p.m. Friday, April 3 at the Wharton Chamber of Commerce, 225 N. Richmond Road.

HEP SCHOLARSHIP BANQUET: The Hispanic Education Project hosts its 24th annual Scholarship Banquet Saturday, April 4 beginning at 6:30 p.m. with a meal at 7 p.m. at the El Campo Civic Center.

SPOT TROT: Wharton County Stray Pet Outreach Team (S.P.O.T.) hosts the seventh annual SPOT Trot, held in memory of Amber Hensarling, DVM. 5K race begins at 8:30 a.m. The TROT and other activities are held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 11 at Riverfront Park in Wharton.

QUEEN’S BIRTHDAY 5K FUN RUN: The community of Danevang celebrates its Danish heritage by honoring the queen of Denmark’s birthday. This year’s event includes a 5K fun run and will be held Saturday, April 18 starting at 8:30 a.m. at the Danevang Meeting House, just off Hwy. 71 in Danevang. On-site registration starts at 6:30 a.m.

YOUTH FAIR COOK-OFF: The annual Wharton County Youth Fair Barbeque Cook-off, which kicks off the Youth Fair, is set for Friday and Saturday, April 17-18 at the Wharton County Youth Fairgrounds in Crescent.

JAVA JAM: Mike Gallo, a soloist who plays light rock, will be the guest performer at the monthly Java Jam from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, April 24 at the Milam Street Coffee Shop, 200 W. Milam, Wharton.

PLAZA THEATRE PERFORMANCES: The Plaza Theatre will present “Picnic” at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, April 24-25 and May 1-2 with matinee shows at 2:30 p.m. on April 26 and May 3 at the theatre, 120 S. Houston, Wharton.
WHARTON COUNTY YOUTH FAIR: The annual Wharton County Youth Fair runs from Saturday, April 25 through Saturday, May 2 at the Wharton County Youth Fairgrounds in Crescent.

FIRST FRIDAY LUNCHEON: This monthly event is from noon to 1 p.m. Friday, May 1 at the Wharton Chamber of Commerce, 225 N. Richmond Road, Wharton.

MOTHER’S DAY SPECIALS: Monterey Square merchants will offer specials from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 9 in honor of Mother’s Day in downtown Wharton.

FREEDOM FEST: The annual Wharton County Freedom Fest will be held noon to midnight on Saturday, May 16 on Monterey Square in downtown Wharton.

JAVA JAM: Dave Roland Duo will be the guest performers at the monthly Java Jam from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, May 22 at the Mi-
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