It is dusk. I stand in the dwindling August light, leaning against my car. I have parked with about thirty others on a caliche driveway just off FM 3009 a few miles east of Natural Bridge Caverns. I am about to witness the emergence of the largest colony of Mexican free-tailed bats in the world from their summer home: Bracken Cave.

According to Bat Conservation International (BCI), the estimated fifteen to twenty million bats, mostly of mammals on earth.” Having purchased the land from the E. W. Marbach Family in 1992, BCI now owns The Bracken Cave Preserve, which is about 1,500 acres of land surrounding the cave. As you might guess, I feel intense anticipation.

After a short hike into the preserve, we settle in, sitting on stones and wooden benches, maybe thirty feet from the entrance to the cave. The ambiance is hushed and expectant. There are no signs of movement from within the cave until dusk begins to settle in.

At first, bats emerge one or two at a time. With a quick intake of breath, we whisper and point, carefully keeping our voices low, as if any sound might keep the coming magic from happening. Soon, small streams of bats emerge, some heading one way, some another until, minutes later...THE LIBRARY IS EXPANDING!

The Bulverde Spring Branch Library will be under construction by sometime in the spring of 2018. We have known for awhile that the library would need to expand to keep up with the rapidly expanding population of the Bulverde/Spring Branch area. It has taken over a year to decide how to go about that expansion. During that time, library staff and the Board has been meeting with planners and a library building specialist and have worked hard on planning the expansion project. We have also invited and received input from the public on what it would like to see in a newly revamped library.

Now, finally, the library is on the cusp of beginning construction for the expansion. The additions and changes to the library will mean more room for meetings and programs, a special children’s area, a dedicated teen area, more study rooms, and other updates related to technology, furniture, and design in general. Our beautiful library will still be beautiful, just bigger!

To see drawings and floor plans for the expanded library, please go to the expansion blog on the Bulverde Spring Branch website at http://libguides.bsblibrary.org/expansion.

We expect the construction and renovation to take anywhere from 15-18 months. Our hope is to complete the project before the summer of 2019. Until then, meeting space will be limited so that the Contractor can be working on as much of the library as possible in order to get the project completed according to the timeline.

There will be other temporary changes as well. Library staff will be relocated from the administrative area to other areas of the library. Temporary walls will block most of the existing entrances, and an alternate entrance will have to be utilized.

During the initial phase of the project, we hope to complete the site work. This will involve expanding the existing parking areas and create a road to encircle the building, connecting the existing upper parking lot to the new lower parking lot. A new parking area will be added at the back side of the building.

While programming will be limited at the library, our programming teams are working hard to continue providing services to the community. We will be holding our larger Summer Reading programs at Arlon Seay Elementary School on Wednesdays in the summer. We are still working on other details of how we might facilitate our children’s and adult summer reading programs.

All of our library materials will still be available in the library, even though access to the building will change depending on the phase of the construction/renovation.

The final expansion plans include more meeting spaces, and we will expand from two study rooms to six. A new large meeting space will be constructed. It will be possible to divide the large space into three rooms, as we have now, but the rooms will be much larger. When all three rooms are open, the space will encompass about 3,000 square feet.

LOCAL HISTORY: BRACKEN BAT CAVE
by D. Ellis Phelps
It is dusk. I stand in the dwindling August light, leaning against my car. I have parked with about thirty others on a caliche driveway just off FM 3009 a few miles east of Natural Bridge Caverns. I am about to witness the emergence of the largest colony of Mexican free-tailed bats in the world from their summer home: Bracken Cave.}

SEE BAT CAVE ON PAGE 2
BAT CAVE CONTINUED FROM PG 1

later, the tiny beasts fill the air like swirling leaves, trailing the stench of guano behind them. The smell stings my eyes and the flurry of wings is palpable like wind in my face. I am speechless with wonder and delight.

For maybe an hour, we watch clouds of bats emerge. Our guide tells us they will continue to make their exodus for hours. These bat-bands have been estimated to measure up to thirty miles long and twenty miles wide (Wikipedia). “As an essential predator of corn earworm moths and other crop pests...the colony...is estimated to consume over 100 tons of these moths every summer night,” according to Texas Parks and Wildlife. The cave measures one-thousand feet long and one-hundred feet in diameter. It is hard to imagine such a dense population living within so small a space: as many as five hundred bat pups can cluster in one square foot of these walls in the spring birthing season.

The cave, formerly known as Cibolo Creek Cave or Cibolo Cave is now a protected natural preserve but was previously and actively mined for guano since 1865. In a 1964 survey conducted by the Texas Speleological Association, the owner reported that the cave yielded seventy-five tons of guano annually, which he sometimes shipped in its entirety to an onion industry in Laredo (Reddell, J., Ed.).

There are two venues through which you can witness this spectacular event for yourself: you can become a member (thirty dollars and up) of Bat Conservation International (https://www.batcon.org) or you can enjoy the Bracken Bat Flight tour package via www.batcon.org.

The staff, Foundation, and Friends of the Library have been developing plans for a Capital Campaign to raise $750,000 which will help fund the furnishings and equipment for the expansion. There are several committees in the Capital Campaign group, such as Naming Opportunities, Fundraisers, Grant Writing and Communications. They hope to roll out the initial promotion about the Capital Campaign in December and plan to run it through the entire year of 2018 and possibly into 2019 if needed. We would love to have anyone who might be interested or have experience join our group.

We expect to know more about the phasing after the Contractor joins the project and more about programming possibilities in the coming months. We will keep you posted!
**Animal Rescue**

*Animal Rescue Connections* provides instructions and traps for the Trap, Neuter, Return feral cat program and furnishes speakers for HOAs and other groups. www.animalrescueconnections.org.

**Bulverde Area Humane Society** has dogs and cats for adoption, plus volunteer opportunities, at 3563 Kingsnake off TX 1863. Open Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday from 10am-1pm and Sunday from 1-4pm. See www.bulverdeareahumanesociety.com.

**Christmas Events**

*Natural Bridge Caverns* is offering several Christmas activities this year, including Caroling in the Caverns, a Christmas Hayride, and a Reindeer Roundup maze for the whole family. For details see the cavern website at https://naturalbridgecaverns.com.

**ESL Classes**

*Free ESL Classes* are available at the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library. Call or go online at www.bsblibrary.org for details.

**Food Pantries**

*Helping Hands Food Pantry* offers food, nutrition education, and spiritual guidance. Open 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month from 2pm–5:45pm at Rebecca Creek Baptist Church on Hwy 281 in Spring Branch. For more information, call 830-885-3945 or 830-221-5526.

*Provisions: A 25:35 Outreach* is a food pantry open Tuesday–Thursday from 9am to 3pm. At 2295-1 Bulverde Road in Bulverde, behind Wine 101.

*Hope Center Food Pantry and Outreach* distributes food every 3rd Wednesday of the month from 10am – noon at Riverside Community Church, 1100 Bulverde Road in Bulverde. Call 830-980-4673 for more information.

**Health and Wellness**

*Wellness on Wheels* is a medical clinic available every 2nd Thursday from 1-2 pm at St. Joseph’s Church Rotary, 25781 State Highway 46 W in Spring Branch.

**Jobs**

*New Braunfels Works* provides Job Assistance Workshops the 1st Friday of each month and computer classes and job coaching every 2nd Friday. Contact: Ines Picazo at 830-327-6007.

**Music and Dancing**

*Anhalt Dance Hall* – On December 16 at 8pm, come dance to the country dance band and 2011 Male Vocalist of the Year Landon Dodd and the Dance Hall Drifters. $15 at the door. 12 and under free. (830) 438-2873

**Recovery/Support**

*Mental Health Crisis Number* – 1-800-325-8931

*AA Helpline* 24/7 - 210-828-6235 for help and information about area AA meetings

*Alanon Helpline* - 210-829-1392 for information about Alanon or Alateen meetings.

**Dementia and Alzheimer’s Caregiver Support Group** – Trained counselors offer support and information every 1st Monday from 2-3pm, at the Comal County Senior Center, 655 Landa, New Braunfels. Contact: Deanna Krawczyk (210) 663-4558.

**Seniors and Over 50’s**

*Bulverde Spring Branch Activity Center* provides a friendly place to socialize, plus free classes in exercise, yoga, health, and more. Call 830-438-311 or come by 30280 Cougar Bend in Bulverde. www.bsbac.com.

**Theater**

*Brauntex Theater in New Braunfels* - The Oak Ridge Boys, winners of Grammy and CMA awards, will perform on Friday, January 19 at 8pm. Tickets $58-$88. Call 830-627-0808 or go to www.brauntex.org.

S.T.A.G.E. –Auditions on December 17 at 4pm for 10 actors to perform in Geezers, to be performed in February and March 2018. See www.stagebulverde.org or call 830- 438-2339 for details.
All library classes and events are FREE unless otherwise noted.

NOTE: If you registered for a class and need to cancel, please do so by clicking the link to unregister in your confirmation email or call the library.

Thursday, December 14
Learn to Download eBooks and Audiobooks from Overdrive 6:00pm – 7:45pm
Learn how download ebooks and audiobooks using Overdrive’s free new app, Libby. This class will focus on Apple and Android tablets and smart phones. Please bring your device and know your password for the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. If you have a Kindle or Kindle Fire please email Bethanie at bethanie@bsblibrary.org. Registration required.

Friday, December 22
The Night Before Christmas 2:00pm – 6:00pm
’Twas three nights before Christmas and everyone in town came to the library to watch a live skit of Clement Moore’s ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas! Following the skit we’ll have Christmas crafts, cookies, and a photo opportunity with Santa himself. Bring the whole family for this fun library tradition! No registration required.

Saturday, December 23
LIBRARY CLOSED

Sunday, December 24
LIBRARY CLOSED

Monday, December 25
LIBRARY CLOSED

Wednesday, December 27
Young Naturalists Story Hour 1:00pm - 2:30pm
With winter’s arrival animals (and plants) have to make adjustments for survival. Who hibernates, who migrates and who just stays and adapts? Join Ranger Craig from Guadalupe River for a special Christmas Break Young Naturalists and discover what’s happening out there. Registration required.

Thursday, December 28
Tech Toy Tutoring 5:30pm – 7:00pm
Did you get some new tech toys for Christmas? Come on out to the library and let us help you with your new phone, tablet or tech gadget. We can help you download apps to use the library’s resources or just familiarize you with the device. If you can please let us know what you will bringing before you come. Email: bethanie@bsblibrary.org

Monday, January 1
LIBRARY CLOSED

Tuesday, January 9
Citizenship Class 5:30pm - 7:30pm
Free! Registration required.

Wednesday, January 10
Lunch and Learn - Fencing Basics 12:00pm - 1:30pm
Landowner Management Series - Different types of fencing for making your property look nice or keep animals in or off of your property. Registration required.
Ongoing Programs at the Library

**Mondays**

**Toddler Storytime**
10:30am - 11:30am

**Greatful Threads Quilt Group**
1st Monday
10am - 4pm
Please register.

**Preschool Storytime**
10:30am - 12pm

**Intermediate Spanish**
9:30am - 10:30am

**Beginning Spanish**
10:30am - 12pm

**Wednesdays**

**The Art of Storytelling – Adults and Teens 13+**
10:30am - 11:30am
Registration required.

**English as a Second Language**
6pm - 7:30pm
No registration required.

**NO CLASS DECEMBER**
18-JANUARY 2

**Thursdays**

**Cookbook Demo & Potluck Lunch Club**
1st Thursday
11:30am – 1:30pm
NOT MEETING IN DECEMBER

**Learn Adobe Dreamweaver Basics**
1st Thursday
2pm – 3:45pm

**Watercolor Basics for Adults & Teens 13+**
6pm - 7:45pm
Registration required.

**BARLD Meeting**
2nd Monday
5pm – 6:30pm

**Watercolor Basics for Adults & Teens 13+**
4th Monday
6pm - 7:45pm
Registration required.

**FOL Meeting**
2nd Monday
1:30pm – 3pm

**Hill Country Christian Writers**
6pm – 7:45pm

**Family Lego Night**
6pm - 7:30pm

**Watercolor for Adults & Teens 13+**
2nd Tuesday
3pm-5pm
Registration required.

**Tuesdays**

**Beginning French**
9:30am - 11am

**Intermediate French**
11am - 11:30am

**Intermediate Spanish**
10:30am - 12pm

**Preschool Storytime**
10:30am - 11:30am

**Wednesdays**

**The Art of Storytelling – Adults and Teens 13+**
10:30am - 11:30am
Registration required.

**English as a Second Language**
6pm - 7:30pm
No registration required.

**NO CLASS DECEMBER**
18-JANUARY 2

**Saturdays**

**Walk-In Computer Help**
11am – 12pm

**Anime Club for Teens**
2pm – 3:30pm

**BSBL Trekker**

Just an update on the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library’s BiblioTechnoTrekker, otherwise known as simply “the Trekker.” This handsome and colorful vehicle can be seen cruising around the area on its rounds, promoting literacy in the West Comal County community.

What exactly does the Trekker do?

The Trekker travels around the community to deliver library goods and services and allows the library to attend local events on a larger scale. The vehicle is equipped with a mobile hotspot for free WiFi access, tables and chairs for events, and bins to hold library books and other materials as needed.

Where does the Trekker go?

Currently, the Trekker has six regular reoccurring routes that take place each month, sometimes multiple times a month.

The Trekker visits the Bulverde Activity center four times a month. On the first and third Mondays, library staff set up to register library cards to new members, assist with library services (such as online databases and using the catalog) and occasionally brings a shelf of books to check out. The first and third Wednesdays of the month, staff bring a free craft to the center. Those who sign up to participate are given materials and instruction on how to make various crafts. So far, participants have enjoyed crafts such as Wine Cork Pumpkins, Fall Leaf Jars, Paper Ornaments, and Christmas Gift Tags.

The Heights of Bulverde is visited three times a month. The fourth Monday of each month, the Trekker transports a craft to the residents. Fall Leaf Jars and Decorating Scented Pine Cones have brought the residents a piece of festive decoration to their rooms so far. Adult Storytime occurs at The Heights on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. Residents are invited to sit in and listen to a story read by a library staff member.

How can I learn more?

You can learn more about the Trekker by visiting http://libguides.bsblibrary.org/Trekker/about. You can also send in a request for the Trekker to attend your event or program at the same link. Included in this information is the Trekker’s calendar which is frequently updated.

The Trekker is in much demand and its days are busy. The BSBL Outreach team suspects it will only get busier as the library begins its expansion project!
COUNTY PRIORITIZES ROAD PROJECTS FOR POTENTIAL FUNDING

Comal County Commissioners Court agreed to submit nine recommended road projects to the Texas Department of Transportation for their sponsorship and possible funding by state and federal transportation dollars allocated in the San Antonio area.

The list approved by Commissioners Court represents the highest-priority road and mobility projects on state-maintained highways within Comal County.

“This is a solid list of projects representing needs from across the county,” said Kevin Webb, Precinct 3 Commissioner and member of the executive committee of the Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO). “This process helps us identify what residents’ mobility needs are and allows us to advocate for the funding to address those needs.”

Every two years, the AAMPO asks its member entities to submit proposals for the next five-year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), a list of approved projects to receive federal transportation money.

TXDOT will be requested to sponsor at least one of the nine projects submitted for the period 2019 through 2022. TxDOT typically sponsors only a small number of the highest-priority projects of the various entities included in the AAMPO, which includes Comal County, because of the program’s limited funding.

The executive committee of the AAMPO will allocate funding based on the money available, technical scores, public input and other considerations. Previous TIP projects funded in Comal County include expansions of FM 2252 and FM 306.

The submitted projects, in order of priority, are:
1. Overpass construction, Loop 337 at River Road;
2. Intersection improvements, State Highway 46 at FM 3009, FM 311 and South Cranes Mill Road;
3. Highway expansion, FM 306 from roadside visitor center to Canning Road;
4. Highway expansion, State Highway 46 from FM 3159 to Bentwood Drive, and from Far Hills Drive to Bulverde Road;
5. Highway expansion, FM 1863 from Smithson Valley Road to U.S. Highway 281;
6. Highway expansion, FM 306 from River Chase Way to roadside visitor center;
7. Shoulder improvements, FM 3009
8. Highway expansion, State Highway 46 from Range Road to FM 3159; and
9. Highway expansion, State Highway 46 from Bulverde Road to county line.

The AAMPO will conduct a public meeting on the proposed TIP projects this spring.

“This is a competitive process, and input from Comal County residents will be important in helping these projects receive the funding they need,” Webb said. “We have a good track record of working with our partner entities in the MPO on behalf of county residents, and I’m optimistic that will continue.”

Information provided by the Comal County Public Information Office, www.comalcountytx.com.

FLU SHOTS AVAILABLE

The Comal County Office of Public Health wishes to remind residents that flu shots are still available.

Cases of influenza have begun to rise, with 53 confirmed cases over the two-week period ending November 25, compared with 33 over the previous two weeks. Overall, Comal County saw more than 377 cases of flu or flu-like symptoms in November, nearly three times as many as in October.

“There’s still time to get your flu shot and protect yourself and your family this flu season,” said Director of Public Health Cheryl Fraser.

The peak of last year’s flu season occurred in February, Fraser said. “An annual flu vaccine is the best way to protect against the flu,” she said. “The CDC recommends that everyone over 6 months old receive a flu vaccine from a licensed medical professional.”

The Office of Public Health accepts Medicaid and Community First CHIP for children age 18 and younger, and Blue Cross Blue Shield for all ages. The cost of a shot for someone without insurance coverage is just $35.

Residents can call 830-221-1150 to make an appointment, but walk-ins are welcome. The office is open from 8 a.m. to noon and 1-5 p.m. at 1297 Church Hill Drive, New Braunfels.

HOW TO TELL IF NEWS IS REAL

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS - Comal Area

Wondering what’s real and what’s fake news? The League of Women Voters of the Comal Area (LWVCA) invites the public to learn how to evaluate print and social media reports on January 16, 2018, from noon to 1 p.m. at the Tye Preston Memorial Library, 16311 S. Access Rd, Canyon Lake, TX 78133.

“It may seem overwhelming to check everything but it is important to check anything that you are considering sharing or acting on”, commented Roxanna Deane, President of LWVCA and a librarian with 50 years of experience. Ms. Deane will review how to combat fake news and provide a handout listing online resources for fact checking during the brown bag lunch meeting with LWVCA members.

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. LWV never supports or opposes candidates for office, or political parties. For more information visit www.lwvcomal.org and https://www.facebook.com/LWVComalTX.
RESIGNATION OF MARTY CHRISMAN FROM LIBRARY FOUNDATION BOARD

Marty Chrisman, owner of Chrisman Realty of Canyon Lake, is resigning as a Director of the Foundation of the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library, having served in that position since 2014. Marty was instrumental in establishing the Foundation, and her presence and contributions will be sorely missed. She goes on to serve as the newly elected President of the Board of the Four Rivers Association of Realtors.

RECYCLING CENTER ACCEPTS CHRISTMAS TREES AND GARLAND

The Comal County Recycling Center will begin accepting used live Christmas trees and garland at no cost on Wednesday, December 27. The center will accept free of charge any used live Christmas greenery through January 20, said James Tart, coordinator of the Moe Schwab Recycling Center. Residents are asked to remove tinsel, ornaments and other decorations before bringing their greenery for recycling.

“This is a service we provide to county residents every year,” Tart said. “We’d rather mulch this greenery and offer it back to residents for use in their gardens than have it sitting in the landfill.

All other brush will continue to be subject to the usual recycling fees. Artificial trees and greenery are not accepted for recycling.

Contact:
James Tart, Recycling Center Coordinator
830.643.3781 or tartja@co.comal.tx.us

CHRISTMAS AT THE LIBRARY!
by Lacee Sowell

’Twas three nights before Christmas, when all through the town, families came to the library not wearing a frown. The trees were decorated by the window with care, in hopes they would win the Holiday on the Hilltop competition affair.

Voting for the annual Holiday on the Hilltop competition has started! Come by the library to enjoy six beautifully decorated trees and wreaths by participants of the event. Ballots are located at the circulation desk and contain the locations of the participating decorations.

Holiday on the Hilltop encourages friendly competitions amongst local community groups. There are two categories: trees and wreaths, and the winners of each category receive a small prize. More than just a competition, Holiday on the Hilltop helps turn the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library into a magical Christmas scene.

Voting for Holiday on the Hilltop ends on December 20th with the winners announced on December 22nd at the Night Before Christmas event.

Families are invited to attend the annual Night Before Christmas event, a library Christmas tradition. Held on December 22nd from 2:00pm - 6:00pm, library staff and volunteers will be bringing to life Clement Moore’s classic Christmas poem. Enjoy the live skit, then stick around for Christmas crafts (such as paper craft Christmas trees and decorating wooden ornaments) and cookies and cocoa. Santa will be around to take in last minute Christmas gift requests and take photos, bring your camera and catch the jolly old man before he starts his delivery rounds!

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, And away they all flew like the down of a thistle. But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight, HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL, AND TO ALL A GOOD-NIGHT!

PET OF THE MONTH - Batman & Robin

Batman and Robin are five year old terrier-chihuahua mixes. Batman is a male and Robin is a female. They are a bonded pair that the Bulverde Area Humane Society would like to place in a home together. They are both small (just right for snuggling in your lap!) and loving pooches. A bonus is that they are already house trained, so they will make an easy transition into being house pets again.

For more information or to meet Batman and Robin and other adoptable pets, come by 3563 Kingsnake, Bulverde, just off TX 1863 west of Hwy 281. Open TUES, THURS, AND SAT from 10am-1pm and SUN from 1-4pm. Contact BAHS at 830-980-2247 or www.bulverdeareahumanesociety.com.

MEMORIES MADE AT CHRISTMAS ARE THE TRUE GIFTS
The Night Before Christmas
Background courtesy of Elizabeth Weaver
In this season of giving most folks’ attention shifts to store and internet shopping to find the “perfect” gift for everyone on ever-expanding lists. I too fall into this trap, particularly now that I have grandchildren. Fortunately, I have discovered over the years that there are gifts we are all afforded on a daily basis that don’t require a date on a calendar, gift-wrapping or debt. It turns out that the natural world provides all of us gifts on a daily basis if only we take the time to slow down and enjoy what unfolds.

I began reflecting on this when on the 19th of November I and a group of trained bird banding volunteers opened a series of mist nets to capture, band and release songbirds at Honey Creek State Natural Area. Not only did we capture seven species of native sparrows, our target birds, but we also received the “gift” of our first ever meadowlark. Sure, we couldn’t tell if it was a western or eastern--turns out in the hand its identification is very challenging. Still, it was quite a thrill, one among so many this year.

A month before that it was a male American Kestrel that found its way into a net, another first. Then there was the entire month of October when monarch butterflies descended on the park for two or three weeks in numbers the likes of which I had not seen before. An appearance of not one but two delicate, often overlooked gemmed satyr butterflies provided yet another natural gift.

There was the morning of Mississippi Kites over the river and the recent appearance of a bellicose Ringed Kingfisher--in fact, a morning when all three kingfishers made an appearance, a kingfisher trifecta. There was the cold morning when heart-shaped images of the frozen sap of the frostweed plants adorning the native wildflower garden.

On a chilly February morning it was the blooming of a single slenderstem bitterweed, the first wildflower of spring, bright yellow against a field of brown. Only a couple of weeks ago the discovery of the delicate Ladies’ Tresses orchids standing like little white candles along the entrance road to the park. It was Spring’s sweet fragrance of agarita flowers attracting not only butterflies and bees by the droves, but butterfly surveyors, as well. It was the flyby and calling of two Eastern Screech Owls on the Bauer Unit while I waited for hunters to check in on a wonderful evening, and the ancient sound of Sandhill Cranes, floating southeastward on their way to the Gulf Coast.

It was an amazing sunset at Black Gap Wildlife Management Area while bats and nightjars swarmed over the water, while we were hoping a few would visit the mist nets set up to monitor bat populations. Or the presence of seemingly hundreds of bold and bright blue male Indigo Buntings along the Gulf Coast on an annual birding trip. There was the afternoon when, upon discovering a stand of boneset plants, I gave over two or three hours to photographing butterflies of every make and model – not on the work clock, mind you.

I am truly blessed to encounter these amazing gifts of the natural world and even more so to get to share them with the people who come to my programs or read this and my other writing, or see one of our Guadalupe River Facebook videos. I have spent my career trying to connect everyone to the natural world, at a time when people are becoming farther removed from Nature’s gifts.

If I could gift one thing to everyone it would be the re-discovering of your sense of wonder and the power to keep it present and strong by guaranteeing you time outdoors so that it, and you, could be nurtured by Nature. So that you would be strengthened by it and come to better understand how critical a healthy and diverse environment is to your survival, and that of your children and that of their children.

As the calendar turns to 2018 I hope and wish for you time to get outside and discover the abundant gifts each of Nature’s seasons has to offer. If you need help getting started, join me at the park for one or more programs next year – beginning with our New Year’s Eve midnight hike to Honey Creek. If you would like to know more about this and other programs, please email me at craig.hensley@tpwd.texas.gov.

Have a wonderful holiday season and new year. Thank you for spending this time with me; I write these articles from the heart and I hope each touches yours.

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**LUNCH LEARN**

**FENCING BASICS**

**Wednesday, January 10 from 12:00 - 1:30pm**

Fencing Basics – This session will look at the different types of fencing that can be used to help make your property look nice or keep animals in or off of your property.

Registration required.
Clubs and Meetings

Do you have a special interest? Would you like to explore a new one? Then check out these groups. If you would like your club listed, email us about it at news@comalchronicle.com.

Book Clubs

History Book Club meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month from 1-3 pm at Mystic Shores Community Center. Contact: Dennis Deeny at vatrading@msn.com. Emailed Dennis.

The 2nd Tuesday Evening Book Club will be meeting as usual in December on the 2nd Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm at the BSB Library.

Local Government

The Bulverde Planning and Zoning Commission meets at 6:30 pm on the 1st Tuesday of the month at City Hall. The public is welcome. 830-438-3612.

The Bulverde City Council meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 6:30 pm to 8 pm at Bulverde City Hall, 30360 Cougar Bend, Bulverde. The public is invited. 830-438-3612.

Service Clubs

The Bulverde Men’s Lions Club meets 7-9 pm every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at the Bulverde Community Center at 1747 E Ammann Rd.

The Spring Branch-Bulverde Lions Club meets 7:30-9 pm every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at the Bulverde Spring Branch Activity Center.

Toastmasters

Col. Jack Wallace Toastmasters meet the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month from 6:30 pm to 7:45 pm at the BSB Library.

Web Design

The San Antonio Web Spinners, an Adobe User Group, meets 2:00 pm - 3:45 pm on the 1st Thursday of the month at the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library to discuss Dreamweaver Basics, and web design in general.

Writing

Canyon Lake Area Writers (CLAW) meet the first and third Tuesday of each month from 4:30 to 6:30 pm at Tye Preston Memorial Library.

Hill Country Christian Writers meet weekly on Tuesdays from 6:00 pm - 7:45 pm at the BSB Library to share encouragement and writing.

Guadalupe Valley Amateur Radio Club meets on Saturdays at 7:30 am at Granzin’s BBQ, 660 W. San Antonio in New Braunfels. Contact: David Schreier, 830-914-6270 or 210-392-0676.

Greatful Threads Quilt Group. They meet every 1st Monday of the month from 10 am - 4 pm at the BSB Library. Call 830-438-4864 to register.

Hobbies

The Bulverde Quilt Group meets at Bulverde United Methodist Church on the fourth Wednesday of each month from 9:30 am – 1:30 pm. Contact: Sherry Sorbera at sorbera@gmail.com.

Comal County Beekeepers Association meets the 1st Thursday of every month at the EMS station at 353 Rodeo Drive, Spring Branch (830) 438-5643.

Guadalupe Valley Amateur Radio Club meets on Saturdays at 7:30 am at Granzin’s BBQ, 660 W. San Antonio in New Braunfels. Contact: David Schreier, 830-914-6270 or 210-392-0676.

Greatful Threads Quilt Group. They meet every 1st Monday of the month from 10 am - 4 pm at the BSB Library. Call 830-438-4864 to register.

Local Government

The Bulverde Planning and Zoning Commission meets at 6:30 pm on the 1st Tuesday of the month at City Hall. The public is welcome. 830-438-3612.

The Bulverde City Council meets on the 2nd Tuesday of each month from 6:30 pm to 8 pm at Bulverde City Hall, 30360 Cougar Bend, Bulverde. The public is invited. 830-438-3612.

Service Clubs

The Bulverde Men’s Lions Club meets 7-9 pm every 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month at the Bulverde Community Center at 1747 E Ammann Rd.

The Spring Branch-Bulverde Lions Club meets 7:30-9 pm every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month at the Bulverde Spring Branch Activity Center.

Toastmasters

Col. Jack Wallace Toastmasters meet the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month from 6:30 pm to 7:45 pm at the BSB Library.

Web Design

The San Antonio Web Spinners, an Adobe User Group, meets 2:00 pm - 3:45 pm on the 1st Thursday of the month at the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library to discuss Dreamweaver Basics, and web design in general.

Writing

Canyon Lake Area Writers (CLAW) meet the first and third Tuesday of each month from 4:30 to 6:30 pm at Tye Preston Memorial Library.

Hill Country Christian Writers meet weekly on Tuesdays from 6:00 pm - 7:45 pm at the BSB Library to share encouragement and writing.

WHAT BOOK CLUBS ARE READING

by Cassie Wedding

Only two of the BSBL book clubs will be meeting during the month of December.

The First Tuesday Book Club will meet as usual on first Tuesday of the month, December 5, at 1:00 p.m. The club is full and not open to new members at this time, but you can sign up for the waiting list. The club will be discussing

The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry by Gabrielle Zevin. This book was reviewed last month, but in brief, it is about a bookstore owner whose rare collection of Poe poems has been stolen. Then a mysterious package appears at the bookstore, and its unexpected arrival gives Fikry the chance to make his life over.

The Second Tuesday Evening Book Club will meet as usual on the second Tuesday of the month, December 12, at 6:30 in the evening. This club is not full and is open to all. Just show up! For December the members will be discussing the novel Nutshell, by Ian McEwan.

Nutshell was also reviewed last month, but “in a nutshell,” this strange little book is told from the viewpoint of a fetus in the womb, who listens in on everything that happens in his mother’s life. The book is an imaginative retelling of Hamlet, with witty echoes of Shakespeare.

As of the writing of this article, the books slated for the January meetings of the book clubs have not been posted, except the following:

The Promise by Ann Weisgarber
This novel takes place in 1900. A young woman flees the fashionable town of Dayton, Ohio in the wake of a terrible scandal. Heartbroken and facing destitution, she marries a recent widower and moves to his land in Galveston, Texas. She struggles to adjust to life there and to forge a relationship with her stepson Andre, who is grieving for his mother. Then the worst storm in a generation descends, the hurricane of 1900.
**CANDIED PECANS**

*By The Bulverde Community Garden Committee*

1/2 cup granulated sugar  
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed  
1 Tbsp ground cinnamon  
1 tsp salt  
1/8 tsp cayenne pepper  
4 cups (12oz) pecan halves, unsalted  
1 egg white, whisked

Preheat oven to 300°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Set aside.

In a bowl or zip top bag place granulated sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, salt, and cayenne pepper. Whisk or toss to combine well. Set aside.

In a large bowl, stir pecans and egg whites gently until pecans are evenly coated. Add sugar mixture to the bowl and stir to combine.

Spread nut mixture in a single layer on prepared baking sheet. Bake for 40 minutes, stirring after 20 minutes, until pecans are fragrant and sugar coating is cooked. Note: sugar will continue to harden after pecans are out of the oven.

Remove from oven and cool on baking sheet on a cooling rack until nuts reach room temperature. Store in sealed, airtight container.

*Source: www.gimmesomeoven.com*

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**SHOP LOCAL BOUTIQUES FOR CHRISTMAS!**

*by Cassie Wedding*

The Bulverde/Spring Branch Area boasts a surprising number of locally owned boutiques and stores. And with continued growth in the area, the number keeps growing. Support your local small businessmen and businesswomen. Check out these shops for your Christmas shopping!

**Choices and More**

Choices and More is an upscale clothing, jewelry, shoe and home décor shop at 19851 Highway 46 West, Suite 104.

For owner Brenda Thomas, “It started as a passion back in 2008 when I opened my Home Decor & Boutique in Spring Branch, Texas, and filled it with a winsome collection of hand-picked merchandise. Women everywhere instantly fell in love with Choices & More - so much so that I relocated my store in 2013 and now have over 5000 square feet of home decor and boutique items. Choices & More offers a haven of unique home decor, an eclectic mix of carefully-curated clothing, bright baubles, bold accessories, and playful gifts that are as fun to give as they are to receive. Choices & More reveals an array of new arrivals almost daily, so you’ll always discover something special and amazing on every visit. And because Choices & More is a boutique, we only carry a few of each item, so everything you find is uniquely yours. Make sure to look in every nook and cranny, because around every corner, Choices & More is brimming with treasures that are sure to become favorite pieces in your collection!”

**Chulie’s Boutique**

Amy Mabie has always had a passion for design, decor and fashion. With a degree in Fine Art from Texas A&M Kingsville, Amy looked for a career that allowed her to celebrate her education, while also allowing her to flex her artistic muscle. As the popularity grew for vintage and rustic décor, Amy began to look for fabulous pieces of furniture and play around with paints and finishes to bring new life to these found treasures.

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**WHERE CAN I PICK UP THE WEST COMAL CHRONICLE?**

You can always find the paper at the Bulverde/Spring Branch Library. Plus, we distribute on the second Thursday of each month to the following locations:

- 46th Street Pizza  
- HEB  
- Big’s on 46  
- The Loft Coffee House  
- BSB Activity Center  
- McDonalds on Hwy 46  
- BSB Chamber of Commerce  
- Pet Galaxy on 281  
- Bulverde City Hall  
- Popcorn Friday  
- Bulverde Post Office  
- Spring Branch Animal Hospital  
- Bulverde Tax Office  
- Strutty’s on Hwy 281  
- Bulverde/Spring Branch Library  
- Walgreens on 46  
- Family Fitness  

*SEE SHOP LOCAL ON PAGE 12*
In researching information for this article, I came across plants listed as herbs that I never thought of as herbs. This of course, led to me to ask what is an herb? The answer to that question is this: any plant with leaves, seeds, or flowers used for flavoring, food, medicine, or perfume.

People plant herbs for many reasons: for medicinal purposes, for their edible nature, or to attract pollinators to their gardens. Many herbs are just pretty plants and look great in the landscape.

According to Central Texas Gardener, some of the more popular herbs to grow for medicinal purposes include: purple coneflower, passionflower, garden sage, catnip, mullein, rosemary, chaste tree and lemon balm. I grow all of these in my garden just because they’re pretty!

Our South Texas climate makes it suitable to grow herbs year-round. Some of the easiest herbs to grow in the garden for both landscaping and their edible nature include rosemary, thyme, oregano, culinary sage, chives, parsley, yarrow, lavender, garlic, and Mexican mint marigold. One of the nice things about growing herbs is that they have few pest and disease problems. Deer generally ignore many of the strongly scented herbs.

Many of us grow herbs to attract pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. You will need to let many of these herbs bloom to attract pollinators. Some of the more popular herbs for our pollinators include: bee balm, pineapple sage, betony, lamb’s ears, basil, oregano, marjoram, chives, and catnip.

Some herbs, including rue, fennel, dill, and passion vine, are also host plants for many of our area butterflies.

It wouldn’t hurt to place a shallow bowl of water in your garden for the pollinators. Make sure to add a few pebbles for a safe surface for the little critters to land.

To make your own Italian Herb Seasoning just in time for gift giving:

- 2 Tablespoons dried basil
- 2 Tablespoons dried marjoram
- 2 Tablespoons dried oregano
- 2 Tablespoons dried rosemary
- 2 Tablespoons dried thyme

Preparation: Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl, until well combined. If you prefer a finer consistency, pulse your Italian seasoning in a spice grinder; take a mortar and pestle to it; or grind it up with the back of a spoon or drinking glass. Use your Italian seasoning immediately, or store it in an air-tight container until you need it. Be sure to label the container, so you don’t mix it up with another spice blend.

This recipe makes 10 Tablespoons (just under 2/3 cup) of Italian seasoning as written, but it’s easily scaled. Just maintain the ratio in the recipe, and you can make as much or as little as you need. To maintain freshness, aim to make no more than you can use in six months. Use in spaghetti, lasagna, salad dressing, bread, etc.

Use your homemade Italian seasoning to make your own Italian dressing.

Just mix 1-1/2 Tablespoons of Italian seasoning with 1/4 cup vinegar (white, apple cider or white wine) and 1/2 cup of a mild tasting oil (canola, salad, etc.). Give it a good shake, let sit for a few minutes for the herb flavor to develop and shake again before using. Your homemade salad dressing should keep for several weeks in the refrigerator, so it’s just as convenient as store-bought.

What is a Host Plant? Host plants are the nurseries of the garden. If you keep an eye out you’ll see the female butterfly as she flits around the plant, gently laying her next brood’s eggs, sometimes on the top of leaves but usually on the bottom, hidden from predators. Then, in 10 to 14 days, the tiny larvae, less than an eighth inch long, emerge and begin eating the plant. It’s a fascinating process as they munch away, growing larger every day. By including both host plants and nectar plants in your garden, you can attract a wider selection of butterflies while providing an environment that supports their entire life cycle. Host plant information from www.gardenswithwings.com.

Source for recipe: www.thebalance.com
Solution to Word Labyrinth #1447

SHYER LABELLS BUG
UREGAL MOTELS
OGLESENBULAAEAT
REACTEDALIRA
BESTYLORDRKIT
SATELOROEHERE
GENE RUESPI S
FEDDAHRPEFETNA

SHOP LOCAL CONTINUED FROM PG 10

“I enjoy transforming vintage pieces of furniture and giving them a fresh updated makeover,” says Amy. Her signature look is a light distressing for a slightly chipped, rustic look. She uses a variety of chalk and milk type paints to create a unique look that can be customized to each client. “There’s nothing better than a new can of paint, a new paint brush and a dusty vintage buffet that needs some loving,” says Amy.

In March of 2014 Amy decided it was time to showcase her painted furniture pieces by opening Chulie’s Boutique. Amy named her store after the Spanish term of endearment, Chulita, that she called her daughter. She branched out to include clothing, jewelry and unique gifts.

Chulie’s is located in a beautiful rustic showroom. “We still offer trendy clothing at affordable prices, locally made goods such as our ‘most comfortable’ Tee’s (customers love these), locally made gifts such as LuBella candles hand-poured out of Castroville, vintage and vintage-inspired home decor, locally made handmade signs, handmade trucker hats and vintage inspired jewelry. There is something for men and women alike,” says Amy.

Information for Chulie’s obtained from The Branch Texas online magazine.

Farmhouse Market

The story of Farmhouse Market, at Faithville at 7080 Highway 46 in Spring Branch, is all about a mother and daughter and their shared love of design.

Diana Craft had built a successful insurance company from the ground up, and daughter Kaitlyn had watched her do it. Mother and daughter talked often about their dream of opening a boutique style furniture and home décor store.

When Diana and Kaitlyn took a trip to the Round Top Antique show, they became more inspired. They brainstormed names for their dream store and came up with “Farmhouse Market.” On the last day of the trip Diana said, “All right, let’s do it. Let’s open Farmhouse Market!”

Now they share their love of mixing old timeless pieces with new functional products and help people decorate their homes with this unique style.

Petticoat Junction

This is a newer shop and it is also located in Faithville, at 17080 Highway 46. Petticoat Junction features Boho Western clothing, jewelry, and shoes, plus some items for men. One customer wrote,

“Their selection of jewelry, shoes, and purses kept me stumped for well over an hour! This Texas gal was in heaven!”

The store held special offers and “retail therapy” for Thanksgiving and continues with ongoing specials for Christmas. It also featured a Girls’ Night Out in November. Currently, the store is offering a free blanket scarf with every $50 purchase while supplies last.

Sassy Shack

The brand new Sassy Shack is located at 20630 Highway 46 West, Suite 114. It officially opened in November 2017. According to its website, it offers “a sassy selection of clothing and accessories. We shop local to support Texas artisans and entrepreneurs.” The shop offers clothing, jewelry, shoes, and décor. Go to their website at www.sassyshackboutique.com to see what they have to offer.

Texas Carpet Baggers

Texas Carpet Baggers, at 2347 Bulverde Road in Bulverde, Texas, is a handbag boutique that also boasts a beer bar and garden. So while you shop, your husband can grab a handcrafted Texas beer and make himself at home in the beer garden. It’s an experience you cannot find anywhere else. Only in Texas…

Meanwhile you can check out the current selection of handbags in the store. Or you can design your own in the design studio.

Becky Feeley, who co-owns the store with partner David, decided that there were too many cheap, flimsy, mass-produced bags on the market.

“In the winter of 2010, I decided that I wanted to make better handbags…It had to be, first and foremost, well-constructed and made with exceptional materials. Then it had to be beautiful and multi-textured. I started with thick piled fabrics, then I added luxurious leather and topped them off with hand-carved, solid oak handles. Next was functionality. I inserted a wood bottom…no more folding up…no smashed fruit and veggies…no broken eggs…no purse items lost in a dark abyss. I designed a bag that could carry anything!”

One model, called the Miss Kitty, even offers concealed carry options for pistol-packin’ mamas.

Becky said, “I never set out to make a purse…I set out to make something beautiful.”