

TEXAS COUNTY & DISTRICT RETIREMENT SYSTEM

CONNECTIONS

A NEWSLETTER ESPECIALLY FOR RETIREES

FALL 2019



Retired but never tired

Former elections administrator Carol Gaultney is staying plugged into volunteering and elections work in retirement. Page 2

Give the world your story

Memoir and autobiography writing tips from author Ann McCutchan. Page 6



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On the cover...

In her 10 years as Montgomery County Elections Administrator, TCDRS retiree Carol Gaultney oversaw more than 175 joint elections and helped 64,000 people register to vote. Photo by Rebecca L. Bennett

Former elections administrator Carol Gaultney: Retired but never tired

Story and photos by Rebecca L. Bennett



TCDRS retiree Carol Gaultney doesn't ever seem to get tired. During her 10 years serving as Montgomery County Elections Administrator, she ate, slept and breathed elections.

"I fell asleep many nights reading the Texas Election Code," Carol admits, laughing.

Physically, working elections for more than a decade did take its toll. Elections administrators face constant deadlines and stay up for all hours of the night during elections, so when Carol broke her ankle and leg during a kayaking accident in 2011, she knew she needed the kind of physical recovery time only retirement could provide.

"It was the most challenging and the most rewarding job I have ever had, and it was an honor working with the poll workers, election staff, and the many county departments that assisted us," Carol says. "They are the unsung heroes of every election and the hardest workers I have known in my work life."

During this time, Carol was raising her two sons full-time, working toward earning her Paralegal Certificate from the Southwestern Paralegal Institute in Houston, and pouring all the rest of her free time into volunteer work.

In February 1993, Carol returned to the workforce as the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office's legal assistant. A little over one year later, they made her a Court Administrator, and by 1997, she had completed the Trial Court Coordination, Management and Administration Certification program at Sam Houston State University and the Texas Center for the Judiciary.

Living the dream

"I read in the paper one day that the [elections] administrator who had been [at Montgomery County] for 30 years was resigning," Carol says. "Many of my prior volunteer activities were election and government related... so I thought, 'That job would be perfect for me.'"

Her legal expertise and drive set her apart from the other candidates, even among a

Case files

Carol grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. After graduating high school, she attended night school at the University of Cincinnati while working for a local law firm. Her family relocated a few times after that, until they settled down in The Woodlands, near Houston, in 1986.

national pool of more experienced applicants. She was appointed by the Montgomery County Election Commission in May 2001, one year before Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to improve voting systems and voter access.

“Everyone knew it was coming,” Carol says. “I had to learn fast.”

During her first year, in addition to her regular responsibilities of conducting federal, state, county and local elections and maintaining the voter registration database, Carol traveled Texas to glean knowledge about elections administration in other counties. She also led the charge to redraw county voting precinct boundaries to accommodate growth and redistricting.

When HAVA was passed in 2002, Carol oversaw the implementation of electronic voting machines that could accommodate voters with disabilities. She carefully studied the extensive new law to ensure her office came into compliance with every requirement — a skill carried over from her legal background.

Throughout her 10 years as Elections Administrator, Montgomery County voter registration increased by 64,000, and Carol and her team conducted more than 175 joint elections.

“Many people asked me what I did the remaining 364 days of the year other than election day, but [only] people involved in the election process fully understand the complexity and the thousands of details and months of preparation required for each election,” Carol says. “We worked many 20-hour days and many 80 to 100-hour weeks during elections.”



“After my [kayaking] accident, while I was not yet eligible for Social Security, I was able to retire with my TCDRS benefits.”

Carol and her husband David enjoy kayaking, traveling and hiking together.

Retired, but not tired

Carol retired from Montgomery County with more than 18 years of service.

“After my [kayaking] accident, while I was not yet eligible for Social Security, I was able to retire with my TCDRS benefits,” she says. “It enabled me to concentrate on my therapy and fully recover from my injury. I am kayaking and hiking today because of... the availability of my retirement benefit.”

Carol and David — her husband of 16 years, a former Justice on the Court of Appeals in Beaumont and a current private attorney — live on a nine-acre ranch between Wimberley and San Marcos. They spend much of their time traveling, gardening, exploring nature through hiking and kayaking, and visiting their children and grandchildren in Dallas and Austin.

In 2013 and 2014, Carol also appeared as a movie extra in *Parkland* and *My All American*, which were both filmed in Texas. “It was fascinating to see all of the behind-the-scenes activities in filming a movie,” she says. “The only ‘acting’ required of me was pretending that I was very cold sitting in a football stadium wearing a winter coat in the Texas hot summer.”

But ultimately, Carol feels most fulfilled when she donates her time and talents to worthwhile causes, such as the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Central Texas, where she currently serves on the board.

She also seeks out ways to stay involved in elections, such as through serving on local task forces and volunteering at the polls. Once per year, she travels with the United States Institute of Peace and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe as an International Election Observer, where she observes elections in Eastern European countries and provides feedback.

“Election access, security, accuracy and integrity are vital voter rights that I have always enjoyed working for,” says Carol. “Good elections are the foundation of democracy and good government, and I still have a passion for that in retirement.” ★



Carol fell asleep many nights reading the Texas Election Code.



To stream or not to stream: Strategies for reducing your entertainment bill

By Rachael Seeley Flores

More and more cable users are switching to streaming services to reduce their entertainment expenses. BroadcastingCable.com projects that six people will “cut the cord” every minute in 2019.

Why are people switching?

Maybe there simply isn't enough time in the day to watch all of the channels available in the average cable bundle. (BroadcastingCable.com estimates cable viewers watch just 0.09% of all the TV they can access.) By contrast, streaming services let users pay only for the content they want to watch, often with few or no commercials.

Cost could also be a factor. A basic subscription to the streaming service Netflix costs \$8.99 per month, while the cheapest Hulu subscription (ads included) is \$5.99 per month. On average, live TV streaming services range from \$20–\$70 per month, while basic cable packages cost roughly \$100 per month.

If you're interested in cutting the cable cord and streaming to save money, follow these steps:

Choose your streaming service. Buy a streaming device. Get adequate internet service.

Figure out which shows you like and determine which streaming services include them. If you want general live TV, Hulu + Live TV, YouTubeTV and Sling TV may be good all-around options, while sports fans may get more out of fuboTV. For a selection of movies and syndicated TV shows, consider Hulu, Netflix or Amazon Prime Video. You can even sign up for an *à la carte* subscription to HBO or Showtime.

To get streaming services on your television, you'll need a device capable of streaming. This could be a smart TV, Blu-ray player, Apple TV, Roku or Google Chromecast. Newer gaming platforms like the PlayStation 4 can also be used for streaming.

If your internet service cannot support your streaming habits, you may experience poor image quality and increased buffering wait times. According to ConsumerReports.com, one active streamer should do fine on an internet speed of 18 Mbps, while a home with multiple streamers requires at least 50 Mbps.

Sources: [BroadcastingCable.com](#), [TheStreamable.com](#), [AARP.org](#), [Move.org](#), [ConsumerReports.com](#), [BankRate.com](#)





Get grocery shopping off your plate

By Rebecca L. Bennett

According to Offers.com, roughly one-fourth of Texans have used online grocery pickup and one-fifth have taken advantage of a delivery service. The popularity of these services has grown in recent years. Even though online grocery services may charge a small service fee, they can save users valuable time and prevent impulse purchases.

Here's how grocery pickup and delivery services can help get shopping off your plate:

Groceries to-go

Walmart and H-E-B offer grocery pickup in most locations across Texas. There are some differences between these two providers, but overall, they're very similar.

1. Create an online account. For Walmart, you will also need to download the Walmart Grocery app to communicate with the store upon your arrival. Downloading the H-E-B app is optional, since you can use text messaging instead.

2. Select your pickup location, date and timeslot. Depending on your location and the timing of your order, same-day pickup may be available.

3. Add products to your cart. You can easily edit quantities and remove items from your cart. H-E-B offers the ability to clip and apply eligible coupons to your cart, while Walmart does not allow coupons.

4. Check out. Walmart does not charge a service fee, while H-E-B charges \$4.95 per order (at time of publication). Keep in mind that your order total will be adjusted to reflect the actual weight of your produce items.

5. Look for your order confirmation. Once your order is successfully placed, you will receive a confirmation email with pickup logistics.

6. Park in a designated spot during your scheduled time-frame. Walmart customers should check in with the app before heading to the store and parking in the orange "Pickup" area. H-E-B customers should show up during their designated timeframe and text their Curbside parking space code to the designated mobile number.

7. Employees will bring groceries to your car. They will go over any substitutions or changes to your order total, get your signature and load your car for you.

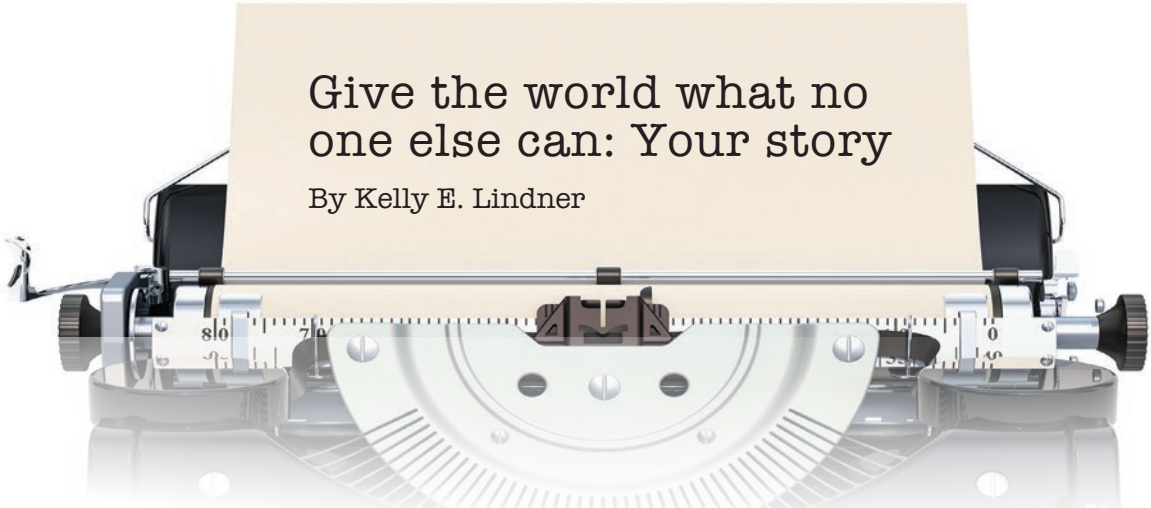
No need to get up

For customers who have trouble getting around or driving (or who wish to apply their time and energy to other activities), Walmart and H-E-B provide grocery delivery services in many locations. There are also many online services that offer grocery delivery such as Amazon, Shipt, Instacart and Peapod.

Most of these providers do same-day delivery if the order is placed before a certain time. Prices vary from \$9.95 per delivery for Walmart and H-E-B, to monthly and yearly subscriptions for independent providers.

It's also worth checking to see if your local grocery store has these services. Central Market, Kroger, Target and Whole Foods have all launched pickup and delivery programs at select stores.

Sources: [Offers.com](https://offers.com), [TimeUse.org](https://timeuse.org), [Walmart.com](https://walmart.com), [HEBToYou.com](https://hebtouyou.com)



Give the world what no one else can: Your story

By Kelly E. Lindner

Everyone has a story to tell. If you're interested in sharing wisdom, preserving heritage, leaving behind a legacy or healing from past events, start typing. By sharing your experiences, you might even make a little money or launch a second career.

Memoir or autobiography?

Though autobiographies and memoirs are both about a person written by that person, there is one major difference. "Autobiography typically covers a whole life," says Ann McCutchan, author of *Where's the Moon? A Memoir of the Space Coast and the Florida Dream*. "A memoir is usually more focused on a particular time of life or situation or event."

McCutchan taught creative nonfiction classes at the University of North Texas in Denton for nine years before retiring in 2016 to focus on writing.

Get it on the page

A blank page can feel intimidating, so McCutchan offers a few tips to get started:

- **Write what you know and love.** "Whatever you're obsessed by is a good place to start," she says. Once you determine that, McCutchan recommends writing a strong scene, instead of starting right at the beginning.
- **Keep at it.** Drafting a memoir or autobiography is a long-term goal, so try to stick with it. If you want accountability to finish, consider participating in National Novel Writing Month (NanoWriMo.org).

It's free and challenges you to write 50,000 words, the approximate length of a novel, each November.

- **Use online resources.** If you ever feel stuck, just search "writing your autobiography/memoir" to find thousands of free articles and classes that provide hours of instruction.

Get it on the shelf or online

Once you've completed your book, decide how you want to share it with others (if at all):

- **Keep it in the family.** If you just want family to see your book, there are many services that specialize in printing family books, such as FamilyHistoryPublishers.com.
- **Self-publish.** If you want to sell your book to the public, there are several popular self-publishing services, such as Amazon and Lulu, that will provide e-book or print-on-demand versions of your book to customers.
- **Go traditional.** Traditional publishing is much more challenging, but possibly worth it if you want to make writing a second career. To publish a book traditionally, you need an agent or publisher. If an agent agrees to represent you, they will pitch your story to publishers

for you — but they are hard to get.

"Agents are more interested in books that will sell well commercially," McCutchan says, "so unless you're sure you've got a commercially viable book," pitch directly to publishers yourself. Use websites like WritersDigest.com and PublishersWeekly.com to research which publishers accept submissions directly and what they're looking for.

"You may even want to consider a small or university press," McCutchan says.

- **Enter contests and attend conferences.** These are other great ways to get your story out there. At many conferences, you can sign up to meet agents, editors or publishers who will consider your work right then and there. "Conferences are often great ways to make connections," McCutchan says. "Personal relationships and contacts are really important — it just really helps grease things when you meet people and get to know them."

Whatever route you choose, we hope to see your story on a shelf or online soon! Because if you don't tell your story, who will?

Source: *ThoughtCo.com*



Butterflies or bust: San Antonio is for the monarchs

By Rebecca L. Bennett

Each October, millions of Monarch butterflies travel through Texas, following a distinct and consistent migration route of up to 3,000 miles on their way into Mexico. There, they overwinter in massive colonies and return north through Texas again in the early spring.

During their fall migration, the butterflies enter what lepidopterists — that is, butterfly scientists — refer to as the “Texas Funnel”, where multiple flyways originating in Canada and the northern U.S. converge in Central and South Texas. The butterflies descend upon flowering hotspots to rest, refuel and join ranks before continuing down into Mexico in larger numbers.

“They gravitate to gardens, rivers and streams, places water sources make late season nectar available,” explains Monika Maeckle, the Founder and Director of the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival in San Antonio, Texas.

Gregg’s mistflower, Maximillian sunflower and other native fall blooms provide fuel for the butterflies during this fall exodus. “They are building up their fat stores that must last until spring,” Maeckle adds.

When the butterflies return to the southern U.S. in the spring, they mate, lay eggs and pass the torch to younger butterflies who will continue north in their place. Native spring blooms like prairie verbena, purple coneflower and Texas lantana give them the energy to search for Monarch caterpillars’ only food source: milkweed plants.

Through her work with the Texas Butterfly Ranch and the festival, Maeckle launched a pollinator habitat initiative called “300for300” in the spring of 2018. The program encourages

and enables residents of the greater San Antonio area to fill their yards and gardens with native, pollinator-friendly plants, and to refrain from using pesticides.

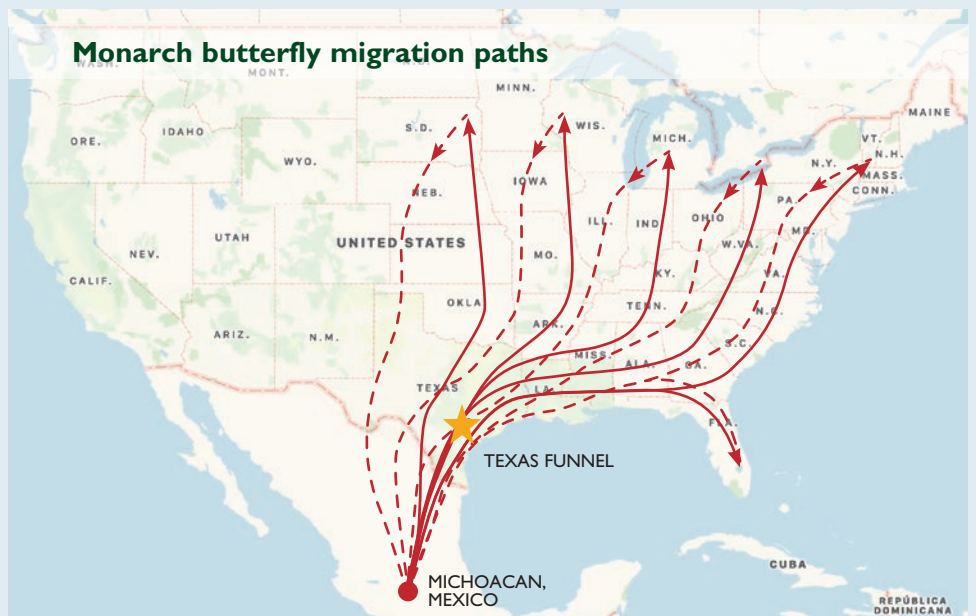
“We already overshot our goal to get 300 pollinator gardens in the ground for San Antonio’s 300th birthday last year,” Maeckle says. “Now, we’re shooting for 500 gardens by 2020.”

Also in 2018, the National Wildlife Federation named San Antonio as the first Monarch Champion City in the country for the community’s dedication to monarch conservation practices, such as improving city habitat for pollinators and supporting educational organizations like the festival.

The 2019 Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival will run from October 12–20 at the Historic Pearl, a 22-acre mixed-use development near the San Antonio River.

“Monarchs capture the imagination and offer hopefulness through their resiliency and ability to change,” Maeckle says. “Oh, and turning legs into wings? That’s pretty cool, too.” ★

Monarch butterflies migrate between the Canada and Mexico using well-established pathways.



CREATE YOUR OWN POLLINATOR HABITAT

- 1. Plant natives and avoid non-natives.** Texas Butterfly Ranch recommends growing two spring nectar plants, two autumn nectar plants and two larval plant species (for example, milkweed). Find a list of native Monarch-friendly plants at Wildflower.org.
- 2. Don't use any pesticides.** They aren't just deadly to pests. And make sure your plants haven't been pre-treated.
- 3. Provide a water source.** This can be as simple as leaving that little muddy spot in the corner of your yard or mulching your flower beds to conserve moisture.

Sources: Wildflower.org, TexasButterflyRanch.com, SanAntonio.gov



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- ★ Strategies for reducing your TV bill
- ★ Butterflies or bust

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Don't get snagged on a virtual phishing hook



Phishing scammers are after sensitive information that they can use to steal your money. They often pretend to be companies or people you trust, and their goal is to get you to click a link, download an attachment or share personal information. These criminals sometimes use scare tactics to pressure their targets to act quickly without thinking.

Learn to identify warning signs, so you can avoid biting on three common forms of phishing bait:

Phone calls:

Only answer calls from known contacts and never share personal information with unsolicited callers, even if they claim it's an urgent request from a government agency or utility. Legitimate organizations will mail you a letter. Even if you receive a letter, search phone numbers and websites yourself to confirm it's legitimate.

Emails:

Closely inspect the sender's email address and content for incorrect grammar and misspelled words. Never download attachments or open links until you can verify that someone you know sent the email. If the email claims you have an overdue bill, call the number on your last official paper statement or look up the company's legitimate phone number on their website.

Texts:

Delete texts from unknown numbers and don't click on links unless you can verify it was sent by someone you trust. Don't reply to suspicious texts.

Sources: Consumer.ftc.gov, Phishing.org