



**Golf Tournament!** *The first annual Veterans Memorial and Peace Garden Golf Tournament was held on Saturday, September 23, and was a great success. All of the sponsors, donations, and golfers who contributed were greatly appreciated. Logan Philley and Tim Philley placed first in the tournament, with Logan also winning “Longest Drive” and “Longest Pin”. Mason Fowler won “Closest to the Pin”.*

Tomm Owens, vice president of the TSPRA board and a member of Heart of Texas Electric Cooperative, didn't join the association until he was 50.

“I was competing in [pro] events when I was 35, 40, 45. I was one of them that held out,” says Owens, who's trying to convince his friends to join. “Their pride just won't let them be old yet.”

For Owens, aging into a new bracket is part of the fun. “You kind of get excited again,” he says, “because you're going to be the youngest in the group, and you're hoping you're one of the best.”

Like Bright, he says his experience gives him a competitive advantage—but for a different reason. “Mentally it's easier as I get older. I don't get as frustrated when things don't go right,” Owens says. “You learn not to let the little things bother you.”

But he admits that the physical aspect only gets tougher.

“Once you get out of shape, it's really hard at 55–60 to get back into shape,” he says. “I do 20–30 minutes of stretching every morning and then some situps and pushups.”

Jimmy Tobolka is living proof that bodies in motion tend to stay in motion. At 88, he's TSPRA's oldest member and still competes in the 80-plus breakaway, where a mounted rider ropes a running calf.

“Once you start doing it, it's hard to get quit doing it, you know?” he says. “It's helped keep me going all these years.”

One of the youngest members of the association is Seth Smithson, the president of the board, who turns 40 in December. “I think it's a breath of fresh air from the hustle and bustle,” he says. The 2023 TSPRA statewide finals are October 19–21 at Circle T Arena in Hamilton. “You come hang out with the older crowd and watch these guys compete and see how great they are with their horses, and you can definitely learn a thing or two.”

The TSPRA's prizes aren't much—trophy saddles and buckles—but that's not the main reason any of these competitors are here. “Nobody's going to get rich at our rodeos,” Owens says. “So much of it is just being able to see all the guys you used to rodeo with, cook steaks out back at the trailers and eat a meal Saturday night with maybe 10 or 15 people at every other trailer. That's a big, big part of it.”

But no one can question the enthusiasm and the dedication these athletes have for their sport—for continuing to hone their craft, even as their bodies falter.

“We're all just very grateful to still be able to throw a leg over a horse,” Bright says. “And when you have that gratitude of still being able to do it, nobody's moaning and groaning about winning.”

**Texas Fish Art Contest now accepting entries**

The Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center (TFFC) is excited to announce the 2024 Texas division of Wildlife

Forever's Fish Art Contest is open for submissions. The Fish Art Contest, which is accepting entries until Feb. 28, is part of an international conservation education program designed to foster youth interest in fisheries and fishing.

“The Fish Art Contest does a tremendous job of exposing students across Texas to the wonders of fish and fisheries resources through the nexus of art,” said TFFC Director Tom Lang. “We always look forward to this time of year when we are once again amazed by the outstanding work and artistic interpretations of these young Texans.”

Participants must submit a completed entry form and an original illustration of a wild fish found in Texas. Participants in grades 4-12 are also required to submit a one-page creative writing piece. Once the entrance form is submitted, applicants must mail their artwork to the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, 5550 FM 2495, Athens, TX, 75752. Dimensions for the physical artwork must be between 8X10” and 9X12”, be

landscape orientation and postmarked by Feb. 28, 2024.

This program is part of Wildlife Forever's national contest and Texas winners will be automatically entered into the national contest. Texas students may choose to enter national specialty awards with fish not found in Texas, however, they will not be eligible for Texas state awards due to the one entry per student limit.

“We have a unique opportunity to celebrate the talents of our Texas students and the beauty of our diverse fish found in Texas,” said Kate Barkalow, Education and Interpretation Coordinator at TFFC. “In doing so, we also recognize the amazing efforts of our teachers and biologists who support them. To complete their piece of art, students research their fish, its habitat and conservation efforts being made to protect the species, forging a connection between the student and fish.”

Educators who wish to have their students enter the 2024 contest can find entry forms, rules, guidelines and more online. A lesson plan offers

interdisciplinary curriculum including lessons and activities, a species identification section profiling each state fish, a glossary and student worksheets. Learn more at [www.wildlife-forever.org](http://www.wildlife-forever.org).

The Fish Art Contest is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year and is sponsored by Wildlife Forever, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Rapala, U.S. Forest Service, Bass Pro Shops, Wonders of Wildlife, Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation, National Fish Habitat Partnership and Western Native Trout Initiative.

Located in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, Wildlife Forever is a nonprofit multispecies conservation organization dedicated to conserving America's wildlife heritage. Working at the grassroots level, Wildlife Forever has funded conservation projects in all 50 states, committing millions of dollars to “on-the-ground” efforts. Wildlife Forever supports habitat restoration and enhancement, land acquisition, research and management of fish and wildlife populations.

For more information, visit the TFFC Texas Fish Art Contest website.

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