1. Americans have been frog-wild for jumping contests ever since Mark Twain's famous story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," was published in the late 1800s.
2. One of the biggest contests is held in Calaveras County, California, the setting of Twain's original story. "We'll jump frogs about 4,000 times, about a thousand a day," says Laurie Giannini, an organizer of the Calaveras County event.
3. Contestants come from all over the country to test their frogs in the home of frog jumping, partly for the honor, but the prizes draw them, too. Beating the world three-hop record of 21 feet, 5 ¾ inches will earn some lucky frog jockey $5,000. Equaling the record will earn $1,000, and each year's winner gets $750.
4. That's big money for some people; how do you get your frog to do its best? Frogs don't understand about money, and they're not very coachable. "You can't train a frog," said Giannini. "A frog is going to do what it wants to."

**Jump, Frog, Jump!**

1. Getting a frog airborne is a very individual thing. "Everybody has their own method," says Marsha Karley, with the Fair Oaks Fiesta Frog Jump in Fair Oaks, California. "Some of them stamp behind them; some of them spray water on them just before they jump." In Kernville, California, where they hold a frog jump in February as part of the Flats Days celebration, cold weather can sometimes play a role. "The frogs, they don't want to jump. Contestants get warm water and put it in squirt guns and sort of encourage them," says Ann Clements.
2. But according to Calaveras frog catcher Rod Dwelley, it's the call of the wild that really sets a frog to hopping. "You want to have a really good jumping frog, it needs to come right out of the wild," says Dwelley. "Frogs we rent to people are getting used to people. They tend not to jump as far."

**Rental Frogs?**

1. It turns out that some of the jumping frogs you see at these contests are pros, shipped in special for the event. Ann Clements concedes that the Flats Days Celebration looks elsewhere for their jumping stock. "Actually, we get our frogs from Tennessee," she says.
2. Rayne, Louisiana, billed by residents as the Frog Capital of the World, also gets a lot of their frogs from the frog market, though they are raised locally. "We rent frogs," says Paul Kedinger, with the Rayne Frog Festival in Rayne, Louisiana, "but we do have some people who go out and catch their own."

**Passage 2**

**Frogs Help This Family Stay Together**

**By Sam Richards**

1. Gabby is learning the finer points of coaxing the frogs to jump by pounding the ground behind them. It takes open hands, palms to the ground, repeated as needed to make the frog jump—straight ahead, ideally.
2. Lisa Fasano said that, even last year, baby Gabby was really getting the hang of it in practice. But she wilted under the glare of the spotlight at last year's contest in Angels Camp.
3. "She was star-struck, and she just sat there looking at everyone," said Lisa, 32. It's hoped a more mature Gabby will fare better this year.
4. There are hundreds of children among the 2,300-or-so contestants each year, said Buck King, manager of the Calaveras County Fair and former longtime manager of the Jumping Frog Jubilee.
5. In 20 years of jumping jubilees, King said he's seen it all: giant African bullfrogs, toads "as big as wash tubs" that couldn't jump, a three-legged overall champion in 1996, even a "circus side show" one year featuring frogs dressed as circus performers.
6. "Lots of people sign their toddlers in there to make the frogs jump," King said. "If they win, it's something else."
7. A champion setting a world record wins $5,000; a non-record winner walks away with $1,500.
8. Frogs aren't really trainable, and the Fasanos and other competitors must discover raw talent in ponds, canals and swamps. The Fasanos make several trips a year to their favorite bullfrog breeding ground, canals "somewhere in the San Joaquin Valley," to catch their jumpers. Frank won't name exact locations: "It's very competitive out there, and it's kind of a family secret."
9. Between now and May, Frank, Lisa and their relatives will catch at least 150 frogs for auditions.
10. They won't get names, and almost all eventually get released near where they're caught.
11. What started in 1959, when Frank's father Gene Fasano and Frank's uncle, Frank Borrelli, went from their native Gustine to their first Jumping Frog Jubilee has become a true family affair since then, Frank Fasano said. Gene has missed only one Calaveras jubilee since then, for his wedding.
12. The frog catching, usually at night with floodlights and nets, is as much a bonding experience as the contest itself, Frank Fasano said. And if it wasn't frogs that kept the Fasanos close, he said, it would probably be something else.
13. "It's all about the family getting together, and we've got an activity we can call our own," he said.