

Story and photos by Randy Mallory

Whitewright Delight!

A tiny North Texas town cooks up a tasty daytrip

Here's a delicious dilemma: First, take a seat at the Chef's Gallery, a high-ceilinged eatery in a restored historic building in downtown Whitewright. Next, devour a home-style lunch of meatloaf, scalloped potatoes, and crisp green salad, complemented by fresh-baked bread and cinnamon rolls. Then, select from a baker's dozen of desserts. How about the restaurant's stock-and-trade chocolate or coconut pies, piled high with meringue? Or maybe something more surprising--perhaps the peanut butter pie or the cheesecake-like chocolate-raspberry rumble? Oh my! Surprising sounds scrumptious.

Surprising should, in fact, be Whitewright's motto. An easy daytrip from Dallas, this quaint North Texas community (pop. 1,755) has plenty of surprises...especially considering that downtown burned twice in the 20th century and, more recently, recovered from economic decline.

Downtown's turnaround began four years ago when Whitewright joined the Texas Historical Commission's Texas Main Street Program, which helps revitalize downtown districts. At the time, lots of boarded-up buildings lined the burg's main drag, Grand Street. Only four businesses existed, including the eclectic gift shop, Cedar Chest. Two more visitor-friendly shops cropped up--Yellow Rose Antiques and Peachtree Gallery gift shop. Soon, a dozen more tourism-oriented retailers breathed life back into vacant structures. Pat and Ken Hubbard established most of them.

In 1982, the Hubbards moved from Plano to a farm near Whitewright where they raise paint horses. Their first two adaptive restoration projects turned a Victorian home into the Holiday House Bed & Breakfast and transformed a historic building into Hubbard Galleries, which sells paintings, sculptures, and pottery. “It was the domino theory,” recalls Ken. “One thing led to another.”

With Pat at the creative helm, the Hubbards bought more buildings and opened more businesses--the Chef’s Gallery, the Flower Bed Garden Shop, Dollies doll shop, Grand Street Bakery, Hubbard & Son’s Hardware, and a modest home-turned-lodging called Beatrice Potter’s Cottage. Another restored home became the Celtic House, a private party place where newly-weds can ride away in an Amish buggy drawn by Belgium draft horses. Pat also opened White’s Ready-to-Wear, a dress shop named after the store her grandmother ran in Durant, Oklahoma for decades.

Pat reached her creative apex with the reincarnation of the 1927 Odeon Theatre, a movie house which closed in the 1960s. Renamed The Odeum (the ancient Greek word for theater), the 150-seat facility shows first-run, independent, and classic films on state-of-the-art projection and sound equipment. Pat decorated the theater in a style she calls Egyptian Art Deco. Light shines into the cozy lobby through a colorful nine-panel transom featuring Egyptian themes in an Art Deco style, created by stained-glass artist Mike Williams of Denison.

“People from Dallas and Oklahoma drive to Whitewright just to see a movie at The Odeum,” Pat says. “While they’re here, some will eat at the restaurant, shop in our stores, and even spend the night in town.”

Daytrippers also bone up on local history at the Whitewright Historical Museum, housed in an early 20th century home, and stretch their legs on trails in the nearby Whitewright Nature Park, which features a pond amid native plantings.

On May DATE TO COME, visitors also can poke around 20 or so private gardens during Whitewright's annual Rose Tour.

"Our little village has become an exciting place to visit," says Pat. "Somebody's going to care you're here."

But the dilemma remains: fudge brownie pie or German chocolate cake? Oh my!

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ESSENTIALS **Whitewright, Texas**

Whitewright is 60 miles north of Dallas at the intersection of US 69 and Texas 160.

The area code is 903.

Visitor-friendly businesses on one long block of Grand Street include: **The Odeum** (movie theater), 364-1340; **Dollies** (doll shop), 364-9974; **The Flower Bed** (garden shop), 364-1111; **Hubbard Galleries** (art), 364-2182; **Chef's Gallery** 364-9111; **Grand Street Bakery**, 364-1320; **Hubbard and Son's Hardware**, 364-0209; **White's Ready-to-Wear** (dress shop), 364-1230; **Cedar Chest Gift Shop**, 364-5620; **Peachtree Gallery** (gifts, collectibles), 364-5166; and **Yellow Rose Antiques**, 364-2024.

Lodgings include **Holiday House Bed & Breakfast**, 402 E. Grant St. (364-2592) and **Beatrice Potter's Cottage**, 207 Gowdy St., 364-2592 or 364-9974. The **Celtic House**, 414 W. Spruce St. (364-9974), is available for private events.

Attractions include the **Whitewright Historical Museum**, 202 S. Bond St. (by appointment at 364-9974), and the **Whitewright Nature Park**, located along the railroad track downtown. Whitewright's 11th annual **Rose Tour** is May DATE TO COME, 2003, featuring 20 or so gardens on view. Nearly every weekend, city hall's auditorium, 206 W. Grand St. hosts a free (donations accepted) **country music or bluegrass** show. Call 364-2219 for details.

For information, contact the Whitewright Chamber of Commerce, 125 Grand St. (364-2000; WEB ADDRESS TO COME). Also find local information at www.whitewright.com.

RESOURCES:

all 903

1. Pat and Ken Hubbard (especially Pat) (www.whitewright.com)
2. Butch Morgan, Main St.
3. Handbook of Texas Online: Whitewright, Texas
4. Barbara Layman, city sec. re: city hall auditorium music shows
5. Pat Goodin, baker at Coffee & Pie, Oh My!
6. Helen Dawson, cook at Coffee & Pie, Oh My!
7. Bob Deberry, re: tour