

## WINNSBORO QUERY

Jill,

In 2003 Winnsboro became a Main Street City. That step opened up the cultural floodgates in what was a sleepy little East Texas burg blessed by lakes and a growing retirement community. A decade later, Winnsboro is such a cosmopolitan little burg that it's a tricky grabbing a parking spot downtown on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights.

Locals and out-of-towners are busy rubbing elbows in nearly two dozen shopping, eating, and art-music-theater venues in the Cultural Arts District. (Winnsboro is one of the smallest of 17 or so Texas towns to receive that designation from the Texas Commission for the Arts.)

Winnsboro, in fact, prides itself in blending cultural traits shop by shop. So Double C Steakhouse mixes black angus rib-eye with Texas country songwriter Max Stalling. Brewbaker's Pub blends blackened tilapia with a blues music jam. Art & Espresso merges baklava and cappuccino with local art and poetry readings. Ladles to Linens joins gourmet cookware with Texas wine tastings.

The Winnsboro Center for the Arts remains the linchpin of cultural growth. Exhibits showcase regional artists, but a recent traveling show splashed town with the visual antics of Salvador Dali. The center stages local theater and standup comedy, plus traveling shows from the likes of Dallas' Pocket Sandwich Theatre. The center also houses Crossroads, a popular singer-songwriter listening room that pairs area talents with Texas legends like Terri Hendrix, Lloyd Maines, and Ray Wylie Hubbard.

A monthly art festival fills downtown's depot with art exhibits and classes. A regular art walk takes place in a former post office, now Keyring Gallery. And an annual open-air juried show surrounds the depot with art and Texas wines.

Every few months the culture flood picks up steam as another eatery or shop opens. Just opened is Winnsboro's answer to Parisian upscale shopping, Clara Ida Frances, featuring high-end French gourmet foods, luxurious lotions, art, and unusual furnishings. Also new are two eateries, a Fifties diner and a sophisticated bistro and patio wine bar.

With all this action there must be rest for the shop-eat-drink-listen weary. Leave that up to two historic bed & breakfasts (both registered national landmarks), Thee Hubbell House and Oaklea Mansion, plus a novel approach—a new upscale condo, The Leaves of Winnsboro, offering suites by the night...right downtown.

Jill, I propose a feature on Winnsboro's new cultural craze, with photos. There's no particular timeframe, although Winnsboro's main events—Autumn Festival throughout October, its Texas Spring Festival in May, and a massive Classic Car Cruise-In each Labor Day—might play into the decision.

A fine sidebar might cover a fresh food fetish shaping up locally. Winnsboro boasts one of the state's top farmers markets (Saturdays through October). And just outside town, two farms feed family interest in organic freshness. Jersey Girls Milk Co. offers raw milk, cheese, and fresh-

made yogurt. Falster Farms raises its own miniature Hereford cows and sells its pasture-raised, clover-finished beef (along with their farm's righteous clover honey).

I look forward to hearing from you.