

# GETAWAYS FOR THE HOLIDAYS

# TEXAS

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THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS ★ DECEMBER 2016



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## EDITOR'S NOTE

# Go Big For the Holidays!

**W**ITH ALL THOSE MIRRORED facades and exceptional examples of 19th- and 20th-Century architecture, downtown Dallas sparkles year-round. But visitors during the holidays will find a few surprises, including a shiny assemblage of 13 giant Christmas tree ornaments (below) on the front lawn of the Omni Hotel, which were designed and fabricated in Dallas by Stephen Stefanou and his team at Venue Arts.

For the past 47 years, Stefanou has created large-scale seasonal installations for corporate and commercial clients around the world, including the Bellagio Resort & Casino in Las Vegas, Embarcadero Center in San Francisco, Rockefeller Center in New York, and—here in Dallas—oversize ornaments for the Omni Hotel, Klyde Warren Park, and the Meyerson Symphony Center.

“I’ve been interested in seasonal decoration since I was 5,” says Stefanou. “Growing up in Shreveport, I was allowed to do whatever I wanted as long as I could pay for it or make it myself.

Our home looked like a trim-a-tree store.”

These days, Stefanou works with a team of designers and installation artists, wrestling complicated and often whimsical forms from steel-reinforced fiberglass and other materials. “I made ornaments for Rockefeller Center about 25 years ago, and our client with the Omni Hotel saw them in our portfolio,” says Stefanou. “The New York ornaments are eight feet in diameter. So I made the Texas ornaments 10 feet.”

Stefanou’s philosophy: When in doubt, go big.

The Omni ornaments make their annual debut around Thanksgiving. Interestingly, when they’re not on display, they’re stacked in a clever underground storage facility on site. “We tried to think of everything,” says Stefanou.

Happy holidays!



LORI MOFFATT, *Interim Editor*





# THIS IS WHERE STARS SHINE BRIGHTEST



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Texas Country Music Artist Josh Abbott



# DECEMBER



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### Lightscapes

We asked six photographers to interpret the holiday season with landscapes and lights. Their creative visions offer imaginative perspectives from the High Plains to the beach, and from skyscrapers to the farm.

*Introduction by* **LORI MOFFATT**



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### 17 Trips for 2017

Texas is on the grow, and so is our state's ever-evolving slate of intriguing travel destinations. Check out what's new, what's different, and what can't be missed. Don't forget your travel planner!

*Text by* **HELEN ANDERS**

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### Merry Melodies

It's the most wonderful time of year—unless the barrage of commercialism, obligations, and expectations gets you down. Cast out the holiday blues with Christmas concerts that celebrate the season and buoy the spirit.

*Text by* **MICHELLE BURGESS**



**FIND MORE ONLINE.** Be sure to visit us at [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com) for more content and events.





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# DECEMBER



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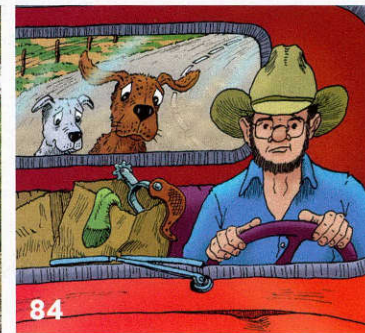
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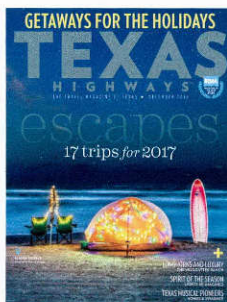
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#### COVER

Holiday lights illuminate a surf camp at sunrise on a Port Aransas beach. Photo © Kenny Braun



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EXCLUSIVE  
WEBSITE  
CONTENT

**DECEMBER**

**Take a Spin!**

**ZILKER TREE TURNS 50**

Spinning under Austin's Zilker Park Christmas tree is a joyful tradition that is now in its 50th year. Come with us as we see what makes it so special.

**LADIES NIGHT IN G-TOWN**

In the December issue, we spotlight Georgetown's home tour and holiday events. Join us for the city's Ladies Night Out, where we take in the pageantry of downtown holiday lights.

**BOOKS, COWDOGS, AND MORE**

We couldn't contain our conversation with fascinating Texas writer John Erickson in the pages of our December issue. Our interview with the creator of Hank the Cowdog continues online.

**#ShareYourTexas**

Readers use the #ShareYourTexas hashtag on our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter pages to help create a collective glimpse of Texas from every corner of the state. Add your photos to the mix.

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# MERGE

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

*I've read Texas Highways cover to cover every month for 26 years now! Many a Texas road trip has been planned and executed from those pages.*

MICHAEL HUGGINS, MONROE, MICHIGAN



OUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH



I've seen Ruthie Foster [October] at least three or four times. Her music and stories are so good. And her voice is just awesome.

JIM FOEHNER, WIMBERLEY

Hiked Colorado Bend today, all because I saw it in my monthly copy of Texas Highways [November]. Plus, I'm retired so I was free today :) Will be heading somewhere else tomorrow!

ERICK YBARRA



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## Extra Credit

This True Texan took your True Texan test in the September issue and scored 305 points. I also gave myself points for additional challenges that I knew were just as important:

- Name the Texas symbols (bird, tree, mammal, gem).
- Name six flags that have flown over Texas.
- You have a shirt or other item of clothing that looks like the Texas flag.
- You've spent the night on a Texas beach in a tent.
- You can sing the state song, "Texas, Our Texas."

**Penny Bagby, Round Rock**

*These are just a few of Penny's worthy additions. Thanks Penny!*

## Full Circle

Texans are travelers. I was born in San Antonio, grew up in Fairfield, and always enjoyed traveling here and there and working summer jobs away from home during high school. That just made me want to travel more. Then it was off to college, a short stint as a merchant marine, and a real

education in the military, where I graduated from the University of South Vietnam! After that, I became an official court reporter and ended up spending 30 years in Alabama courtrooms sitting behind a stenograph machine and doing various other jobs for another 10 years. I loved my monthly *Texas Highways* magazine during that time and dreamed of coming back to Texas. In July, my wife and I moved to Georgetown, and I have finally come full circle, back to where it all began—in Texas! Man, it is good to be home!

**William "Moe" Moeglin, Georgetown**

## Precious Postcards

My granddad worked with the CCC in the national parks

[July], and he would send postcards to his family signed only, "Love, Miss and See My Girls Soon." They would always know where he worked last from the postcard. Now I have them to treasure, and I will pass them down too.

**Linda M. Jung, texashighways.com**

## Traditional Treasures

I used to buy my Christmas tamales from a Mexican woman who is no longer with us. Then I moved to another, who grew too old to make them. I'm afraid that as we get more homogenized, old traditions are disappearing. Soon there'll be no one left who knows the secrets and/or is willing to put in the work and love to do it right.

**Tom Swinburn, texashighways.com**

READER'S FAVORITE

## Downtown SA Getaway

*We stayed at The St. Anthony hotel in San Antonio for our mother/daughter getaway. It's in a great location and the staff is super-nice. Beautiful hotel.*

JOANNA PECINA, Facebook

Built in 1909 and recently restored, The St. Anthony hotel is at 300 East Travis St. in downtown San Antonio. Call 210/227-4392; [www.thestanthonyhotel.com](http://www.thestanthonyhotel.com).

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!** Send feedback and recommendations to: *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin, TX, 78714-1009. Email: [letters@texashighways.com](mailto:letters@texashighways.com).



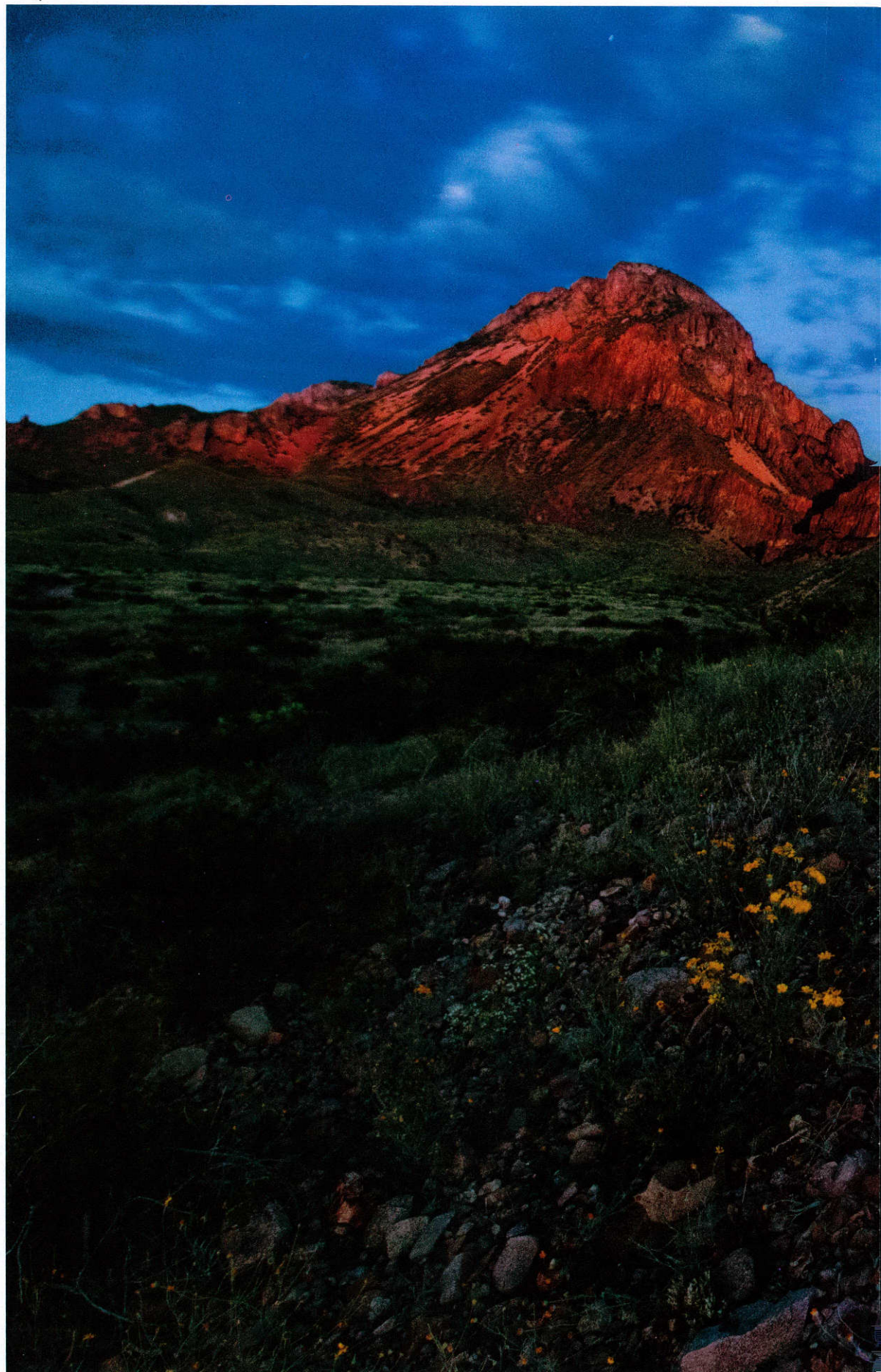


## SCENIC ROUTE

### Lighting the Way

29° 16' 58.16" N  
103° 20' 31.16" W

**WHILE THE BIG BEND** area's natural beauty needs no enhancement, photographer E. Dan Klepper temporarily lit the Chisos Mountains foothills for an interpretive holiday scene submitted for the Lightscapes photo feature in this issue. Big Bend National Park is located on the Texas-Mexico border, south of Marathon off US 385 and south of Alpine off Texas 118. The park features more than 150 miles of trails and some of the darkest night skies in the continental United States. For more information on Big Bend National Park, visit [nps.gov/bibe](https://nps.gov/bibe)











# A weekend of family fun the kids won't try to veto.

Texans aren't afraid of some crisp winter air. In fact, we welcome it. It's the perfect time to hit the road on a weekend getaway, and Bryan College Station offers plenty to do no matter the forecast.

Take a stroll through modern American history at the George Bush Library and Museum in College Station, featuring artifacts and interactive exhibits that will educate and entertain the entire family—including a slab of the Berlin Wall and intricate replicas of George H. W. Bush's Oval Office and Situation Room.

Or venture north to bask in the revitalized charm of downtown Bryan. You'll find a perfect blend of historic allure and modern comfort, with enough shopping, dining and entertainment options to satisfy travelers of all ages. It's a place where local flavor isn't a cliché—it's reflected in everything from the food on your plate, the coffee in your cup and the art that surrounds you at every turn.

Whatever your wintertime pleasure, in Bryan College Station we're just getting warmed up.

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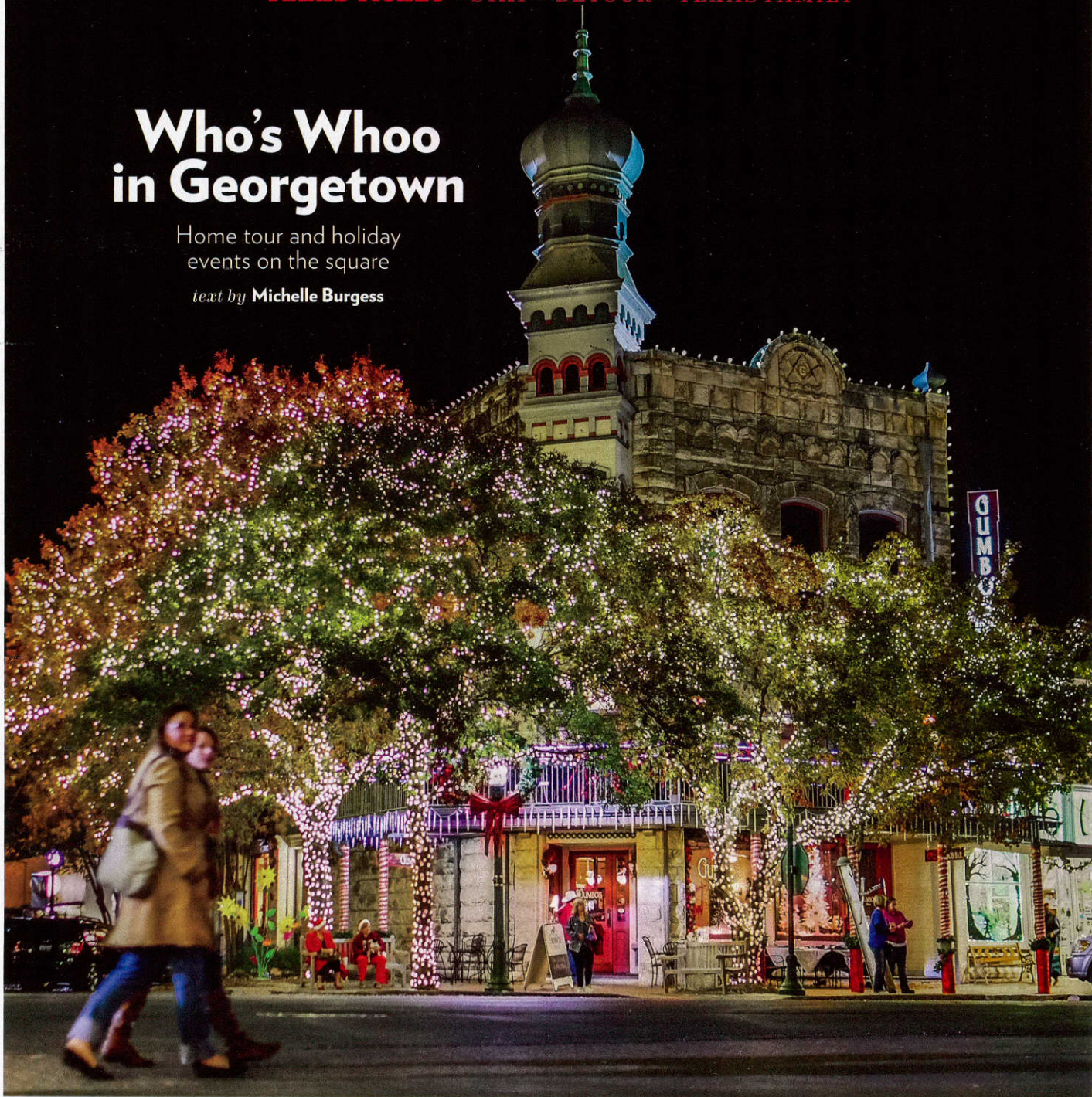
# DRIVE

TEXAS TICKET + STAY + DETOUR + TEXAS FAMILY

## Who's Who in Georgetown

Home tour and holiday  
events on the square

*text by* **Michelle Burgess**



Georgetown's 1900 Masonic Lodge, now Gumbo's North restaurant, receives a trimming of lights in December, when the entire courthouse square glimmers with thousands of lights. Residents and tourists alike flock to the festive Christmas Stroll.



**S**TRICTLY SPEAKING, GEORGETOWN isn't exactly a small town; with just under 65,000 residents, it can probably be better described as small-ish or maybe medium-sized. But anyone who has spent time here around the holidays, when every tree and building on the square is ablaze with lights, can see that in spirit, Georgetown is the epitome of a small town. Despite its designation by the U.S. Census Bureau as one of America's fastest-growing cities, it remains the kind of place where folks greet each other by name, regard their neighbors as extended family, and welcome visitors as if they were old friends.

Even winter weather can't dampen the enthusiasm of those who put on Georgetown's annual holiday celebration, which begins with a tree lighting

**This year marks the 36th annual Stroll, which begins with choirs of schoolchildren serenading visitors with carols and ends the next evening with a visit from Santa.**

on the courthouse square on the day after Thanksgiving. The following weekend marks the city's beloved Christmas Stroll, a two-day event that has its origins in 1960, when a handful of local craftsmen got together in the heart of town to sell their wares in the days leading up to Christmas. In the decades since that first loosely organized market, the event has evolved to include a crowded schedule of family-friendly activities.

This year marks the 36th annual Stroll, which begins with choirs of schoolchildren serenading visitors with carols and ends the next evening with a visit from Santa. The Saturday Christmas Market now features more than 150 vendors selling gourmet foods, crafts, and other handmade holiday gifts; entertainment on three stages; and



Georgetown holiday events include the annual Christmas Stroll (Dec. 2-3) and the Holiday Home Tour (Dec. 10-11).



a Dr. Seuss-inspired “Whoo Village” that offers cookie-decorating and crafts stations for kids.

The town’s festivities continue the following weekend, when the Georgetown Heritage Society’s Holiday Home Tour will showcase five privately owned historic houses that exemplify this year’s Mid-Century Modern theme. The former Grace Episcopal Church, built in 1881 and now the Grace Heritage Center, will serve as the tour’s hospitality center and home base, from which guests can walk to the homes featured on the tour.

This year, organizers expect more than 40,000 residents and visitors to attend the town’s holiday events, a far cry from the 500 or so who showed up for the first Stroll back in 1980.

Staging such an undertaking year after year requires the efforts of a small army, and it is in this respect that Georgetown has a leg up on some other towns. In part because it is home to 176-year-old Southwestern University, a private liberal-arts college and Texas’ oldest post-secondary school, the city enjoys the benefits of a dynamic and supremely civic-minded core group of citizens who love promoting Georgetown’s charms to visitors.

Nell Benold is one of those citizens who moved to Georgetown to attend college and never left. A resident since 1946, she says that the early holiday festivities differed widely from the events that visitors experience today.

“The church choirs met on Austin Avenue, then sang as we walked to the square,” she recalls. “As we approached, the lights on the square came on to signify the light of Christ. It was very sincere and simple; not at all elaborate. There were candles in all the trees, and you could smell the chestnuts roasting.”

But despite the growth of the town, Benold insists that the spirit of the original event remains. “It’s still a wonderful community effort by all of us who love this town,” she says, “and a gathering that is a true celebration

A woman with brown hair and a young girl wearing a red Santa hat are smiling and taking a selfie with a silver digital camera. They are in front of a large, multi-tiered wooden structure, possibly a Christmas tree or a decorative tower, with lights and decorations. The background is a clear blue sky.

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of and by Georgetown's community."

Benold's longtime friend Jeannine Fairburn moved to town in 1971, when the population hovered around 6,000. A military wife, she had moved quite a bit during her married life, but says that Georgetown fit her like a glove.

**Around the holidays, Georgetown is the epitome of a small town.**

"This is still the friendliest town I've ever seen," Fairburn says. "Those of us who have been here awhile have seen great changes. But as we grow, we still keep that small-town friendliness. People are really proud of Georgetown, and you can feel it during the Stroll."

Some Stroll visitors stay at the Sweet Lemon Inn & Kitchen, a boutique hotel and farm-to-table restaurant housed



**THE GEORGETOWN CHRISTMAS STROLL**

takes place on and around the Williamson County Courthouse square Dec. 2 (5-9 p.m.) and Dec. 3 (10 a.m.-8 p.m.) For more information, call **512/868-8675**; [www.downtowngeorgetownassociationtx.org](http://www.downtowngeorgetownassociationtx.org). See [www.georgetownheritagesociety.org](http://www.georgetownheritagesociety.org) for details about the home tour on Dec. 10-11.


For general information about Georgetown, including lodging, restaurants, events, and attractions, call **800/436-8696**; <https://visit.georgetown.org>.

in a converted 1918 home in a prime location just off the square. The three-room inn can accommodate groups up to 10, and features well-appointed suites with modern furnishings and kitchenettes, plus quaint touches such as clawfoot tubs. The town also boasts several chain hotels—including a brand-new Sheraton—as well as a handful of other inns and B&Bs.

Georgetown, which bills itself as "The Red Poppy Capital of Texas," retains its focus on tourism throughout the year, hosting the Red Poppy Festival in the spring, a wine and

music celebration in September, ghost tours and a carnival around Halloween, and live music, art exhibits, market days, farmers markets, and First Fridays On The Square year round.

But when it comes to experiencing the true magic of Georgetown, residents say it's hard to beat the holidays.

"When the lights go on and everyone gathers together, in some ways, it still feels like the 1940s and '50s," Benold says. "It's impossible to explain, and something you just need to see for yourself to really understand." 

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## Find Your Inner Cowpoke

Giddy(Up) at Wildcatter Ranch in Graham

text by **June Naylor**

**N**OTHING MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A 10-YEAR-OLD girl again like a trip to a West Texas ranch. I've joined my husband and a few families for a short post-breakfast wagon ride, and I'm as giddy as the kids. Pulled by a shiny John Deere tractor, we're heading down a hill at Wildcatter Ranch, near Graham, to a pasture where a small herd of Longhorn cattle awaits their morning snack.

Clint West, the Wildcatter's head wrangler, pulls the tractor and wagon into the grass and we scramble out. As we approach the rough-cedar fencing separating us from the giant beasts, Clint tells us the Longhorns' names, pointing out Big Boy, Sparkle, Red 1, Red 2, and others. As Clint gestures to a brick-red fellow who's taking his sweet time ambling over

**Here, the everyday headaches of city traffic and rushing around vanish.**

to us, I'm immediately smitten.

"And that's Cry Baby," Clint says with a friendly drawl. "He gets upset if he thinks he's not getting enough attention."

Clint holds out a bag of cattle cubes so that we can feed them, showing us how to hold the treats in our hands so that we don't get slimed by slobbery mouths. Sure enough, the Longhorns know exactly how to pluck them neatly from our fingers, and how to turn their heads so their curved horns don't get

The Wildcatter Ranch extends to this dramatic bend in the Brazos River.





caught in the fence rails. We all giggle at this rare event, taking pictures and marveling at how joyful it is to interact with creatures that seem like colossal, slow-moving puppies.

At that instant, I realize why I have long loved spending time at a ranch, and especially this one, which opened in 2004 just an hour and a half west of my Fort Worth home. Here, the headaches of city traffic and rushing around

vanish. Standing by a wooden fence, miles from signs of the modern world, I'm focused on the enormous brown eyes of an animal whose existence speaks of a heritage as old as Texas itself.

Breaking into my reverie comes a pitiful, deep-throated whine: True to his name, Cry Baby feels neglected when a few minutes pass without someone giving him a treat. I think he's commanding us to stop fawning

**Guests saddle up for a guided horseback ride through the Wildcatter Ranch's 1,500 acres. Longhorns greet visitors in the morning. Accommodations feature Western decor and upscale amenities.**

over all those other Longhorns and feed him some more, and I can't help but oblige him until it is time to go.

Were it not for the prospect of exploring the ranch on horseback, I might spend the day beside that fence. But the daily 10 a.m. ride is next on our schedule, and Clint gets six of us saddled up after giving us a quick riding lesson. A fan of a beautiful buckskin horses since I was a child, I'm delighted that Clint has assigned me a horse called Dusty, while my husband is given a huge Belgian-quarter horse mix named Ted.



### THE WILDCATTER RANCH

is about seven miles south of downtown Graham at 6062 Texas 16, roughly 90 minutes northwest of Fort Worth. Lodgings include 16 cabin suites, each with a fireplace, large bathroom, mini-fridge, and either queen beds or a king bed. In addition, a two-story hotel with 16 rooms sits across from the restaurant; and two remote guest cabins each offer two bedrooms. Finally, Herron Bend, a four-bedroom home originally built for the ranch owner, sits on 26 private acres overlooking the river. Overnight stays start at about \$149. Call **940/549-3500**; [www.wildcatterranch.com](http://www.wildcatterranch.com).

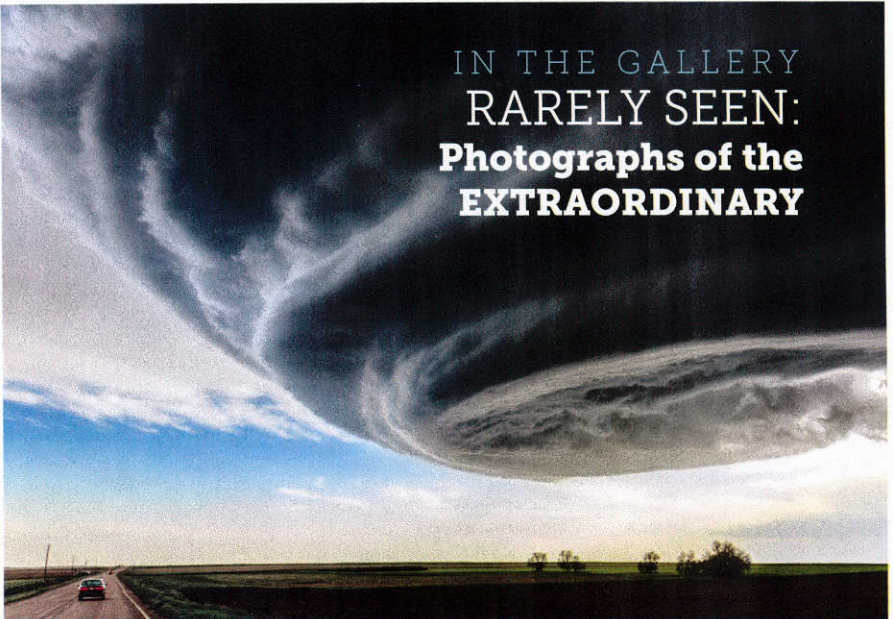


Like most guest ranches, the Wildcatter specializes in easygoing horses that are content to walk and not run. Forming a queue, we slowly head out for trails that crisscross various areas of the hilly, 1,500-acre spread. Here again, I feel like the luckiest kid alive, energized by the chance to view from horseback the magnificent curves of the Brazos River as it winds through the Palo Pinto Mountains.

**Riding the rocky landscape, dotted with cactus and mesquite, cedar, and live oak trees, our only company is the occasional hawk soaring overhead in the clear, blue sky.**

Along the way, we stop so that Clint can point out landmarks like a grassy point of land abutting Conner Creek, where a deadly Comanche raid took place a century and a half ago. To this day, Clint tells us, folks find arrowheads on that patch of property, which lies close to the creek's junction with the Brazos. Riding the rocky landscape, dotted with cactus and mesquite, cedar, and live oak trees, our only company is the occasional hawk soaring overhead in the clear, blue sky.

In the early afternoon, my husband and I join Clint for another look around the Wildcatter, this time aboard an open-air Jeep with massive tires that can handle the ranch's boulder-strewn terrain. He stops at a limestone bluff 75 feet above the Brazos, noting that the Comanche once ran buffalo to their deaths from cliffs like these. On one rutted path, he pulls over to show us pieces of flint rock; we can see how easily arrowheads would have been made from these and even where someone had begun chipping away at a few, presumably for that purpose. We also pause beside a prickly pear cactus to examine the sticky white substance on its paddles. It's excreted by the cochineal "beetle," a scale insect



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## DECEMBER

The David Crockett Old Time Music Society  
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December 3

Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder in Concert  
December 17

Don Edwards at Camp Street Cafe  
December 30



## JANUARY

Cliff Eberhardt at Camp Street Cafe  
January 14

Texas Tenors presented by  
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January 19

Greg Trooper at Camp Street Cafe  
January 21

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known for producing a purple-red dye used for centuries by various civilizations, and Clint shows us how rubbing the taffy-like goo turns his fingers a deep magenta.

**Playing cowboy appeals to all of us, whatever our age and whichever country we call home.**

Our conversations with Clint keep us amused, too: As he takes us around the archery and skeet-shooting ranges, he shares stories about entertaining guests from around the world. The Brits, Germans, and Chinese enjoy a Texas ranch weekend as much as we do, it seems. Playing cowboy appeals to all of us, whatever our age and whichever country we call home.

Whiling away the rest of the afternoon beside the Wildcatter's swimming pool on its native stone deck, we admire a view of scrubby mountains for miles and miles. Guests who want to book a massage can do that at the Wildcatter spa, but we content ourselves lounging under the infinite sky.

At suppertime, we make our way to the Dinner Bell, the Wildcatter's restaurant, which lies a short walk from our cabin. Run by three women who also own a restaurant in Graham by the same name, this steakhouse fits perfectly with the ranch's laid-back vibe. An appetizer of crispy-crust, fried avocado slices, which we dip in a spicy aioli, is a tasty prelude to one of the best chicken-fried steaks we've had in a long while. Crunchy on the outside and fork-tender inside, the steak comes atop a shallow pool of peppery cream gravy, with crisp, buttery grilled asparagus spears on the side.

Afterward, we wind down on the porch outside our spacious cabin, one of 16 sitting atop a bluff. Looking up at the sparkling quilt of stars in the clear night sky, it's good to feel like a kid again, and good to have a ranch nearby that can evoke such spirit. 🌟



# A Texas Time Capsule

The 1847 T.C. Lindsey & Co. General Store in Jonesville

text by **Cody Neathery**

**N**OT EXACTLY LOST BUT NOT EXACTLY IN plain sight, the community of Jonesville sits near the Texas-Louisiana border, just as it has since Texas' earliest days as a state. Visitors will notice the deteriorating wooden structures along the Union Pacific railroad, relics of the area's cotton-shipping past. But Jonesville refuses to disappear, thanks largely to its only private business—the T.C. Lindsey & Co. General Store, which has operated continuously since 1847.

William Harrison Jones, the town's namesake, opened the store as a trading post, and it moved to its current site in 1922.

**Some of the store's once-new inventory items have become historical curiosities over time.**

At its height at the dawn of the 20th Century, Jonesville was a railroad and cotton hub with a steam-powered gristmill and cotton gin. But over the decades, Jonesville dwindled as cotton farming faded and its residents moved to nearby cities like Marshall and Shreveport. Today, Jonesville has only a few residents, although more than 100 people from the area collect their mail at the U.S. Post Office across the street from T.C. Lindsey & Co.

Set in an expansive whitewashed building with an A-frame roof, the store welcomes visitors with jingling bells on the front door. Once a general store carrying household goods, farming equipment, medicine, and livestock



T.C. Lindsey & Co. General Store opened in 1847 and moved to its current location in 1922.





with cotton stretched for over a mile down the road. People came in to sell their crop and get supplies.”

Some of the store’s once-new inventory items have become historical curiosities over time. Behind the cash register, shelves display antique canned goods and pharmaceuticals

**Jonesville refuses to disappear, thanks largely to its only private business—the T.C. Lindsey & Co. General Store, which has operated continuously since 1847.**

like Crazy Water crystals from Mineral Wells and Grandpa’s Pine Tar Toilet Soap. Eye-catching (but not for sale) items in the store include an antique dentist’s chair from Marshall, vintage farming hand tools, a burial tuxedo left over from when the store used to sell caskets, and the last bale of cotton ginned in Jonesville. Stuffed in burlap wrapping, the fluffy white bale was ginned in 1973.

At the back of the store, rocking chairs arranged around a fireplace welcome visitors to linger. Old family photographs, Longhorn mounts, and road signs adorn the surrounding walls. After the train rattles through town each day, store Manager Jon Miller uses a broomstick to reposition the Longhorns above the fireplace as the vibration causes them to lean. “They used to at least slow down

Crackers with Wisconsin cheese? Yes, please. The snack is one of T.C. Lindsey & Co.’s most popular offerings. Part store and part museum, the mercantile has amassed a collection of antiques over the years, such as these novelty canned goods.

feed, the store now stocks books covering regional and state history, candy, snacks, Wisconsin cheese, cast-iron cookery, Christmas-tree ornaments, wooden kegs for aging whiskey, woven baskets, pocket knives, vintage signs, glass lamps, overalls, toys, and various other odds-and-ends and souvenirs.

The aisles of the two-story mercantile exude nostalgia and warmth. For some visitors, the toys on display, such as harmonicas and Radio Flyer

wagons, recall childhood. For others, the store’s atmosphere speaks of small-town America and serves as a remnant of an era lost to time.

“As far as we know, we’re the oldest continuously operating mercantile in the state of Texas,” says Marty Vaughan, co-owner of the store and a great-granddaughter of S.F. Vaughan I, a physician who bought the store in the late 19th Century. S.F. Vaughan’s daughter married T.C. Lindsey, which is how the store got its current name.

“When I was a small child in the ‘40s, people could still buy wagons at the store,” she says. “It was like the Wal-Mart of its day, and a lot of people walked maybe four or five miles to the store to buy things. Wagons loaded



when coming through, but not anymore,” says Miller, S.F. Vaughan’s great-great-grandson.

Adjacent to the fireplace is a framed glass case from 1903 that holds a 20-pound, red-waxed wheel of Wisconsin cheese. It’s just plain Wisconsin cheddar, but people love it. “It’s the atmosphere of the old general store and the 100-year-old cheese slicer that makes the Jonesville cheese special,” Vaughan says.

The store also sells regionally produced jams, jellies, syrups, and pickled vegetables, as well as dozens of soft drink varieties, including specialty brands like Virgil’s Black Cherry Vanilla and Sioux City Sarsaparilla. A table set in the middle of the store beckons customers to take a seat for a snack of cheese, saltine crackers, and a soft drink.

Syble Elliott is the store’s longest-tenured employee with 59 years



### T.C. LINDSEY & CO. GENERAL STORE

is at 2293 FM 134 in Jonesville, about five miles northwest of Waskom and one mile north of Interstate 20. The store opens Tue-Thu 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and Fri-Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Call **903/687-3382**. The store will host a Christmas open house Dec. 10, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

under her belt. As customers arrive, she hands buffalo nickels to the kids and directs adults to sign the guest-book, which has entries from guests from as far away as England and South Africa. Elliott is full of stories, and one of her most memorable tales involves a customer who would always find his way to the store after getting drunk. During one of his drunken visits, he passed out on the floor, so the employees carried him to the second

floor and placed him in one of the caskets stored there at the time. After he awoke, he never again visited the store drunk.

Gone are Jonesville’s cotton and railroad days, but as long as customers keep walking through T.C. Lindsey & Co. General Store’s screen door, the community’s spirit will remain alive. School groups, church groups, motorcycle clubs, and antique-car clubs are among the visitors who take the short detour off of Interstate 20 to check out T.C. Lindsey’s.

“The store’s the only reason—that and the post office—that people would come here as a destination as opposed to passing through this little community on the way to somewhere else,” Vaughan says. “We get a lot of people stopping to ask questions. We’re supposed to know everything because we’ve been around longer than everybody else.”



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## A New Zoo Review

Lights fantastic at the Houston Zoo

text by **Heather Brand**

**M**Y 15-YEAR OLD WAS SKEPTICAL WHEN I TOLD her we were going to see the Zoo Lights at the Houston Zoo for New Year's Eve. Wasn't that for babies? Wasn't she too old for all that now, and didn't she have better things to do, like play games on her smartphone, watch video clips online, and text her friends? Nope, I told her. We were going. With only a few precious years of child-rearing left to go, I didn't intend to waste a single season, and soon my powers of persuasion (or coercion) would lose their effect. Plus, I suspected that the outsized holiday spectacle would dazzle her back into childhood enchantment.

Who wouldn't be transported by the zoo's mile-long trail winding through a scintillating wonderland of about 2 million LED lights and more than 20 illuminated displays? This annual seasonal event kicks off mid-November and continues into January,

**As we pressed forward with the giddy crowd, my daughter began humming along, in spite of herself, to the piped-in holiday music.**

with breaks only for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. When the event started in 2012, it attracted 150,000 visitors, a number that had grown to 280,000 by 2015. The zoo's website conveniently noted which evenings would be the busiest, and I had intentionally picked New Year's Eve to avoid the worst of the crowds.

Nevertheless, by the time the doors opened at 6 p.m., the line at the main entrance had grown to surprising lengths. My daughter grumbled a bit but was happily distracted by the vendors selling light wands and

A mile-long trail at the Houston Zoo sparkles with lights and more than 20 illuminated displays.



glow-in-the-dark necklaces from carts stationed nearby. Our patience was rewarded once inside the gates, where we were greeted by a stunning vista of massive live oaks with trunks and branches wrapped in strings of lights in shades of red, orange, blue, and fuchsia. These majestic trees lined both sides of the zoo's long, rectangular reflecting pool, and their particolored display flashed in time to the rhythms of "Christmas Time Is Here" from the TV special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

From there, helpful guides directed us along a designated path as we wound our way through the zoo grounds. Many of the side paths had been blocked off to allow the animals their rest, but a few creatures were still stirring. The aquarium, reptile house, and bug house were open to visitors, as was the *Natural Encounters* building—home to a variety of species, including the nocturnal fruit bat. One of our

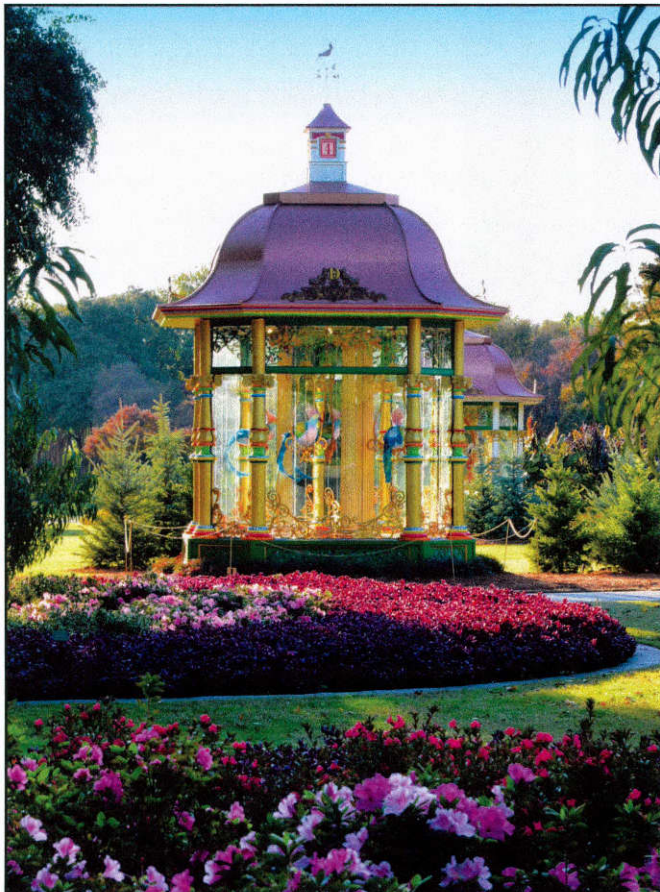
first stops was the flamingo habitat, fittingly decorated with painted displays of the iconic pink birds outlined in lights. Unperturbed by the onlookers, the real birds intently went about their business trawling for food in the shallow waters of their enclosure.

Rounding a corner, we encountered a full-size sleigh, the first in a series of staged photo ops beckoning us to pose for posterity. Farther down the path, a line of gypsy-style wagons presented humorous displays on how to survive the holidays, including one with glass vials of "medicines" bearing labels such as "boundaries" and "humor." This narrow path opened onto a herd of sheep—white statues onto which hidden projectors cast spirals of light to the sound of Bing Crosby crooning "Jingle Bells." I glanced at my daughter, who was busy snapping photos with her smartphone.

The trail continued on, and though

we could not see the elephants, their unmistakable scent wafted through the night air. We passed beneath round red lanterns that hung from trees like luminous fruit, and stopped to marvel at neon-hued inflatables that vaguely resembled alien sea anemones, or something from a Dr. Seuss book. Just in front of us, a toddler paused to lick one of the lollipop-shaped lights along the trail, mistaking it for the real thing. For a moment, I felt like a pawn in a life-size version of the board game Candy Land. This impression was underscored by the vendors hawking food at regular intervals along the way—kettle corn and hot chocolate, and even s'more fixings. Families swarmed around an elevated fire pit to toast marshmallows for the gooey treat.

Around the next bend, the zoo's carousel lit up the night, and children clambered aboard their favorite exotic animals. Though my teenager declared



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herself too old for the ride, she was appropriately awed by the sight of the giraffes in their barn for the night. The viewing window revealed mostly just their long legs and torsos, but it was the perfect height for spying the new calf in their midst.

As we pressed forward with the giddy crowd, my daughter began humming along, in spite of herself, to the

pipied-in holiday music: “I Want a Hippopotamus for Christmas.” I could tell the Zoo Lights were starting to work their magic. Next, we passed through an artificial cave decked out with a chandelier of electric icicles to reach the chimp house. Though the creatures were nowhere to be seen, their enclosure had been transformed into a disco, festooned with mirror



**ZOO LIGHTS AT THE HOUSTON ZOO,**

held at 6200 Hermann Park Dr.

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balls that cast spinning points of light in all directions.

Farther along the path, a full-size animatronic zebra stationed in the bushes wished us a “Happy Moo Year” before we passed through a long archway made entirely of multicolored lights. A cluster of families gathered around the next display, an electric model train circling through a charming miniature village, which looked like a Thomas Kinkaid painting come to life. Others lined up to have their photo taken inside an inflatable snow globe.

Eventually, we came full circle back to the reflecting pool, with its illuminated canopy of live oaks. My daughter gravitated toward two musicians playing guitar and ukulele on the stage at the far end, mesmerized by their country-style interpretation of “Silent Night” and their tight harmonies. After a few tunes, we made our way slowly toward the exit, passing two more photo ops along the way—a black 1936 Ford pickup hauling a pine tree, and a 1958 Cadillac bedazzled with rope lights, the latter with a fully decorated Christmas tree on its roof and holiday music booming from its speakers. It was time to track down our own car somewhere amid the sea of vehicles in the parking lot.

On our way out, my daughter insisted on buying a souvenir—a pair of black knitted gloves with fingers that lit up and blinked in different configurations of colors. I was glad that she wanted something to commemorate the experience, and that I could prolong her childhood just a little bit longer. Of course, she also came away with a phone full of images and a better attitude. It was a Christmas miracle. **L**

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# PLATES

COOK + EAT + DRINK

## *¡Sopa Deliciosa!*

Dishing with Sylvia Casares, the Enchilada Queen

text by Mai Pham

*Sopa de fideo*, a nourishing soup made with vermicelli pasta, is hard to find in restaurants north of the Rio Grande. Turn the page for the recipe.





**F**OR RESTAURATEUR AND COOKBOOK AUTHOR Sylvia Casares, the road to becoming Houston's beloved "Enchilada Queen" started mid-career. "I was 42 when I left the corporate world," she says. "Looking back on it, I surprise myself when I think about what I did: Leaving a secure, nice job with great pay and great benefits, and diving in feet-first without any prior restaurant experience."

Born in the border town of Brownsville, Casares is a third-generation Mexican-American with parents from Texas and grandparents from Mexico. She grew up cooking with her mom, her *tias* (aunts) and her *abuela* (grandmother).

After graduating from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in home economics, Casares went to work for Uncle Ben's in Houston, where she developed recipes in the company's test kitchen. After 10 years, she left for a sales and marketing

**Casares grew up cooking with her mom, her *tias* (aunts) and her *abuela* (grandmother).**

job with Kraft Foods. However, the job required a lot of travel, and when she turned 40, she decided to make a change that would allow her to establish stronger roots.

"I started thinking about what else I could do, and I figured I could take my skills and open a restaurant," she says.

Her first effort, a restaurant called Camino Real in Rosenberg, offered her plenty of on-the-job training, but when she lost the restaurant a few years later in a divorce, she found a new location in West Houston and started from scratch. "It was your basic, run-of-the-mill hole in the wall with 18 tables," she recalls. "By that time, I had realized that my enchiladas were a big hit, so I decided to call it Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen as a way to market what I was becoming known for."

That was approximately 18 years ago. Naming her restaurant Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen set her on a path that would lead to running three restaurants and eventually writing a cookbook.

Along the way, a reporter dubbed her the "Enchilada Queen," and the nickname stuck. Her restaurants, which are famous not only for their enchiladas but also for made-from-scratch soups, grilled-meat platters called *parilladas*, and South Texas-style comfort foods like *chiles rellenos* and tamales, are regularly honored as some of the best places for Tex-Mex in Houston.

These days, in addition to overseeing the operations of her restaurants, she teaches classes on how to make traditional Mexican dishes such as tamales, *chiles rellenos*, and *gorditas*. This winter, on December 22 and 23, she'll host tamale-making parties called *tamaladas*, which she remembers fondly from her childhood > continued on page 28



### THE ENCHILADA QUEEN COOKBOOK

Find *The Enchilada Queen Cookbook* (St. Martin's Griffin Press) at bookstores or online.



## RECIPE

### SYLVIA'S SOPA DE FIDEO (Vermicelli Soup)

This recipe is adapted slightly from *The Enchilada Queen Cookbook* by Sylvia Casares with Dotty Griffith; makes 6 servings.

Made with thin pasta called fideo, this soup is a weekday staple in many Texas border towns.

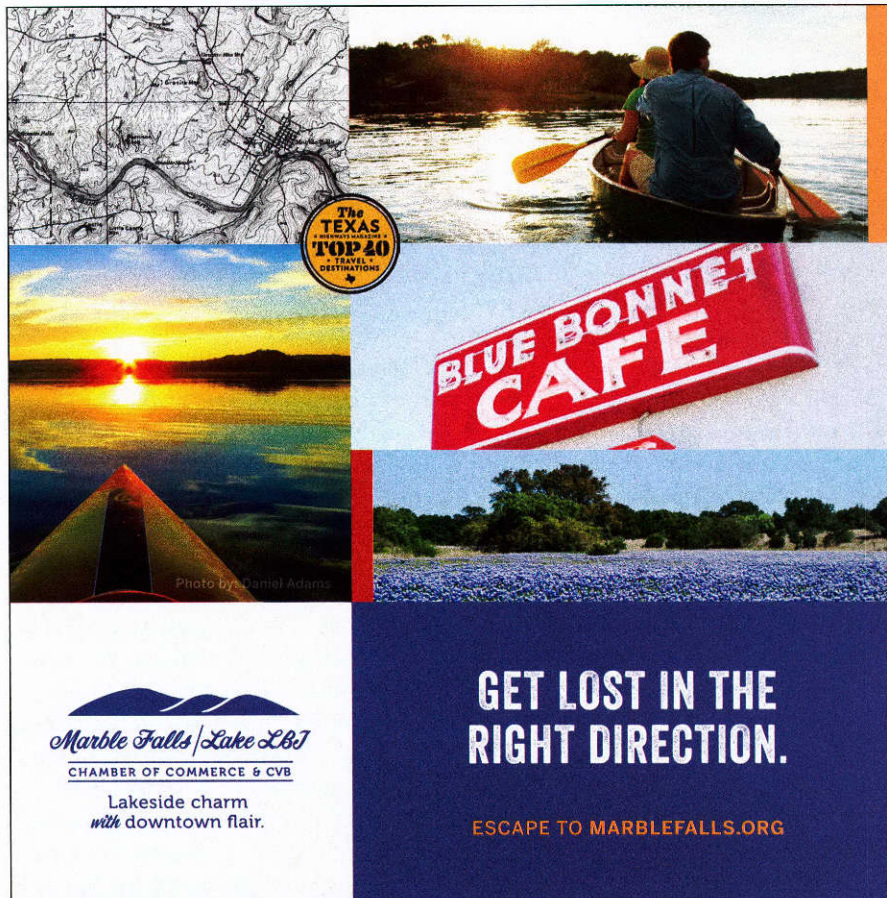
- ✦ 1 (5-ounce) box vermicelli pasta
- ✦ 3 T vegetable oil
- ✦ 1/4 cup chopped white onion
- ✦ 1 cup coarsely chopped tomato
- ✦ 4 1/2 cups chicken stock
- ✦ 1/4 cup chopped green bell pepper
- ✦ 1/4 cup tomato sauce
- ✦ 2 tsp. Tex-Mex Holy Trinity (see below)
- ✦ 1/2 tsp. salt
- ✦ 1 1/2 to 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- ✦ Avocado slices (optional)

1. In a large skillet over medium heat, heat 2 T oil. Add the vermicelli and cook, stirring frequently, until light golden brown. Place the browned pasta in a large saucepan or stockpot.
2. Using the same skillet over medium heat, add the remaining 1 T oil and the onion. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is transparent. Set aside off the heat.
3. In a blender jar or using a mini-chopper, process the chopped tomato with 1/4 cup water for about 30 seconds, until smooth.
4. To the large saucepan or stockpot with the browned pasta, add the broth, onion, processed tomatoes, bell pepper, tomato sauce, Holy Trinity, and salt.
5. Over high heat, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for 10 minutes. Set aside, off the heat, uncovered, for 5 minutes. Stir in the chicken and add avocado slices before serving.

#### Tex-Mex Holy Trinity

- 3 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 1/2 tsp. cumin seeds
- 1 1/2 tsp. whole black peppercorns

In a spice or coffee grinder, puree garlic with water, and set aside. Grind cumin seeds, then peppercorns, adding 2 T water each time. Stir together to make a paste. Keeps 1 month.



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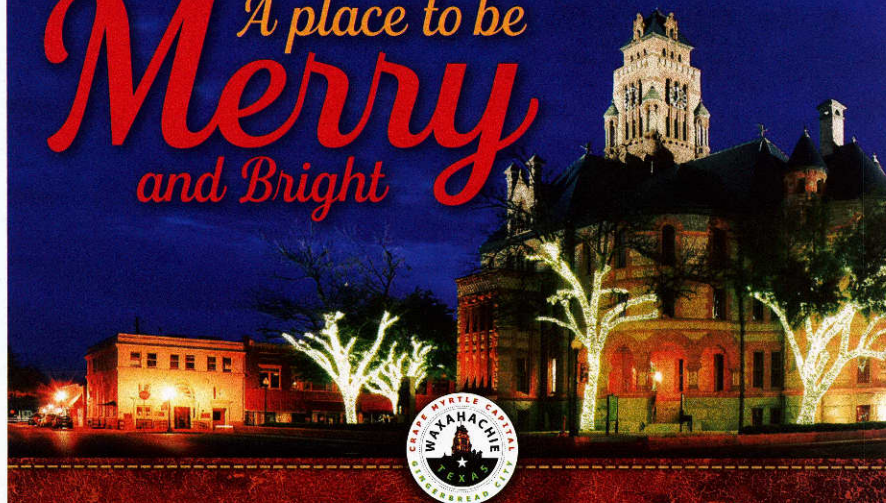
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◀ continued from page 26 in Brownsville. “A *tamalada* is typically held in someone’s home, usually on December 24th,” Casares says. “It’s typically multi-family and multi-generational. They start really early in the morning, and by dinner, all the tamales have been made.”

**In addition to overseeing the operations of her restaurants, Casares teaches classes on how to make traditional Mexican dishes such as tamales, chiles rellenos, and gorditas.**

Over the years, she says, students in her cooking classes would ask her if she had plans to publish a cookbook. She had toyed with the idea, but in 2012 she started to pay the notion serious attention, eventually collaborating with food writer Dotty Griffith to test recipes, develop tips and shortcuts, and



**WANNA TAMALADA?**

On December 22 and 23, Sylvia Casares will lead tamale-making parties known as *tamaladas* at two of her three restaurant locations in Houston. Guests will make and take home at least a dozen tamales. See [www.sylviasenchiladas.com](http://www.sylviasenchiladas.com) to reserve your spot.

record South Texas culinary histories for posterity. Along the way, she enlisted her brother, novelist Oscar Casares, to write the foreword. Published by St. Martin’s Griffin Press, *The Enchilada Queen Cookbook: Enchiladas, Fajitas, Tamales and More Classic Recipes from Texas-Mexico Border Kitchens* includes 80 recipes for enchiladas and other traditional dishes, including 14 essential South Texas sauce recipes ranging from classic Tex-Mex chili gravy to *mole poblano*. The book highlights not only recipes passed down to Casares by her mother and grandmother, but also recipes such as *sopa de fideo* (a Mexican noodle soup; see

recipe) and *arroz con pollo* (chicken and rice) that she’s adapted over the years to appeal to health-conscious cooks.

“I’m very proud of the cookbook,” she says. “These recipes work; I’ve tested them and re-tested them, and I’ve written them so that people can make them at home,” she says. “One of my key recipes is for something I call Holy Trinity Paste; it’s a combination of cumin, black peppercorns, and fresh garlic, and it’s different than what you’ll find in other cookbooks. But I’m from Brownsville, and this is South Texas. This is how our grandmothers and mothers did it; it’s Tex-Mex, the original fusion food.” 🍴

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## Sweet-tooth Solutions

Naegelin's Bakery in New Braunfels

text by **Melissa Gaskill**

**PUSH OPEN THE WEATHERED METAL-AND-GLASS DOOR** of Naegelin's Bakery and immediately face a dilemma. On one side of the narrow room, bakery cases display an array of goodies—kolaches, cinnamon rolls, colorful cupcakes, candies, brownies, cakes, and pies. On the other, shelves are laden with rolls, bread, coffee cakes, gingerbread men, cookies, and bags of fresh tortillas.

The dilemma: how to choose just one thing. The solution: an entire box of assorted goodies. Obviously.

Naegelin's Bakery, an 8,000-square-foot bakery in New Braunfels, claims to be the oldest continuously operating bakery

**The  
dilemma:  
how to  
choose just  
one thing.**

in Texas. And while it has passed through numerous owners, it has always been a family affair. Founder Edouard Naegelin opened the bakery in 1868 on the site of what is now City Hall, and he moved it 11 years later to this tiny building just off the main plaza. Edouard and his wife, Francisca, lived in an apartment above the bakery with their children until Edouard's death in 1923, and the business was passed down to various family members until it was sold in 1980 to entrepreneur Wilburn Granzin.

"My dad had been in baking for 20 years in San Antonio when a salesman told him that this bakery was up

**Baker Frankie Alvarado** shows off a pie with employee Della Pantermuehl, who has worked at Naegelin's for almost four decades.



for sale,” Wilburn’s son Todd Granzin recalls. “Edouard Naegelin’s grandson Clinton was looking for a family to keep it going the way his did. His children weren’t interested. We came up to New Braunfels and met, and we liked him and he liked us. The rest is history.”

Todd and his brother Ross now own the bakery. The Granzins kept the Naegelins’ recipes, and they are especially proud of their famous apple strudel. “No one else makes it the way we do, the way that Mr. Naegelin did it,” Todd says. “The filling is like apple pie filling, but we add cherries and coconut, and we use a puff pastry. There’s not that much to it, but I think the atmosphere of the bakery makes it more interesting to eat.”

I bite into a piece and find layers of delicate pastry, a gooey filling, and slices of apple with just a hint of firmness. As the pastry melts in my mouth, the sweet filling sets my taste buds dancing. No wonder Naegelin’s makes

Practice makes perfect: Naegelin’s Bakery in New Braunfels opened nearly 150 years ago and moved to this “new” spot in 1879.

Pies, strudels, and all manner of pastries tempt visitors today.



more than 25,000 of these strudels a year.

The bakery also sells about 600 of its whimsical “smiley face” shortbread cookies daily, and about 30,000 gingerbread men every year—many of them around the December holidays. Other big sellers are traditional German cookies such as *pfefermuesse*, *lebkuchen*, and *springerle*, Todd says, as well as the bakery’s unusual interpretation of the classic bear claw.

“Most people make bear claws with a puff pastry dough and almond flavor,

but ours is Danish-style dough with cinnamon and 12 layers of brown sugar and pecans in there,” Todd says.

The business also sells a variety of cream-filled pie, fruit-filled pie, and a lot of cakes, including 50 to 75 custom birthday cakes a week and at least three wedding cakes every weekend. “We do so many cakes that our decorators sometimes beg us to quit taking orders,” Todd admits. Those decorators work in their own dedicated room, where containers of colorful sprinkles, sugars, and other goodies fill a long







**NAEGELIN'S BAKERY,**  
at 129 South Seguin Ave.  
in New Braunfels, opens  
Mon-Fri 6:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.,  
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Call **830/625-5722**;  
[www.naegelins.com](http://www.naegelins.com).


shelf above a counter lined with cakes in varying degrees of completeness.

The Granzins have added new items to the lineup over the years, including tortillas and a sweet German pretzel made with pastry dough, brown sugar, cinnamon, and pecans.

About 35 people are employed at the bakery, although that number grows during the holidays and in summer, the bakery's busiest times. But busy seems to describe Naegelin's in general, both the shop, where the stream of customers flows nonstop, and the operations in back. There, in a maze of small rooms, employees work dough into a variety of shapes and sizes. Another room houses giant bags of flour and tubs of fillings, and a third is dominated by a white, 1940s-era oven the size of a panel truck. In the passageways between the rooms, bread loaves and rolls cool on racks, shelves are piled with cake pans, and carts covered in wrapped cookies and other goodies create a fragrant obstacle course. The phrase "controlled chaos" comes to mind.

That "oldest bakery in Texas" claim became official in 1985, after Todd conducted research nationally and at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio and Texas State University. The closest potential competitor for the title, according to the Institute of Texan Cultures, closed in the 1940s.

And Clinton Naegelin got his wish for keeping the bakery a family business, as the Granzin brothers' wives and kids work here, too. "It's a real family operation, multi-generational, a bakery that has stood the test of time," Todd says.

I can't say the same of my box of goodies, which disappears within a day. 

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## Party with a Purpose

The San Antonio Cocktail Conference

text by **Lori Moffatt**

**F**OR FIVE DAYS IN JANUARY, IN THE RECUPERATIVE lull between New Year's and Valentine's Day, San Antonio hosts a smashing soiree that both raises money for children's charities and celebrates the craft cocktail movement.

And here's the delicious thing: It turns out that this unexpected pairing works as beautifully as fried chicken and champagne; one provides the sustenance and the other provides the sparkle. Since its founding in 2012, the San Antonio Cocktail Conference has donated more than \$450,000 to area children's charities, making incidental philanthropists out of merrymakers seeking to learn more about spirits, cocktail history, and San Antonio's vibrant culture and culinary scene.

"I doubt that most people who come to the festival are familiar with all of the charities we support," says Cathy Siegel, executive director of Houston Street Charities, the event's governing nonprofit. "They come because it's fun. We call it a conference, but it's

really a festival—a party with a purpose. This is the new face of philanthropy."

Bartender Michael Rogers, one of several hundred volunteers who make drinks, haul glassware, zest citrus, and provide assistance throughout the event, notes, "I'd estimate that more than 60 percent of attendees aren't in the industry. They're coming to learn more about cocktails and experience San Antonio. You can get as nerdy with it as you like; there are seminars for practically any interest. My favorite part is education, steering consumers to tastes they might not know about yet."

Founded by Mark Bohanon (whose namesake steakhouse on Houston Street may be the swankiest spot in San Antonio to sip a daiquiri) and the late Sasha Petraske (the urbane New York bartender widely credited with kick-starting the modern cocktail revival), SACC makes it easy to duck in for a quick nip of cocktail culture or stay for a weekend-long eyeopener. The conference sells individual tickets to seminars, tastings, and events, so you can join in on a little, or a lot.

One year, for example, I built a day trip around an afternoon seminar focused on mezcal and other agave spirits. We tasted fiery, earthy spirits made by Oaxacan mezcaleros and sampled sweet, juicy squares of smoked agave to cleanse our palates. Another year, I stayed overnight to attend the Houston Street Stroll, when dozens of restaurants and bars set up along the strip to serve representative dishes and creative libations as dusk turns to night.

And last year, I made a weekend of it, enjoying seminars that ran the gamut from Mixology 101 (where I learned that NASCAR has its roots in Prohibition, as bootleggers of the era developed fast cars to outrun the fuzz) to a comparison of Japanese and Texas whiskies aboard a rollicking riverboat charter. In between, we explored the history of medicinal spirits and herbal elixirs, the

**It's easy to duck in for a quick nip of cocktail culture or stay for a weekend-long eyeopener.**

The sixth annual San Antonio Cocktail Conference kicks off January 11, raising money for kids' charities while celebrating the craft cocktail movement.



concept of the bar as an anthropology experiment, the botany of agave, and the resurgent popularity of low-proof cocktails like the Grasshopper.

Wise to the risks inherent in a day that began with breakfast Mai Tais and would end past midnight at a West San Antonio taco truck, I followed the lead of smart peers and explored the city on foot in between classes. I ducked into the Aztec Theatre to admire the chandeliers in the lobby, strolled through the grounds of the Alamo to ponder the city's character when the garden's giant oak tree was moved here in 1912, and took a restorative disco nap in my room at the opulent St. Anthony hotel, a hub of business and political activity since 1909. (Here in the 1960s, for example, future Southwest Airlines co-founder Herb Kelleher would sketch his plan for the airline on a cocktail napkin.)

Cathy Siegel notes that with each



## THE SAN ANTONIO COCKTAIL CONFERENCE

The San Antonio Cocktail Conference takes place January 11-15. Most events take place within a pedestrian-friendly section of downtown adjacent to the River Walk. Within this locus of activity, many hotels, including The St. Anthony, the Sheraton Gunter, and the Hotel Valencia Riverwalk, offer special rates to conference attendees and serve as venues for registration, seminars, and tastings. Free shuttles run to and from other events; other transportation options include Uber, Lyft, and B-Cycle.

Multi-event passes are available, with tickets to individual seminars, parties, and tastings running in the \$40-\$100 range. Tickets go on sale November 15.

See [www.sacocktailconference.com](http://www.sacocktailconference.com).

For general information about visiting San Antonio, see [www.visitsanantonio.com](http://www.visitsanantonio.com).

year, the festival's ticket sales have grown about 15 percent. "We don't want it to grow too fast, so we're concentrating on expanding our paired dinners and adding other smaller events, some of which start the week before the official event," she says. "This year, we're having our opening night at the DoSeum, the new children's museum. We'll have shuttles running from downtown, and there

will be jugglers, balloon artists, stilt-walkers, and music. The chefs, bartenders, and brand ambassadors are excited to play with the lightheartness of the children's museum space."

After all, whether it's fried chicken and champagne, Fernet and hot chocolate, or jugglers and jiggers, the San Antonio Cocktail Conference folks seem to have mastered the art of unexpected—and wildly successful—pairings. **L**

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# LIGHTSCAPES

SEASONAL SCENICS FROM  
SIX TEXAS PHOTOGRAPHERS



**I**N PLANNING THE HOLIDAY-THEMED photo feature that appears on the following pages, *Texas Highways* Photography Editor Brandon Jakobeit challenged some of our most creative photographers to interpret the season's spirit with landscapes and lights.

Photographer E. Dan Klepper, based in Marathon, drew inspiration from the 1979 movie *The Electric Horseman*, draping a buddy in solar- and battery-operated lights as he rode his horse in shallow waters near Big Bend National Park's

Cattail Falls trailhead. In contrast to E. Dan's mountainous landscape, Dallas photographer Sean Fitzgerald headed to the Rita Blanca National Grasslands in the Panhandle, capturing a moody, star-dusted shot where the Milky Way, a lone windmill, and an illuminated stock tank on the plains suggest a visual connection between earth and sky. And Kenny Braun of Austin headed to the beach at Port Aransas, juxtaposing a trio of gleaming starfish with the foamy surf at sunrise.

Woodlands photographer Kathy Adams Clark trekked to downtown Houston for a dramatic shot that combined the city skyline with a brilliant Christmas tree, while Laurence Parent of Wimberley re-interpreted the concept of a glittering tree by wrapping lights around the branches of a dying oak atop Enchanted Rock.

Austin photographer Matthew Johnson also seized upon the tree theme, venturing to a family-run tree farm near Magnolia to create a nostalgic image suggesting hard work with a joyful payoff. "The barn itself dates to the 1920s," says Matthew. "I was going for a photo that could have been taken yesterday, or decades ago."

It's easy to lose track of time when contemplating these unusual images.

—Lori Moffatt



## E. DAN KLEPPER

*(Opening spread)*

**E. Dan conjured up an image from his childhood as he developed the dramatic Big Bend shot on the opening spread. "I was originally thinking about photographing hikers or backpackers. But then I remembered a poster I'd seen as a kid for the movie *The Electric Horseman*; Robert Redford's character rides a horse down the Las Vegas strip. So I tried to re-create that with Christmas lights."**

## KATHY ADAMS CLARK

*(Inset)*

**In downtown Houston during the holidays, decorations around City Hall and the Hermann Square reflecting pool create a festive atmosphere.**

## KENNY BRAUN

*(Right)*

**"I had been down to Port Aransas with my family in August, and we were amazed at the many starfish on the beach," says Kenny. "So I knew I wanted to combine the ideas of stars at Christmas with the stars on the beach."**













## LAURENCE PARENT

"I've been playing with the idea of Christmas lights in the wilderness for some time," says Laurence of his Enchanted Rock shot. "It's such a surprise to see lights like this where there is no electricity."









## MATTHEW JOHNSON

Bob Jones runs Spring Creek Growers in Magnolia with his wife, Carla, and their three kids. "When I saw this neat old tractor parked outside the antique barn, I knew this was my shot," says Matthew. "I was hoping to capture a romantic view of Christmas, and this also speaks to the essence of their farm."









## SEAN FITZGERALD

"Out here on the plains is the best place in the whole state to see windmills," says Sean of his shot at Rita Blanca National Grasslands. "I wanted the feel of the open sky, because the skies become part of us, especially out on the prairie. And I wanted to capture the human drama of the lone windmill trying to pull a little bit of water out of the ground." 🌌



A large, leafy tree stands in the center of the frame, casting shadows on a modern, light-colored building. To the left, a woman sits on a chair with a white dog. To the right, a woman in a white lab coat walks past. In the foreground, the front of a red Harley-Davidson motorcycle is visible, including the headlight and front wheel. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

# 17 TRIPS FOR 2017

TEXT BY HELEN ANDERS

**THERE'S NO DOUBT** that Texas contains an ever-evolving mix of people and ideas. And with changing times come new offerings for travelers to explore the state's fascinating history, environment, and culture. Looking ahead to 2017, we've scoured the state for 17 new or refreshed attractions. From the recently updated Landmark Inn in Castroville, which first opened to guests in 1853, to a striking new aquarium exhibit at Corpus Christi's Texas State Aquarium, these enticing new destinations will stretch the boundaries of your own Texas experience.



HOTEL SAINT GEORGE, MARFA







1

## EXPLORE A BIGGER, BOLDER WITTE IN SAN ANTONIO

Just in time for Spring Break this March, San Antonio's Witte Museum will roughly triple in size with the opening of more than 100,000 square feet of new gallery and event space—finally enough to showcase its collection of Texas dinosaur fossils and replicas. In the museum's new glass-walled lobby entrance, a life-size model of a *Quetzalcoatlus* flying dinosaur will greet visitors.

A series of three galleries titled *Texas Deep Time* will explore life in Texas hundreds, thousands, and millions of years ago. In the *Dinosaur Gallery*, you'll see full-size skeleton casts of bones unearthed in Texas, including a *Tyrannosaurus rex* and a carnivorous *Acrocanthosaurus*, which will stand in molds of actual *Acrocanthosaurus* footprints discovered in the Paluxy River in Glen Rose. A 3-D screen next to each dino will show how the animal walked, hunted, and ate.

Among the galleries and dioramas of Texas animals then and now, look for an interactive lab where you'll be able to touch a snake or hold a tortoise (with staff supervision). In the *People of the Pecos* exhibit, explore the lifestyles and rock paintings of early inhabitants of the West Texas desert. Another gallery will host summer traveling shows, including an exhibition on whales this summer. Outdoors next to the San Antonio River, the new Acequia Madre Overlook will showcase the stone remnants of a 1719 irrigation system discovered on the Witte's property.

[www.witemuseum.org](http://www.witemuseum.org)



2

## GRAZE GRAFFITI IN HOUSTON

See why the art world has embraced street art at Houston's new Graffiti and Street Art Museum. Houston graffiti artist Mario Enrique Figueroa, Jr., who signs his work GONZO247, opened the collection at 2219 Canal Street to "give it the respect it deserves." The works represent everything from wheat paste art to spray-painted murals, as well as glue-up posters, brush painting, and stencil. In October, Figueroa's annual Human Urban Experience Mural Festival draws street artists from around the world to embellish the outdoor walls of downtown Houston in diverse and captivating styles.

[www.thegasamtx.org](http://www.thegasamtx.org);

[www.huemuralfestival.com](http://www.huemuralfestival.com)





## FOLLOW YOUR FEATHERED FRIENDS THROUGH ARANSAS COUNTY

Home to some of Texas' most beautiful coastline, Aransas County is working to highlight its offerings with the Aransas Pathways Project, an ever-growing network of birding, nature, history, hiking, and paddling sites around the Rockport-Fulton area. The project aims to enhance heritage tourism and eco-tourism with information pavilions, kayak launch sites, hike and bike paths, and numerous bird sanctuaries and birding trails. The historic Bruhl-Paul-Johnson House, home of the History Center for Aransas County, has been renovated, as well.

[www.aransaspathways.com](http://www.aransaspathways.com)

3

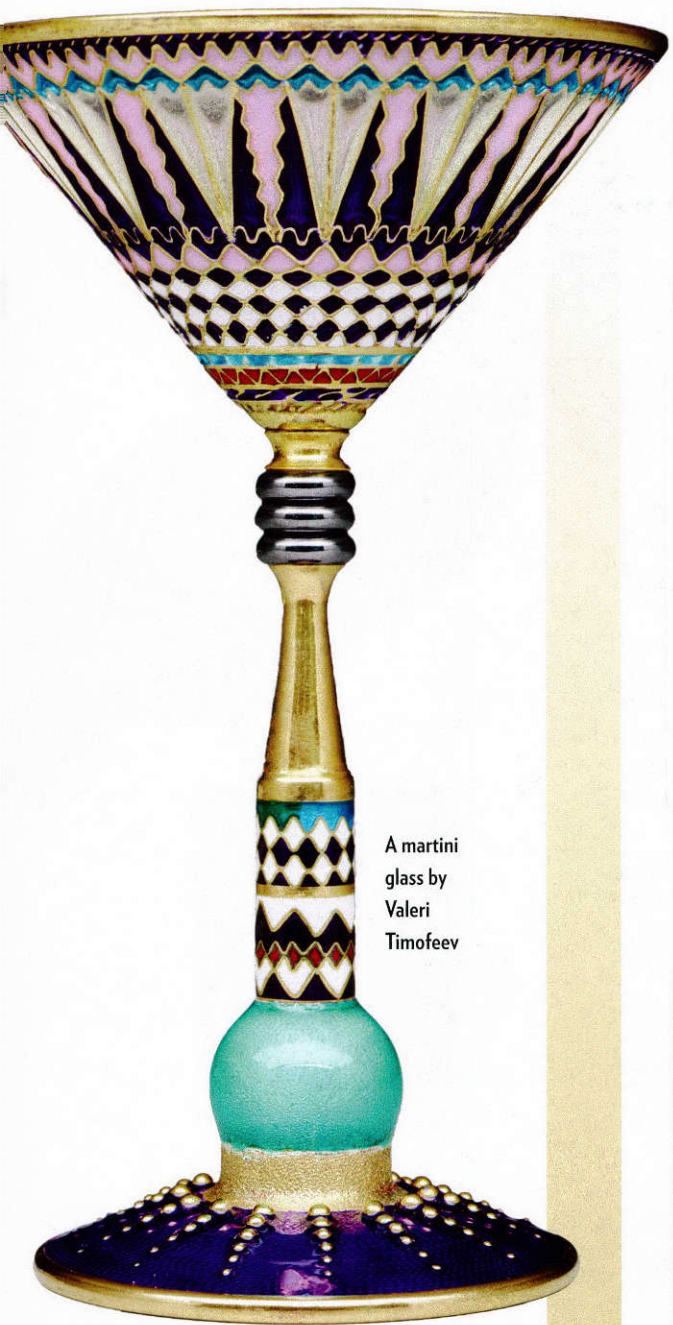


## Scout small towns along the Northeast Texas Trail

Ever been to the little town of Celeste? What about Pecan Gap, Blossom, or New Boston? Take a walk—or bike or horse—along the Northeast Texas Trail for a sampling of the region's small towns and photogenic rural landscapes. The 130-mile trail follows old railroad beds from Farmersville to New Boston through 19 towns. Since the 1990s, volunteers from the Northeast Texas Trail Coalition and other groups have worked with city and state government agencies to grade, clear, widen, and pave portions of the trail, as well as repair the historical railroad bridges along its span. The coming year should see a total of 75 improved miles of trail, including 25 paved.

[www.northeasttexasrail.org](http://www.northeasttexasrail.org)





A martini glass by Valeri Timofeev

6

## DRINK IN HISTORY, ART IN MARFA

The West Texas arts oasis of Marfa grows evermore fascinating with new offerings that build both on its history and distinctive culture. The new Hotel Saint George, located downtown about three blocks from the Presidio County Courthouse, is built on the footprint of the 1880s Hotel Saint George. The four-story, 55-room lodging forges a minimalist, industrial design using marble and bricks reclaimed from the original site. Take in the view of Chinati Peak from your room's window and enjoy Chef Allison Jenkins' deft entrees (crispy river trout, seared rib eye) in the restaurant, Laventure. The hotel also houses the Bar Saint George and the Marfa Book Company bookstore.

Need another reason to head for Marfa? The Chinati Foundation recently added a vast (about 10,000 square feet), permanent installation by Robert Irwin. Essentially, it's a building with transparent scrim walls in black and white. The experience transforms throughout the day as natural light and shadows change, or as the Chinati Foundation puts it, "Irwin's largest work to date, it represents the culmination of his decades-long investigation into the act of perception through poetic manipulation of space and light."

[www.marfasaintgeorge.com](http://www.marfasaintgeorge.com); [www.chinati.org](http://www.chinati.org)

## TOAST A STIRRING NEW EXHIBIT IN DALLAS

It's happy hour at the Dallas Museum of Art. Through November 12, 2017, *Shaken, Stirred, Styled: The Art of the Cocktail* delves into the history and culture of cocktails, as well as the vessels used to prepare and serve them. The exhibition displays objects like glasses, decanters, punch bowls, and Prohibition-era cocktail shakers in its tracing of cocktail culture from the late 19th Century to the present.

[www.dma.org](http://www.dma.org)

5



Laventure Chef Allison Jenkins





S

## See more sea life in Corpus Christi

Always a gem of coastal Texas, the Texas State Aquarium gets bigger and better with the summer 2017 opening of its new Caribbean Journey showcase. The new wing, topped with a glass roof, more than doubles the size of the aquarium and explores the wildlife of the Western Caribbean Sea and Yucatan Peninsula with habitats of sharks and tropical fish, exhibits of birds and reptiles, and close-up looks at coral reefs and karst caves. Step into the 4-D theater and take a virtual swim with the sea creatures.

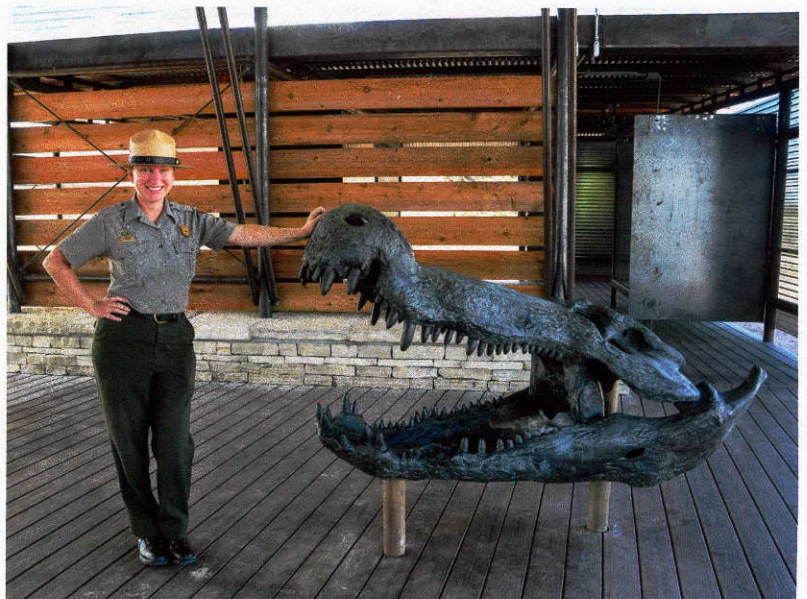
[www.texasstateaquarium.org](http://www.texasstateaquarium.org)

2

## Commune with Big Bend's big beasts

Big news in the Big Bend: In January, Big Bend National Park opens its new *Fossil Discovery Exhibit* at a site where paleontologists excavated mammal fossils in the 1950s. Under an open-air shelter, life-size fossil replicas demonstrate how the area's landscape has changed over time—from a sea (mosasaurs, sharks, oysters), to a swamp (giant alligators), to a forested upland (flying pterosaurs), and finally, to the rocky Chihuahuan Desert we know today. Touchable exhibits, including the bronze cast of a giant alligator skull, will add thrills.

[www.nps.gov/bibe](http://www.nps.gov/bibe)







9

## SHOP, SIP, AND DINE IN GEORGETOWN

Just north of fast-growing Austin, once-sleepy Georgetown is joining in on the frenzy to the benefit of shoppers, as well as fans of history and small towns. Crape myrtle-shaded brick sidewalks line the thriving Williamson County Courthouse Square, where century-old limestone buildings house boutiques, eateries, galleries, and theaters. Pick up wind chimes at The Escape Fine Crafts and Gifts, check out paintings and sculptures at the nonprofit Georgetown Art Center, and enjoy a glass of wine at the Grape Creek Vineyards tasting room. If you have time, catch a local production at the Art Deco Palace Theatre, a 1920s movie house.

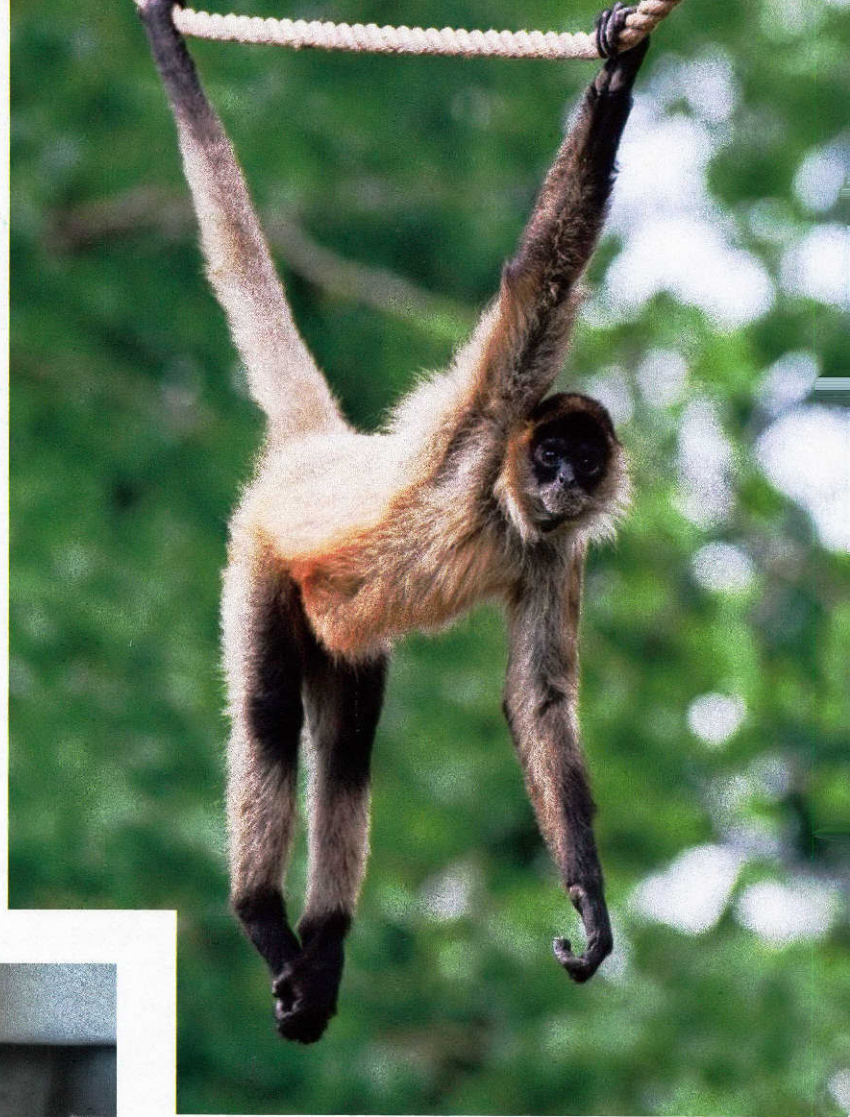
[www.visit.georgetown.org](http://www.visit.georgetown.org)



## Feel the pioneer spirit at Landmark Inn in Castroville

On the banks of the Medina River in Castroville, the Landmark Inn gives visitors the chance to stay in the same building as travelers from the 1850s. You can learn about those pioneers and absorb the 19th-Century atmosphere by spending the night in the period-furnished, eight-room inn. The Texas Historical Commission recently completed a project to repair, re-stucco, whitewash, and add central air conditioning to the Landmark. The project included the restoration of an open-hearth demonstration kitchen, where you can watch biscuits and pies take shape. [www.thc.texas.gov/historic-sites/landmark-inn-state-historic-site](http://www.thc.texas.gov/historic-sites/landmark-inn-state-historic-site)

10



11

## MONKEY AROUND AT THE AMARILLO ZOO

The monkeys have more to play with in 2017 at the Amarillo Zoo, and that means you have more to watch. A new climbing structure in the black-handed spider monkey exhibit consists of pipes formed into faux branches with platforms for the monkeys, as well as ropes to swing on and more shade.

After you've monkeyed around, check out the excellent Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon, just south of Amarillo, to enjoy its renovated *Panhandle Petroleum Story* exhibit. The 16,000-square-foot interactive exhibit explores the petroleum industry, including the lives of oil workers and industry equipment.

[zoo.amarillo.gov](http://zoo.amarillo.gov); [www.panhandleplains.org](http://www.panhandleplains.org)





## EXPLORE PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING IN WICHITA FALLS

**T**urns out Wichita Falls has a wrestling history, with pros such as Gorgeous George working the rings of far North Texas in the 1950s. So, when former wrestler Johnny Mantell, a native of Montague County, became president of the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame, he saw an opportunity to move the museum from New York State to Wichita Falls, his old stomping grounds. The history-focused museum, unaffiliated with World Wrestling Entertainment, opened in March, featuring a wall honoring hall-of-famers such as Hans Schmidt, the Fabulous Freebirds, Fritz Von Erich, and Hulk Hogan. The museum showcases memorabilia including the sign from the old Dallas Sportatorium, David Von Erich's "Yellow Rose of Texas" jacket and boots, a U.S. Air Force wrestling belt, and a ring from New York's Polo Grounds that was used for both boxing and wrestling. The museum also hosts occasional meet-and-greets with pro wrestlers.

[www.pwhf.org](http://www.pwhf.org)

## 12 Soak up some fun in Mineral Wells

**Y**ou may know about Crazy Water, the mineral-rich water bottled in Mineral Wells that inspired the town's heyday as a health resort from the 1880s to the 1940s. But did you know you can once again bathe in the mineral water, as the likes of Clark Gable and Judy Garland did here in the '30s? The Famous Water Company, purveyor of Crazy Water, operates the Crazy Bath House. You can also spend the night in the Crazy Bath House's 1900s rock abode, where hardwood floors and period furniture will take you back to Mineral Wells' golden years.

[www.crazybathhouse.com](http://www.crazybathhouse.com)



## 13





## FIND YOUR CABIN IN THE WOODS AT FORT BOGGY

In Leon County north of Houston, reserve a cabin to stay overnight at 1,847-acre Fort Boggy State Park, a woodsy haven for fishing, hiking, and biking. The new cabins are the park's first overnight lodging options (there are no camp-sites). Each 300-square-foot, wood-floored, wood-paneled cabin offers both heat and air conditioning and includes a microwave and refrigerator, as well as an outdoor deck and screened porch. Outside, you'll find a picnic area shaded by pecan and elm trees with a table, lantern holder, and fire ring. It's the perfect setup for an outdoor weekend with the family.

[www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/fort-boggy](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/fort-boggy)



15

## IN BEAUMONT, GAZE AT GATORS AND BIRDS

Beaumont's Cattail Marsh was already a prime spot for viewing birds and alligators, but now visitors can get even better access with the construction of a 520-foot boardwalk and viewing platform. More than 251 species of birds hang out here, including roseate spoonbills, grebes, and even bald eagles, and it's virtually impossible not to spot a gator in the marsh's 900 acres, whose six miles of gravel levees can be toured by bike or on foot. [www.beaumontcvb.com](http://www.beaumontcvb.com)





## Revel in the '50s in Nacogdoches' Fredonia Hotel

When it opened in downtown Nacogdoches in 1955, the six-story Fredonia Hotel was touted to be "as modern as an atomic submarine." While it lacked atomics, the hotel did have a swimming pool and, wonder of wonders, central air conditioning. Immediately popular, the Fredonia nevertheless eventually fell into disrepair and closed. Now, local businessman Richard DeWitt is leading a renovation to reimagine the Fredonia as a boutique luxury hotel combining its classic mid-century character with modern updates. The newest incarnation of the Fredonia is expected to open in spring 2017 with two restaurants, two bars, two pool areas, and a gift shop.

[www.fredoniahotel.com](http://www.fredoniahotel.com)



## DELVE INTO HISTORY IN IRVING

You'll feel like you stepped back into the 1950s when you enter the Ruth Paine House in Irving. Now open to the public as a museum, the home that civil rights activist Ruth Paine lived in during the 1960s draws its fame from Lee Harvey Oswald's visit there on the night before he assassinated President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. Oswald's estranged wife, Marina, was living with Paine at the time.

In addition to its historical significance, the house is a rare example of 1950s design, right down to the knotty-pine kitchen cabinets. Before your 90-minute tour, you'll visit a museum nearby offering assassination photos, newsreel footage, and Oswald effects found by police, including a Russian-English dictionary and cameras. 📌

[www.cityofirving.org/498/Ruth-Paine-House-Museum](http://www.cityofirving.org/498/Ruth-Paine-House-Museum)



*Austin-based travel writer Helen Anders traipses all over Texas in search of delights new and old. It's a great gig.*





# Merry Melodies



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TEXT BY *Michelle Burgess*

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## TEXAS CHRISTMAS CONCERTS SPREAD MUSICAL CHEER

*Even before retailers slash the price of leftover Halloween candy, they're decorating their windows with spray-on frost and setting their sound systems on an endless loop of Christmas carols. By the first week of December, even the jolliest of souls can start to feel a bit jaded.*

*Fortunately, the remedy for holiday weariness is as close as the nearest dance hall, concert venue, or church sanctuary. Live musical performances—a choir of schoolchildren singing at the mall, perhaps, or a lone saxophonist performing on a street corner—can cut through the commercialism and stress of the holiday season and reinvigorate flagging Christmas spirits.*

*Musicians across Texas present a range of holiday concerts that are as diverse as the Lone Star State itself. We've rounded up six can't-miss options, including a few that travel to multiple places around the state spreading Christmas cheer.*

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**Clockwise: The Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball in Anson; Robert Earl Keen's *Merry Christmas from the Fam-O-Lee* at San Antonio's Tobin Center; TubaChristmas at the Texas State Capitol; Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis' *Holiday Shindig* at Gruene Hall.**





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ROBERT EARL KEEN

## Merry Christmas from the Fam-O-Lee

Robert Earl Keen has a tip for fans who want to maximize the experience of attending one of his annual *Merry Christmas from the Fam-O-Lee* shows: Pretend you're at a Broadway show, not a concert.

"I like the whole idea of this being a show from beginning to end," says Keen. "It works better when people come in on time, when it starts, as though they are at the theater."

An offshoot of Keen's 1994 song by the same name, the stage show combines music—Keen's most popular songs, new releases, holiday classics, and covers that fit the year's theme—as well as a bit of comedy. *Fam-O-Lee* feels like a festive sing-along with a smidge of *Hee Haw* thrown into the mix.

Written, says the Houston native, "to amuse myself," the song "Merry Christmas from the Family" came from Keen's desire to write a holiday song he could actually relate to. "I didn't know what a chestnut was," he says, "so I wrote about what I know about Christmas and what I thought might be the common experience for a lot of people."

On its surface, "Family" is a song about a redneck clan getting together for the holidays. But it achieved popularity as a cult classic because of its universal message—that each one of us has a family that's a little crazy but that we love anyway.

At last year's *Fam-O-Lee* show at San Antonio's Tobin Center for the Arts, the audience included longtime fans who have followed Keen since he emerged onto the Texas country music scene in the early 1980s and younger folks who found "Family" and appreciate the song's sly wit and subversive-but-good-natured lyrics.

"After the song got out there, we would do shows in December, and people would come and wait for that song," he recalls. "I threatened to just come out and talk for awhile and sing 'Merry

Christmas from the Family' and that'd be the whole show."

It was an empty threat, of course. Anyone who has seen Keen perform knows that he typically puts on an energetic performance lasting more than two hours. The Texas A&M graduate, longtime Kerrville resident, and devoted family man is proud that he has been playing with five of his bandmates for more than two decades and vows to "keep going until the wheels fall off."

**Keen is happy to bring his slightly twisted take on the holidays to 10 or so venues across Texas and the region every year.**

Regardless of what gets folks in the door, Keen is happy to bring his slightly twisted take on the holidays to 10 or so venues across Texas and the region every year. And he insists that he never gets tired of singing "Merry Christmas from the Family"—and the popular finale "*Feliz Navidad*"—along with audience members from Mission to Amarillo, and Tulsa to Houston.

"I'm not Orson Welles," Keen says. "I'm not P.T. Barnum. I just want to have fun, and this show is fun."

Keen's *Merry Christmas from the Fam-O-Lee* Texas tour stops are December 8th in Greenville, 10th in Goliad, 15th in Midland, 17th in San Antonio, 20th in Austin, 26th in Houston, 29th in Dallas, and 30th in Fort Worth. [www.robertearlkeen.com](http://www.robertearlkeen.com).

Right: Robert Earl Keen's *Merry Christmas from the Fam-O-Lee*.

Opposite page: The Dallas Bach Society at Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas.







**DALLAS BACH SOCIETY**

*Handel's Messiah*

If the *Hallelujah Chorus* from George Frideric Handel's *Messiah* doesn't leave you feeling refreshed, renewed, and re-energized to face the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, well, you might just be beyond hope.

Choral groups around Texas perform *Messiah* annually. In about the time it would take to watch a movie, you can take in a performance of one of the most stirring pieces of music ever composed. Written in 1741, *Messiah* is reverent and traditional, a balm for those who prefer their Christmas to be more "Silent Night," less "Santa Baby."

For the past 34 years, the Dallas Bach Society has performed chamber and Baroque music at public and private concerts in the Dallas area. Its annual *Messiah* performances—including a formal show and a sing-along concert—are held the week before Christmas and feature the conductor on harpsichord.

Hillary Coyle, executive director of the Dallas Bach Society, says that even those who have never been to a chamber music or Baroque concert will enjoy *Messiah*. The group uses 17th- and 18th-Century period instruments and vocal styles.

"If people are unfamiliar with classical concerts, this is a

good one to dive into," Coyle says. "There really is a transcendent thing that happens at these concerts. People say, 'I was transported to another time.'"

The Dallas Bach Society performs Handel's *Messiah* twice: December 19th at the Meyerson Symphony Center and December 20th as a sing-along at the Church of the Incarnation. [www.dallasbach.org](http://www.dallasbach.org).

**BRUCE ROBISON & KELLY WILLIS**

*Holiday Shindig*

The "First Couple" of Texas country music puts on a holiday concert that is a lot like them—musically endearing, completely unpretentious, and a little irreverent.

Bruce Robison, a Bandera native, and Kelly Willis, originally from Oklahoma, met in 1992, married four years later, and now live in Austin with their four children. Their chemistry and genuine likeability—as individuals as well as a duo—enhance their *Shindig*, which they've been putting on for 17 years. It pre-dates the 2003 release of their *Happy Holidays* album, which remains a fan favorite for its take on original and classic Christmas tunes.

These *Happy Holidays* songs form the core of the *Shindig* every year. From Buck Owens' rollicking "Santa Looked





Michael Martin Murphey and the Rio Grande Band at the Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball; the Houston Bronze Ensemble at Houston's MATCH theater.

a Lot Like Daddy” to “Please Daddy, Don’t Get Drunk,” the pair’s set list includes songs that might be familiar but haven’t been played to death on the radio or department-store Muzak streams.

Bruce and Kelly put their own spin on classics like “Baby, It’s Cold Outside,” “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,” and “Blue Christmas,” and Robison’s comically profane “Oklahoma Christmas” brings the house down. The show also includes some non-seasonal hits and occasional guest performers, including favorites like Joe Ely and Rodney Crowell in years past.

After you bask in the holiday glow of the *Shindig*, Bruce and Kelly could well become part of your favorite holiday reunions, like the cousins you look forward to seeing every year or favorite neighbors you invite over for a white elephant gift exchange.

*Bruce and Kelly’s Holiday Shindig* Texas tour stops are December 2nd in Plano, 3rd in Tyler, 8th and 9th in Houston, 10th in Dallas, 16th in New Braunfels, and 17th in Austin. [www.bruceandkellyshow.com](http://www.bruceandkellyshow.com).

## *TubaChristmas*

What the tuba lacks in elegance, it more than makes up for in presence. The sonorous brass instrument’s robust, good-natured rumbles are on full display at the TubaChristmas shows

held across the state in the weeks leading up to Christmas.

In several Texas cities—plus nearly 300 more across the United States and in Canada, Costa Rica, and Switzerland—tuba, sousaphone, baritone, and euphonium players gather for seasonal performances on courthouse steps, at craft markets, shopping malls, and anywhere else crowds mill about this time of year.

In Texas, you’ll find TubaChristmas performances in places like Austin on the south steps of the Texas Capitol, in Amarillo at Westgate Mall, in Bryan at the Carnegie History Center, in Denton at the University of North Texas Library Mall, in Killeen at the Killeen Mall, and in Lake Jackson at the Brazos Mall.

Austin’s TubaChristmas, one of the state’s largest, attracts about 200 horn players ranging from junior-high beginners to veteran pros, many of them decked out in seasonal garb. Downtown office workers, tuba aficionados, and families fan out from the Capitol steps, soaking in the December sun amid the lawn’s statues and memorials.

Will these versions of “Jingle Bells” and “Joy to the World” bring wistful tears to the eyes of its watchful audiences? Probably not. But they’re guaranteed to inspire some smiles. TubaChristmas players don’t take themselves too seriously, and they don’t expect their audiences to, either.





For TubaChristmas details, including information on how to participate in a local performance, see [www.tubachristmas.com](http://www.tubachristmas.com) or search the web for your town's event.

## MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY

### *Cowboy Christmas*

Michael Martin Murphey's singing rings with the sincerity and authenticity that many find lacking in pop country these days. Nowhere is that more apparent than during Murphey's annual *Cowboy Christmas* tour, a series of seasonal shows throughout the Southwest that feature a mix of traditional Christmas songs, a few Murphey favorites such as "What's Forever For" and "Wildfire," and cowboy poetry and storytelling. Murphey's Christmas shows are unapologetically old-fashioned, much like the 71-year-old singer-songwriter himself, and have an intimate, reverent, and wholesome quality.

Murphey, a working cowboy who divides his time between ranches in Amarillo and Colorado, embraces and celebrates what he calls the cowboy way of life—a life based on faith, family, hard work, and a passion for conservation and the environment. He says that this philosophy has a strong impact on his holiday show, as does his own family background.

"The material speaks of the music of the beginning of the cowboy trail-driver period in the 1870s to the music of modern-day ranching and rodeo," Murphey says of *Cowboy Christmas*. "The new material and approach this year will focus on my Texas-Irish heritage. The influence of the Irish culture is huge in cowboy music and cowboy poetry."

Murphey started his *Cowboy Christmas* tour after participating in Anson's historic Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball in 1992. He recalls being surprised by the ball's rigid rules for guests and performers—no alcohol or smoking, no skirts above the knee or hats allowed on the dance floor, and all dancing should be counter-clockwise. But he was charmed as well—and inspired to develop his own show.

The Anson ball, which was first held in 1885, remains the centerpiece of the tour each year and features a ranch supper and traditional Western songs and dances. Many attendees to the event wear period dress, as do Murphey and his Rio Grande Band.

Murphey says he attributes the popularity of *Cowboy Christmas* to the same influences that have enabled him to release 33 albums since 1972: God, discipline, ethics, and his commitment to understanding his audience.

"My music speaks to people because I try to put myself in the place of the listener," he says. "I write my best songs from the heart, by inspiration. I let people fill in the blanks that I provide through imagery and storytelling."

Michael Martin Murphey's *Cowboy Christmas* tour stops in Texas are December 2nd in Austin, 3rd in Brenham, 5th in Corpus Christi, 17th in Kerrville, 18th in Victoria, and 19th in Fort Worth. [www.michaelmartinmurphey.com](http://www.michaelmartinmurphey.com).

## THE HOUSTON BRONZE ENSEMBLE

### *It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*

Handbell concerts captivate audiences with their singular sound and the visual spectacle of the musicians' precision movements. At holiday performances by the Houston Bronze Ensemble, under the direction of Bill Nave, watch and listen as 17 handbell musicians showcase the distinctive instrument in Christmas classics.

"The sound, motion, and sparkle of the bells is mesmerizing for everyone," says Lorna Noack, the ensemble's president. "Since we play a wide variety of musical genres, there is likely to be a piece recognizable by old and young alike at each concert."

Houston Bronze is one of only a few groups in the country to play on seven octaves of bells. Each ringer is responsible for his or her assigned notes in the song. Noack likens the arrangement to 17 people playing the same piece of music on one piano, with each one responsible for only two notes. If one person is missing, so are his or her notes.

After each concert, the audience is invited to play the bells to get a better idea of what they feel like. Noack says that most people are amazed at the precision needed to master the more complicated pieces of music.

"We often hear comments like, 'I had no idea you could do that with bells!' and 'That's not like anything I've ever heard on bells before!'" says Noack.

Noack says the Houston Bronze Ensemble's goal is to give audiences an experience they can't get anywhere else.

"Come knowing that you will begin your Christmas season hearing your favorite holiday music in a new way," she says. "It is our hope to fill our listeners with joy, as well as to offer a few moments to relax and enjoy the awe of beautiful music."


The Houston Bronze Ensemble's holiday concerts are at 7 p.m. December 2nd at the Tomball United Methodist Church and 7:30 p.m. December 3rd at the Midtown Arts and Theater Center Houston (MATCH). [www.houstonbronze.com](http://www.houstonbronze.com). 

**Live music can cut through the stress of the holiday season and reinvigorate flagging Christmas spirits.**

*Michelle Burgess lives and writes in San Antonio, in her opinion the absolute best Texas city to live in during the holidays. Christmas at the Burgess house is a lot like the rest of the year at the Burgess house—a chaotic mix of music, dogs, and grandbabies, with cowboy cookies cooling on every flat surface.*



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## Festive Frontier

Unplug at Fort Davis' Frontier Christmas Festival

text by E. Dan Klepper

**D**URING THE HOLIDAY SEASON, THE FRESH air and cheerful sunlit peaks of Fort Davis become all the more festive thanks to the town's Frontier Christmas Festival. This mile-high community in the foothills of the Davis Mountains commemorates its Old West history, scenic mountain setting, and the delicious tradition of homemade cookies with the annual holiday celebration, scheduled for Saturday, December 10, this year.

Developed around a frontier military garrison in the mid-1800s, Fort Davis grew into a prominent West Texas outpost because of its location at the crossroads of two major trails. Today, Trans-Pecos residents and visitors alike converge on the town during the Frontier Christmas Festival for activities like the Holiday Lighting Contest, a cookie-baking



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3 hours
- **San Antonio**  
6 hours
- **Dallas**  
8 hours

championship, special hiking opportunities, the Overland Trail Museum's Holiday Open House, and the Frontier Christmas Parade.

Start your Frontier Christmas early and share breakfast with Santa Claus at Davis Mountains State Park's Black Bear Restaurant. The Black Bear is located at the park's Indian Lodge, a multi-storied hotel designed to resemble a pueblo village and built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. The lodge "decks the halls" for the holidays, adding tinsel, baubles, and wreaths to the handmade adobe walls, rock fireplaces, and hand-carved furnishings. The festive decor complements the handsome views of the surrounding pine forest and mountain landscape, where during the festival hikers can indulge in cookies



at different stations around the park. Meet and greet Santa at the Black Bear and then join the kids for a special Christmas-cookie decorating workshop in the restaurant.

Fort Davis wasn't always as family-friendly as it is today. In fact, had you attempted a real "frontier" Christmas in the 19th Century, you probably would have experienced more "naughty" than "nice." In 1854, the U.S. military established the garrison that preceded the town, part of a line of defense along the far West Texas frontier, on the site of a Native American village known to early Texans as Painted Comanche Camp. The appropriation of the site created plenty of animosity among the surrounding tribes, and by 1867 the

garrison had been looted by Apaches and abandoned.

The town of Fort Davis, a rowdy settlement originally called Chihuahua, evolved just southwest of the military operation and survived long enough for the 9th U.S. Cavalry to arrive in 1867 and reoccupy the fort. The military presence brought a limited calm throughout the region, although fights and heavy drinking (courtesy of the soldier population) made for a ram-bunctious blend of part-timers and permanent locals. Fort Davis National Historic Site, modestly decorated for the holiday season, preserves the old fort, considered one of the Southwest's best surviving examples of an Indian Wars-era military post.

Despite its frontier turbulence, Fort Davis was among the most important communities in the Trans-Pecos. The Overland Trail Museum, which explores the town's history, welcomes visitors during the Frontier Christmas Festival with warm punch, cookies, and Christmas ornaments and decorations, such as vintage handmade dolls dressed for the holiday season. Fort Davis is located along the Southern Overland Trail, the route used by the Butterfield Overland Mail Company (and later Wells Fargo) to transport mail and passengers across the country in the 1860s. Also part of the San Antonio-El Paso Road, the trail was eventually made obsolete with the 1883 arrival of the railroad in nearby Marfa. Inside the museum, antique medical supplies, kitchen utensils, a hair-curling machine, an original telephone switchboard, and dozens of early photographs reveal the stark realities of life on the Fort Davis frontier.

If you want to experience a sense of the early frontier days in Fort Davis, albeit in comfort, be sure to reserve a room at the Hotel Limpia, one of multiple lodgings in town. The Victorian, pink-stone hotel was built in 1912 as a summer retreat for Texas cattlemen. The rooms reflect the era, with high ceilings and vintage furnishings, and the communal sitting room next to the lobby features antique overstuffed



**CLOCKWISE:**  
A wreath-framed view from Indian Lodge at Davis Mountains State Park; Christmas-cookie decorating at Black Bear Restaurant; Javelinas & Hollyhocks; ponderosa pines at the Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve.





armchairs and a fireplace. During the holidays, garlands and gold ribbons grace the Limpia throughout. Generous wrap-around porches offer both enclosed and open-air locations to read a book, play a board game, write a last-minute letter to Santa, or do nothing more than relax and rock in one of the hotel's wooden rockers.

Hotel Limpia also offers a chance to catch up on Christmas shopping at its Javelinas & Hollyhocks store, which carries gifts like jams, jellies, books, and decorative oddities from Texas and around the world. Shopping is a key part of the Frontier Christmas Festival as multiple shops around town display their Texas mountain crafts; the Chamber of Commerce provides maps to the various retailers. Earn some extra points with Santa by shopping at Fort Davis' Grand Companions Thrift Store, a fundraising venture of the Grand Companions Humane Society, the town's no-kill animal shelter.

If you're looking to gather the extended family or a big group for a holiday getaway, consider the 1898 Webster House. Located within walking distance of downtown, the Webster House, with four bedrooms and two bathrooms, combines a frontier Texas experience with updated modern conveniences like high-speed wireless internet, a full-size kitchen, and satellite television. The house includes classic turn-of-the-century highlights like tall ceilings, transoms, original wood floors, a fireplace, and period furnishings including cushy, four-poster beds.

Frontier Christmas specializes in cookies (they are available just about everywhere you go in town) and honors the homemade holiday fare with a cookie-baking contest. Judging takes place at the Kelly Outdoor Pavilion behind the Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce office. Local judges are on hand to nibble and take notes. Winners get a trophy featuring a cheerful gold-colored Santa.

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**FORT DAVIS FRONTIER CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL**

is Saturday, December 10, with events at various locations around town and a lighted parade on State Street at 6 p.m. For festival information, call the Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce at **800/524-3015**; [www.fortdavis.com](http://www.fortdavis.com).

avenue, cowboys gather on horseback alongside parade floats, decorated by hand and strung with lights, for the annual Frontier Christmas parade at about 6 p.m. Local school clubs, civic organizations, and the volunteer fire department embellish trucks and flatbed trailers with Christmas cheer. After the parade, Santa arrives for photos and to take gift requests at the Jeff Davis County Library, located in a charming turn-of-the-century mercantile building.

Perhaps the best way to experience frontier life would be to unplug completely and take a hike through the Davis Mountains. As part of the Frontier Christmas Festival, The Nature Conservancy will open its Davis Mountains Preserve to the public for the entire weekend (December 9-11) for hiking and camping. Located 25 miles northwest of town, the preserve's McIvor Conservation Center is decorated for the holidays and even hosts a visit from Santa. (High clearance vehicles are required for visitors driving beyond the center.)

A "sky island" with rare plants and animals, the preserve helps protect the last surviving population of ponderosa pine trees in Texas as well as stands of quaking aspen and madrone trees. Here you can explore some of the highest elevations in the Davis Mountains, including Baldy Peak, a massive rock knob crowning Mount Livermore with unparalleled views of the surrounding mountain range. Be prepared. It could take most of the day to get there and back, but who knows, once on top you might catch a glimpse of Santa on his way! 🦌

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## A State of Music

The loud, colorful influence of Texas music pioneers

Text by Michael Corcoran







**N**O STATE IS MORE MUSICAL THAN TEXAS, whose very geography seems to hum. Even the city names remind you of songs. It's easy to break into a medley of "San Antonio Rose," "El Paso," "Streets Of Laredo," "Amarillo By Morning," "Galveston," and "La Grange" while checking out the ol' Texas road map.

Musical pioneers come from every corner of Texas, all of them contributing to and drawing from a stew that mixes flavors from a diversity of landscapes, cultures, and lifestyles. Black-and-white cowboy movies, popular with all races and ages, gave Texans a lot to live up to, and they inspired music with just a little more swagger. The mythical Texas we love—stoked by big hair, big cars, and bold proclamations—has been made real by musical pioneers.

Some towns remind you of the great musicians who couldn't wait to get out. Beaumont conjures a 12-year-old George Jones singing on the street for tips, and it's impossible to see Wink on a map without imagining Roy Orbison slipping on his first pair of dark shades. Centerville? That's the birthplace of gritty blues giant Sam "Lightnin'" Hopkins. Baytown gave the world Chitlin' Circuit kingpin

Joe Tex, a virtuoso of the mic stand.

Certain burgs are associated with the greats who never left. Little Joe Hernandez still calls Temple home; Navasota is where Mance Lipscomb lived and died; Adolph Hofner stayed around San Antonio, blending the polka of his Czech and German ancestors with Western Swing; while Jimmy Heap and the Melody Masters made history in Taylor with the 1951 original version of "Wild Side of Life."

The wide-open spaces of rural Texas have inspired the best Lone Star songwriters—from Willie Nelson to Cindy Walker and Townes Van Zandt—to add to the meaning and power of their songs by leaving out any clutter.

Texas is a state of immigrants, with a geography as diverse as its people. It was the first U.S. state to have sizable populations of both African Americans and Mexican Americans—and both cultures made a huge imprint on the music.

Mexicans brought Spanish guitars to the picking fields, the Czechs and Germans brought accordions to their dance halls, and the sons and daughters of slaves brought the rhythm that screamed to be free. Texas is where blacks played country, farm boys played big band jazz, and everyone played the blues.

A Texan was the first to record a country tune (Amarillo's Eck Robertson in 1922), the first to play an amplified guitar on record (Eddie Durham of San Marcos in 1935), and the first to explore "free jazz," as Fort Worth alto sax player Ornette Coleman's idiosyncratic experimentations were dubbed in the late '50s.

The original national recording stars of guitar blues and country were Texans. Blind Lemon Jefferson of the Wortham area recorded nearly 80 country blues tunes for Paramount Records. Jefferson's Vernon Dalhart, who supposedly took his name from two Texas towns he visited in his youth, was the first country singer to sell a million records with "The Prisoner's

**The mythical Texas we love—stoked by big hair, big cars, and bold proclamations—has been made real by musical pioneers.**





### TEXAS MUSIC READ

The University of North Texas Press is set to release Michael Corcoran's *All Over the Map: True Heroes of Texas Music*, which profiles more than 40 Texas music pioneers, in May 2017.

[www.michaelcorcoran.net](http://www.michaelcorcoran.net)

Song" backed with "The Wreck of the Old '97" in 1924.

Lubbock's Buddy Holly and the Crickets were the first rock combo to write and produce their own hits, helping to inspire the British Invasion a few years later. (The Beatles' name was an homage to the Crickets). Ernest Tubb and the Texas Troubadours took the honky-tonk sound nationwide with "Walkin' the Floor Over You" in 1941. The country's first electric blues guitar hero was T-Bone Walker of Oak Cliff; its first great electric jazz guitarist was Bonham native Charlie Christian.

In the gospel field, a trinity of Texans—Blind Willie Johnson, Washington Phillips, and Arizona Dranes—were putting religious lyrics to hot piano and guitar in the 1920s. And while the Soul Stirrers are best known today as Sam Cooke's gospel group, it was while fronted by Rebert Harris in Houston in the '30s that the Stirrers perfected the "hard gospel" quartet style that led to soul music.

Both boogie-woogie piano, originally known as the "Fast Western" style for the Texas Western railroad that ran through Marshall, and "psychedelic" rock originated in the Lone Star State. George W. and Hersal Thomas, the brothers of Houston-raised blues great Sippie Wallace, first put boogie woogie to sheet music in the early '20s, while Austin's 13th Floor Elevators were making acid rock back when LSD was still legal.

Would jazz have gone where it did when it did without Dallas sax players Henry "Buster" Smith and Budd Johnson? Smith played in the Kansas City Blue Devils in the late 1920s and early '30s with a protégé named Charlie Parker. Johnson played with sax giant Coleman Hawkins in 1944 on a



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session credited as the recorded birth of bebop. And while New Orleans is rightfully designated the birthplace of jazz, there's no denying that Scott Joplin of Texarkana provided the template with his syncopated ragtime compositions in the late 1890s.

Texas is where music is made for dancing. Historically, rowdy, exuberant crowds coaxed musicians to play louder, first out of necessity and later because the added power expanded the boundaries of the music's sound and configuration. The size of dance halls required bands to feature more players, with Milton Brown of Fort Worth adding twin fiddles and piano to his Musical Brownies. His fellow Western Swing inventor Bob Wills upped the danceability with drums and electric guitar.

Money, oil, independence, and big noise: That's Texas, a land of opportunity within the land of opportunity. It's where the South ends and the West begins, and yet Texas remains independent of those regions.

Of course, Texas is not the only state with impressive musical heroes. Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, California, and many more states can boast of the music they've given

the world. But Texas stands out for its sheer number of musical pioneers, spanning several genres.

In the Latin music field, the late Lydia Mendoza, who made her career in San Antonio, had a smash in 1934 with the ballad "Mal Hombre," while the first person to have a national Cajun music hit was Harry Choates of Port Arthur with "Jole Blon" in 1946. DJ Screw of Smithville showed the rest of the rap world how to slow it down in the '90s, the same decade Selena took Tejano music to the top of the pop charts.

The range of Texas music is spectacular: It seems that for every national superstar like Ray Charles or Merle Haggard, there were Texans like blues/jazz pianist Charles Brown of Texas City or country crooner Lefty Frizzell of Corsicana who showed them the way.

And with Houston native Beyoncé Knowles reigning as the current queen of pop, the Lone Star State continues to shine in the musical galaxy. Like football, music has mattered here forever, going from pastime to tradition. Born as a diversion, then growing up to be a livelihood, music is a way of life in Texas, where the frontier mentality rewards those who go just a little farther. **L**

### TEXAS MUSIC MUSEUMS

Texas is home to numerous music museums highlighting the state's musical pioneers with displays of photos, instruments, albums, and other memorabilia.

- ◆ **Texas Musicians Museum**, Irving.  
[www.texasmusiciansmuseum.com](http://www.texasmusiciansmuseum.com).
- ◆ **Texas Polka Music Museum**, Schulenburg. [www.texaspolkamuseum.com](http://www.texaspolkamuseum.com).
- ◆ **Texas Music Museum**, Austin.  
[www.texasmusicmuseum.org](http://www.texasmusicmuseum.org).
- ◆ **Bullock Texas State History Museum**, Austin. [www.thestoryoftexas.com](http://www.thestoryoftexas.com).
- ◆ **Museum of the Gulf Coast**, including the Music Hall of Fame, Port Arthur.  
[www.museumofthegulfcoast.org](http://www.museumofthegulfcoast.org).
- ◆ **Texas Country Music Hall of Fame and Tex Ritter Museum**, Carthage.  
[www.carthagetexas.us/halloffame](http://www.carthagetexas.us/halloffame).
- ◆ **Heart of Texas Country Music Museum**, Brady. [www.hillbillyhits.com/museum.htm](http://www.hillbillyhits.com/museum.htm).
- ◆ **Selena Museum**, Corpus Christi.  
[www.q-productions.com/museum.html](http://www.q-productions.com/museum.html).
- ◆ **Buddy Holly Center**, Lubbock.  
[www.buddyhollycenter.org](http://www.buddyhollycenter.org).
- ◆ **Roy Orbison Museum**, Wink.  
432/527-3743.
- ◆ **Lefty Frizzell Museum**, Corsicana.  
[www.cityofcorsicana.com/index.aspx?NID=554](http://www.cityofcorsicana.com/index.aspx?NID=554).
- ◆ **Bob Wills Museum**, Turkey.  
806/423-1033.
- ◆ **Freddy Fender Museum**, San Benito.  
[www.freddyfendermuseum.com](http://www.freddyfendermuseum.com).



# WEST TEXAS ROAD TRIP



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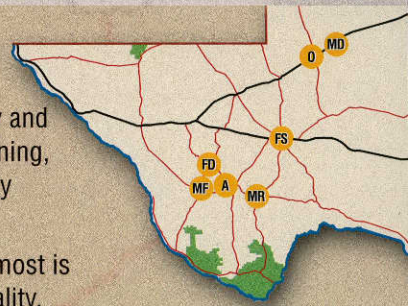


MD

**MIDLAND**—Feel the Energy. A great starting point for your trip to West Texas! Midland International Air & Space Port is the closest airport to Big Bend National Park. [visitmidland.com](http://visitmidland.com)

**Nov 30-Dec 17** - Christmas at the Mansion  
**Dec 6** - *Elf the Musical* @ Wagner Noël Center

As you explore, you'll find an amazing range of relaxation and adventure, natural beauty and urban culture, fine art, fine dining, small-town charm and big-city amenities...  
but what you will remember most is the warm, West Texas hospitality.



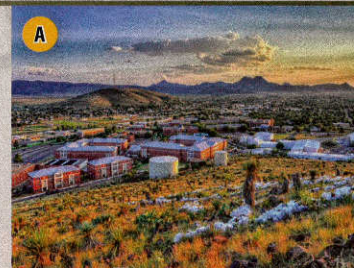
O

**ODESSA**—Known for breathtaking sunsets, wide-open spaces and warm West Texas hospitality; you'll enjoy shopping, dining, unique cultural attractions and events. Odessa: your gateway to the Big Bend. [odessacvb.com](http://odessacvb.com)

**Dec 1-31** - Starbright Village  
**Dec 28** - Moscow Ballet's *Great Russian Nutcracker* @ Wagner Noël Center

**ALPINE**—Natural beauty, unique nightlife and shopping, and a grand array of hotels and guest lodging make this the perfect staging grounds for your West Texas adventure. [visitalpinetx.com](http://visitalpinetx.com)

**Dec 3** - Parade of Lights  
**Feb 24-25** - Texas Cowboy Poetry Gathering



A



FS

**FORT STOCKTON**—Lodging, Dining, Entertainment and History. Experience our Visitor Center, Historic Sites, Museum, Fort Grounds, Golf Course, and Unique Shopping, West Texas style. [historicfortstocktontx.com](http://historicfortstocktontx.com)

**Dec 2** - Christmas Parade  
**Jan 14** - Pecos County Livestock Show

**FORT DAVIS**—Experience the mile-high climate in the Texas mountains! Award-winning State and National Parks offer excellent nature activities and star gazing under the "Darkest Skies in North America!" [fortdavis.com](http://fortdavis.com)

**Dec 10** - Frontier Christmas



FD



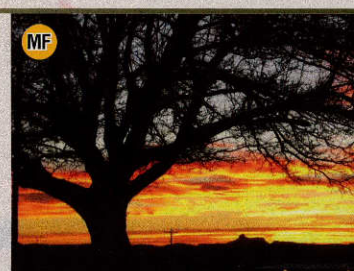
MR

**MARATHON**—Small town friendliness under one of the darkest and starriest skies in the country, with Big Bend National Park just 40 miles down the road. [marthontexas.com](http://marthontexas.com)

**Oct 22** - M2M (Marathon 2 Marathon)  
**Dec 3** - Fiesta del Noche Buena: Shops open 5-8pm for downtown party

**MARFA**—It defies easy explanation, yet any google search yields thousands of opinions. Marfa is tough to get to—tougher still to explain. But once you arrive, you get it. [visitmarfa.com](http://visitmarfa.com)

**Dec 1-31** - AFI 2016 @ Ballroom Marfa  
**Dec 1-31** - Franciso Ugarte: *How Things Are* @ Marfa Contemporary



MF





**GALVESTON ISLAND DELIVERS MORE THAN 50 DAYS OF HOLIDAY EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

Galveston Island is bringing sparkling ice, white snow and twinkling lights to the Gulf Coast this holiday season as it transforms its relaxed, tropical atmosphere into the "Winter Wonder Island" of Texas. The island will transport visitors to a magical destination where they can experience more than 1,000 holiday events, including its popular ICE LAND exhibit featuring nearly 2 million pounds of ice.

In addition, visitors to Galveston can experience the largest holiday lighting festival along the Gulf Coast, ice skating, snow tubing, Victorian Christmas celebrations and more.

[www.galveston.com/holidaymagic](http://www.galveston.com/holidaymagic) | 888.GAL.ISLE (425.4753)  
#GalvestonChristmas

**Here's a look at a few events happening this holiday season:**

**ICE LAND: Ice Sculptures, A Caribbean Christmas at Moody Gardens** (Nov 12-Jan 8)

**Festival of Lights at Moody Gardens** (Nov 12-Jan 8)

**43rd Annual Dickens on The Strand** (Dec 2-4)

**The Grand 1894 Opera House: Elf The Musical, Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer, Elvis Christmas Memories** starring Jake Rowley, The Nutcracker Ballet plus performances by Loretta Lynn, Jerry Jeff Walker and more (Nov 13 - Dec 19)

**Holiday Shopping in Galveston's Historic Downtown District** (Nov 12-Dec 24)

**Holiday Splash at Schlitterbahn Indoor Waterpark** featuring Surfing with Santa (Nov 25-Dec 31)

**Santa Train at the Railroad Museum** (Dec 10)

**Holiday with the Cranes** (Dec 10-11)

**Cirque Joyeux Noel Dinner and Show** at Moody Gardens Hotel (Dec 16-25)

**Santa Hustle Half Marathon and 5K** (Dec 18)

For a complete list, visit [www.galveston.com/holidaymagic](http://www.galveston.com/holidaymagic)



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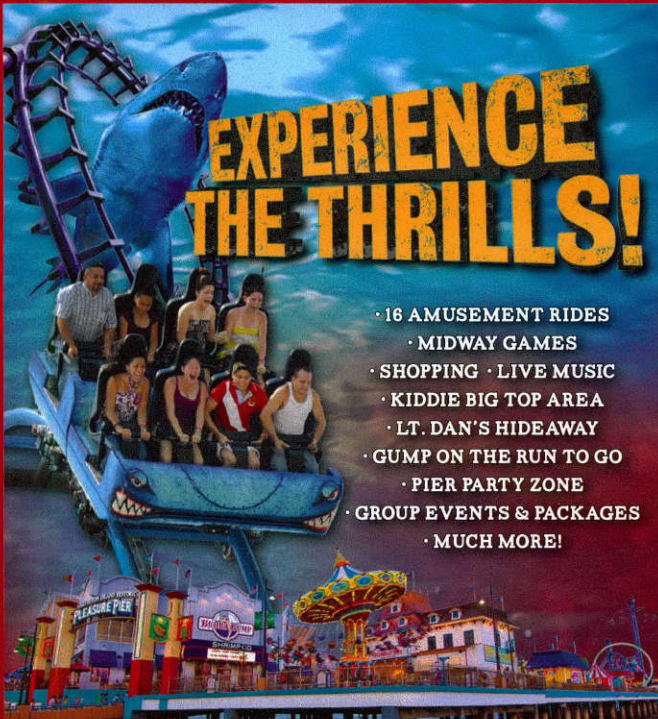


5400 Seawall Blvd. • 409.744.5000  
[galvestonhilton.com](http://galvestonhilton.com)

5222 Seawall Blvd. • 409.744.1500  
[sanluisresort.com](http://sanluisresort.com)


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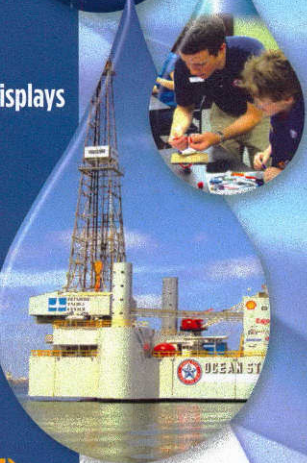
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continued from page 84

house, get out of the gate!" Poor old Hank never understood why people were yelling at him. He had this hurt look on his face, and I thought that was a funny character. He had no self-knowledge, and he had grandiose delusions.

**Q:** *I understand you attended the University of Texas and Harvard Divinity School. How'd you end up returning to Perryton to cowboy?*

**A:** I was curious to know if a kid from the Panhandle could compete in that world and so I got accepted into Harvard Divinity School, and I went for two years. I originally thought that I might go into the ministry, but I decided that that was not my language, and so we moved back to Texas, and I worked at various menial jobs that allowed me to write in the morning.

When I was in high school, I couldn't wait to get out of Perryton and see the bright lights, and I never thought that

I'd go back. But one day when I was walking through the snow in the Harvard yard, I looked around and it struck me that I would never be one of those people. I had wanted to be; I had tried to wash Texas off my skin and it didn't happen. So, I came back home and started learning about my home country.

I never thought that there was anything in a small town that was worth writing about, and I didn't suspect that my focus in writing would be ranch life, because I didn't think that was worth writing about. But that's what I was doing, and that's what I started writing about. And it's turned out that I really can't write about anything else. That seems to be where my heart is.

**Q:** *Why has the series endured for 68 books, in your opinion?*

**A:** I think part of it is the fascination that people have always had with the



**MORE ONLINE**

Read an extended version of our John Erickson interview online at [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com).

American West and with Texas in particular. And also, dogs are universal commodities. People in Iran laugh at their dogs just the same as we do in Texas. The first 30 Hank books have been translated into Chinese, so the Chinese appreciate the culture that I'm talking about, which is a small sub-culture of ranching people in Texas.

**Q:** *Does your family vacation in Texas and where do you like to go?*

**A:** You know, my father and mother never took a vacation. We went to see our relatives in Lubbock and Seminole, and I've kind of followed the same pattern. We go visit our kinfolk in Amarillo and Dallas, and then I'm traveling so much for Hank programs.

**Q:** *Are you working on Hank the Cowdog No. 69?*

**A:** I've got the next six books already written. I only allow myself to write two Hank books a year, because I don't want to overgraze my pastures, you might say. And in between Hank books I'm getting ideas as I work on the ranch and watch my dogs and watch the buzzards and coyotes and the interaction of the animals on our ranch.

**Q:** *Will Hank ever win Beulah's heart?*

**A:** I won't say no, but it seems unlikely. Beulah is a sensible lady. She likes what is likeable in Hank, but she recognizes that he's a bit of a dingbat. He's not reliable. Plato the bird dog is dull but steady. 🐾

*Texas Highways* (ISSN 0040-4349) is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, 150 E. Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704; phone 512/486-5858, fax 512/486-5879. The official travel magazine of Texas encourages travel within the state and tells the Texas story to readers around the world.

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# EVENTS



## DECEMBER'S TRAVEL SPOTLIGHT:

PANHANDLE PLAINS > Lubbock

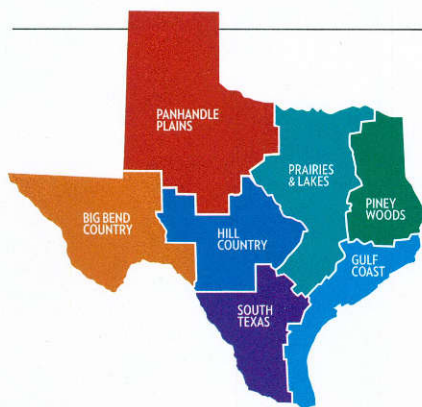
### Candlelight at the Ranch

**T**EXAS TECH UNIVERSITY'S NATIONAL RANCHING Heritage Center extends its interpretation of bygone Texas ranch life to the holiday season with Candlelight at the Ranch. On the nights of December 9-10, about 4,000 glowing luminarias will light the center's historical park, where 15 vintage structures (including the 1909 Barton

House, pictured above) will offer visitors a glimpse of holidays past with period decorations and hosts dressed in period clothing. In the 6666 Barn, which was originally built in 1908, sip hot chocolate and apple cider as the band Brazos West plays cowboy Christmas songs. Santa Claus and a Christmas choir will also be on hand. [www.nrhc.ttu.edu](http://www.nrhc.ttu.edu).

Want more? Go to the Events Calendar at [texashighways.com](http://texashighways.com).





## BIG BEND COUNTRY

**DEL RIO:** Christmas Parade and Tree Lighting Dec. 2. Civic Center. drchamber.com

**DEL RIO:** Christmas Under the Stars Dec. 9. Whitehead Museum. drchamber.com

**DEL RIO:** Annual *Posada, Tamalada, Bailes y Cantos* Dec. 16. La Casa de la Cultura. drchamber.com

**FORT STOCKTON:** Christmas Parade Dec. 2. 432/336-2264

**MIDLAND:** Christmas at the Mansion Dec. 1-30. Museum of the Southwest. museumsw.org 432/638-2882

**MONAHANS:** Christmas and Chili Market Dec. 3. Ward County Convention Center. monahans.org 432/943-2187

**MONAHANS:** Lighted Christmas Parade Dec. 5. Hill Park. monahans.org 432/943-2187

**VAN HORN:** Van Horn Lighted Christmas Parade Dec. 10. Downtown. vanhorn-texas.us 432/283-2682

## GULF COAST

**BAY CITY:** The Christmas Celebration/Trail of Lights Dec. 10-15. 979/323-1660

**BAYTOWN:** Christmas on Texas Avenue Dec. 3. Historic Shopping District of Old Goose Creek. christmas-on-texas-avenue.com 281/674-5163

**BROWNSVILLE:** Zoo Nights and Lights Dec. 2-4. Gladys Porter Zoo. gpz.org 956/546-7187

**CLUTE:** Elizabethan Madrigal Feast Dec. 2-4. Center for the Arts & Sciences. bcfas.org 979/265-7661

**FULTON:** Lighted Boat Parade Dec. 10. rockport-fulton.org 361/463-1193

**FULTON:** Christmas in Fulton Dec. 14-15. rockport-fulton.org 361/729-2388

**GALVESTON:** Holiday Magic Nov. 12-Jan. 8. galveston.com/holidaymagic

**GALVESTON:** Dickens on The Strand Dec. 2-4. Strand Historic District. dickensonthestrand.org 409/765-7834

**GALVESTON:** Santa Hustle Half Marathon and 5K Dec. 18. santahustle.com

**HOUSTON:** The Mayor's Official Downtown Houston Holiday Celebration Dec. 2. visithouston-texas.com

**HOUSTON:** Bayou Bend Christmas Village Dec. 10-Jan. 1. Bayou Bend.

**INGLESIDE:** Ingleside Renaissance Faire Dec. 10-11. Live Oak Park. inglesidetxchamber.com 361/776-2906

**KINGSVILLE:** La Posada de Kingsville Parade of Lights Dec. 3. Downtown. kingsvilletexas.com 800/333-5032

**LAKE JACKSON:** *Hands on History—Christmas Tree Garlands of the Past* Dec. 10. Lake Jackson Historical Museum. lakejacksonmuseum.org 979/297-1570

**PORT ARANSAS:** Carolers Afloat/Boat Lighting Parade Dec. 3. Roberts Point Park. portaransas.org 361/749-5919

**PORT ARTHUR:** Port Arthur Lighted Cultural Holiday Parade Dec. 6. Downtown. portarthur.net 409/983-8105

**PORT ARTHUR:** Kwanzaa Dec. 26-Jan. 1. visitportarthurtx.com 409/985-8838

**RICHMOND:** Christmas in the Park Dec. 3, 10, 17, 20-23, 31. George Ranch Historical Park. georgeranch.org 281/343-0218

**ROCKPORT:** Tropical Christmas Dec. 3. rockport-fulton.org 361/727-2158

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND:** Holiday Celebration and Lantern Festival Dec. 3. South Padre Island Convention Centre. thelanternfest.com 800/657-2373

**SPRING:** Home for the Holidays Dec. 3-4, 10-11, 17-18, 24. Old Town Spring. oldtownspring.com 281/353-9310

**SUGAR LAND:** New Year's Eve on the Square Dec. 31-Jan. 1. Sugar Land Town Square. sugarlandtx.gov/parks

**VICTORIA:** Annual Lighted Christmas Parade Dec. 3. Main and Bridge streets. 361/485-3200

## HILL COUNTRY

**AUSTIN:** Austin Trail of Lights Dec. 10-23. Zilker Park. austintrailoflights.org

**AUSTIN:** Luminations Dec. 10-11. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. wildflower.org/events

**BANDERA:** Cowboy Capital Christmas, Shoppers Jubilee, and Night Parade Dec. 2. Main Street. banderatexasbusiness.com 830/796-4447

**BUDA:** Budafest Dec. 3-4. Downtown Greenbelt. budafest.org 512/295-7170

**BURNET:** Christmas at Fort Croghan Dec. 10. fortcroghan.org 512/756-8281

**CANYON LAKE:** North Pole Village Dec. 8-10, 15-17. CRRC (below the dam). crccofcanyonlake.org 830/964-3003

**FREDERICKSBURG:** Light the Night Christmas Parade and AfterGlow Dec. 2. Main Street and Marktplatz. lightthenightchristmasparade.com 830/997-5000

**FREDERICKSBURG:** Pearl Harbor Day Observance Dec. 7. National Museum of the Pacific War. pacificwarmuseum.org 830/997-8600 ext. 205

**GEORGETOWN:** The Christmas Stroll Dec. 2-3.

The Georgetown Square. visitgeorgetown.com 512/868-8675

**GRUENE:** Gruene Town Lighting and Pony Express Ride Dec. 3. Gruene Historic District. gruenetexas.com 830/629-5077

**HUTTO:** Downtown Christmas Fair Dec. 10. The Gin at the Co-Op District. visithutto.com 512/759-4029

**JOHNSON CITY:** Lights Spectacular Dec. 1-Jan. 2. lbjcountry.com 830/868-7684

**LLANO:** Starry Starry Nights Nov. 25-Dec. 31. Badu Bark. llanochamber.org

**LLANO:** Snow Day Dec. 10. Badu Park. llanochamber.org 325/247-5354

**LUCKENBACH:** Luckenbach New Year's Eve Celebration Dec. 31. Luckenbach Texas Dance Hall. luckenbachtexas.com 830/997-3224

**MARBLE FALLS:** Walkway of Lights Nov. 18-Jan. 1. Lakeside Park. walkwayoflightstx.com 844/635-4448

**OZONA:** DeerFest Dec. 3. Crockett County Fair Park Convention Center. deerfest.org 325/277-9345

**OZONA:** Wool and Mohair Style Show Dec. 3. Crockett County Senior Center. ozonamuseum.com 325/392-2837

**SAN MARCOS:** Sights and Sounds of Christmas Nov. 30-Dec. 3. San Marcos Plaza Park. sights-n-sounds.org 512/393-8400

**STONEWALL:** LBJ Tree Lighting Dec. 18. Lyndon B. Johnson State Park & Historic Site. tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/lyndon-b-johnson/47th-annual-lbj-tree-lighting 830/644-2252

**WIMBERLEY:** Trail of Lights Nov. 26-Dec. 29. EmilyAnn Theatre and Gardens. emilyann.org 512/847-6969

**WIMBERLEY:** Winter's Eve—A Christmas Festival Dec. 10. Wimberley Square. wimberleymerchants.com 512/722-3668

## PANHANDLE PLAINS

**ANSON:** Texas Cowboys' Christmas Ball Dec. 15-17. Pioneer Hall. ansoncowboyschristmasball.com 325/669-2063

**BAIRD:** Christmas Village Dec. 2-3, 9-10, 16-17. The Arches Downtown. bairdchamber.com 325/854-1212 ext. 4

**BIG SPRING:** Comanche Trail Festival of Lights Dec. 15-31. Comanche Trail Park. visitbigspring.com 432/263-8235

**GRAHAM:** 20+1 Amateur Arenacross Dec. 2-3. Young County Arena. visitgrahamtexas.com 866/549-0401

**JACKSBORO:** Jacksboro Christmas Reindeer Games Dec. 8. Courthouse Square. jacksborochamber.com 940/567-2602

**SAN ANGELO:** Christmas at Old Fort Concho Dec. 2-4. fortconcho.com 325/481-2646

**SNYDER:** Big Country Christmas Ball Dec. 10. The Coliseum. westtexasrehab.org 325/660-8338

## PINEY WOODS

**GILMER:** Yulefest Dec. 1-8. Gilmer Square. gilmerareachamber.com 903/843-2413

**GLADEWATER:** Gladewater Christmas Parade Dec. 6. Antique District. gladewaterchamber.org 903/845-5501

**HUNTSVILLE:** Huntsville for the Holidays Dec. 2-4. The Wynne Home. thewynnehome.com 936/291-5424

**JACKSONVILLE:** Christmas Parade Dec. 1. jacksonvilletexas.com 903/586-2217

**JEFFERSON:** Christmas Candlelight Tour of Homes Dec. 1-3, 8-10. jeffersoncandlelight.com 903/665-7064

**JEFFERSON:** Rail of Lights Christmas Train Dec. 1-4, 8-11, 15-18, 22-24. Historic Jefferson Railway. jeffersonrailway.com 866/398-2038

**LUFKIN:** Yule Love Lufkin Christmas Festival Dec. 17. Pitser Garrison Convention Center. visitlufkin.com 936/633-0359

**MAGNOLIA:** Christmas in Unity Park Dec. 2-3. cityofmagnolia.com 281/356-2266 ext. 3

**MONTGOMERY:** Christmas in Historic Montgomery Dec. 10. experiencemontgomery.com 936/597-7300

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**NACOGDOCHES:**

Nine Flags Christmas Festival Lighted Parade & Fireworks Dec. 3. Downtown. nineflagsfestival.com 888/564-7351

**PALESTINE:**

The Polar Express Train Ride Nov. 18-20, 25-27; Dec. 2-4, 9-11, 16-18, 23. Texas State Railroad Depot. texasstaterr.com 877/726-7245

**PALESTINE:** Frost Fest Dec. 3. Historic Main Street District. palestinechamber.org 903/729-6066

**PALESTINE:** *Grinch's Lair at the Texas Jail House* Dec. 3-4, 10-11, 17-18, 22-24. Historic Anderson Co. Jail. texasjailhouse.com 903/723-3014

**PALESTINE:** USAF Band of the West *Holiday in Blue* Concert Dec. 4. Palestine Civic Center. visitpalestine.com 903/723-3014

**SAN AUGUSTINE:** Christmas Jubilee Days Dec. 2-3. 936/201-9798

**SILSBEE:** Christmas in the Big Thicket Dec. 3. Downtown. silsbeebeechamber.com 409/385-5562

**TEXARKANA:** Main Street Christmas Parade Dec. 5. mainstreettexarkana.org 903/792-7191

**THE WOODLANDS:**

Holly Jolly Jingle Dec. 1. The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion. woodlandscenter.org 281/364-3010

**THE WOODLANDS:**

Scuderia Exotic Car Show Dec. 17. Market St. marketstreet-thewoodlands.com 281/419-4774

**TYLER:** Rose City Christmas Nov. 1-Dec. 31. visittyler.com 903/592-1661

**PRAIRIES AND LAKES**

**ARLINGTON:** Texas Christkindl Market Nov. 25-Dec. 23. Globe Life Park. txchristkindlmarket.com 817/461-3888

**BASTROP:** Lost Pines Christmas Winter Wonderland Dec. 10. Downtown. lostpineschristmas.com 512/332-8996

**BELTON:** Christmas on the Chisholm Trail: An Old Fashion Christmas Dec. 3.

beltontexas.gov 254/933-5861

**BONHAM:** Holiday Open House Dec. 10. Sam Rayburn House. samrayburnhouse.com 903/583-5558

**BRENHAM:** Christmas Stroll and Lighted Parade Dec. 2-3. cityofbrenham.org 979/337-7250

**BRYAN:** Downtown Christmas Parade Dec. 9. 979/822-4920

**BURTON:** Christmas at the Depot and Tannenbaum Tour Dec. 4. Burton Railroad Depot and Museum. burtonheritagesociety.org 979/353-0050

**CLEBURNE:** Whistle Stop Christmas Parade and Celebration Dec. 2. Hulen Park. whistlestopchristmas.org 817/645-2455

**CLIFTON:** Norwegian Country Christmas Tour Dec. 3. cliftontexas.org 254/675-3720

**COLLEGE STATION:** Christmas in the Park Dec. 2-4. Stephen C. Beachy Central Park. cstx.gov/christmas 979/764-3486

**CUERO:** Christmas Downtown Dec. 9-10. Main Street District. cueromainstreet.com 361/485-8008

**DALLAS:** The 12 Days of Christmas Nov. 6-Jan. 3. Dallas Arboretum. dallasarboretum.org

**DALLAS:** BMW Dallas Marathon, Half-Marathon and Behringer Relay Dec. 11. Downtown. bmwdallasmarathon.com

**DENISON:** Grayson County Holiday Tour of Lights Nov. 25-Dec. 31. Loy Lake Park. denisontexas.us 903/465-1551

**DENTON:** Holiday Lighting Festival of Denton Dec. 2. Courthouse Square. 940/382-7895

**ELGIN:** Holiday by the Tracks Dec. 3. Veterans' Memorial Park. elgintx.com

**FORT WORTH:** National Cutting Horse Association (NCHA) Futurity Nov. 17-Dec. 10. Will Rogers Memorial Center Coliseum. nchacutting.com 817/392-7469

**FORT WORTH:** Christmas in the Stockyards Dec. 3.

Fort Worth Stockyards. stockyardsstation.com 817/625-9715

**FORT WORTH:** Cowtown Indie Bazaar—Handmade Holidays Dec. 10. Will Rogers Memorial Center. cowtownindiebazaar.com

**FRISCO:** Christmas in the Square Nov. 25-Jan. 1. Frisco Square. friscosquare.com/cits 469/633-7117

**GLEN ROSE:** World Cheetah Day Dec. 3. Fossil Rim Wildlife Center. 254/897-2960

**GLEN ROSE:** Brother-N-Laws Team Roping Dec. 31-Jan. 1. Somervell County Expo Center. 254/897-4509

**GRAND PRAIRIE:** Prairie Lights Nov. 24-Jan. 3. Lynn Creek Park. prairielights.org 972/237-8100

**GRAPEVINE:** Christmas on Main Dec. 2-4, 9-11, 16-18. Historic Downtown. grapevinetexasusa.com 817/410-3185

**GRAPEVINE:** North Pole Express® Dec. 2-4, 9-11, 16-23. Grapevine Vintage Railroad. gvr.com 817/410-3185

**HALLETTSVILLE:** Christkindlmarkt Nov. 26, Dec. 3, 20, 17. 361/217-7030

**LA GRANGE:** Schmeckenfest: Wassail and Christmas Festival Dec. 1. visitlagrangetx.com 979/968-3017

**LEWISVILLE:** Old Town Holiday Stroll and Christmas Parade Dec. 3. Old Town. cityoflewisville.com 972/219-3401

**LOCKHART:** A Dickens Christmas in Lockhart Dec. 2-3. Dr. Eugene Clark Library. clark-library-lockhart.org 512/398-3223

**MCKINNEY:** Holidays at the Heard Dec. 10, 16-17. Heard Natural Science Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary. 972/562-5566

**MESQUITE:** Christmas in the Park Dec. 3-4. Westlake Park. cityofmesquite.com 972/216-6260

**PLANO:** Dickens in Historic Downtown Plano Dec. 2. Haggard Park. plano.gov/2395/dickens-in-historic-downtown-plano 972/941-7250



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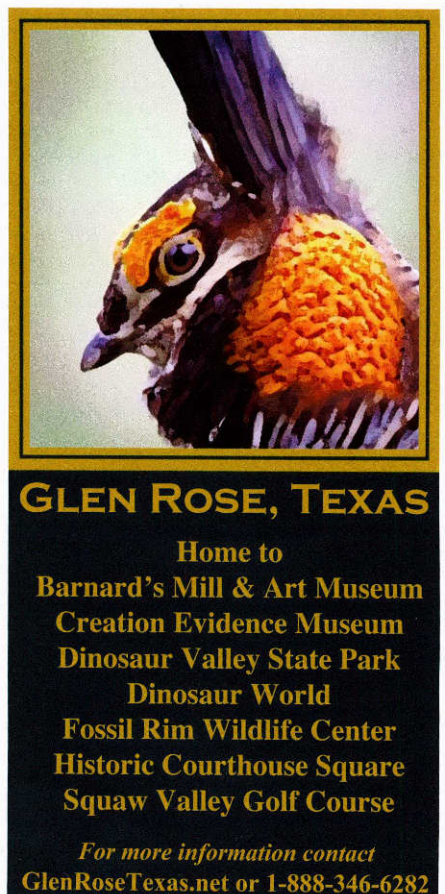
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# EVENTS

**PLANO:** The Santa Run  
Texas Dec. 10.  
Dr Pepper Snapple Group  
Headquarters.  
santarutexas.org  
469/241-9100

**ROUND TOP:** Christmas  
at Winedale Dec. 10.  
Winedale Historical Complex.  
cah.utexas.edu  
979/278-3530

**SALADO:** Salado  
Christmas Stroll  
Dec. 2-4, 9-11.  
Various locations.  
salado.com  
254/947-5040

**SEGUIN:** Country  
Christmas Dec. 9-10.  
Texas Agricultural  
Education and Heritage  
Center. texagedu.org  
830/379-1122

**SHINER:** Christmas in  
the Park Dec. 1.  
Welhausen Municipal Park.  
shinertx.com  
361/594-4180

**VAN:** Festival of the Trees  
and Christmas Lighting  
Nov. 21-Dec. 2. The Old  
Movie House. vantx.com  
903/963-5051

**VAN:** Christmas Parade,  
Carnival and Movie Dec. 3.  
Van Oil Museum and  
at City Park. vantx.com  
903/963-5051

**WACO:** Waco Wonderland  
Dec. 2-4. Heritage Square.  
254/750-8080

**WASHINGTON:**  
Christmas on the Brazos  
Dec. 10. Washington  
on the Brazos State  
Historic Park.  
tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/  
washington-on-the-brazos

**WEATHERFORD:**  
Christmas on the Square  
Dec. 3. Historic Downtown.  
weatherford-chamber.com  
817/596-3801

**WEIMAR:** Weimar  
Down Home Christmas  
Dec. 8. weimartx.org  
979/725-9511

## SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

**GOLIAD:** Christmas in  
Goliad Dec. 2-3. Historic  
Downtown Square.  
361/645-8767

**GOLIAD:** Christmas  
Rendezvous and Trade Fair  
Dec. 3. Presidio La Bahia.  
presidiolabahia.org  
361/645-3752

**MCCALLEN:** McAllen  
Holiday Parade Dec. 3.  
McAllen Veterans  
Memorial Stadium.  
mccallesholidayparade.com  
956/681-1200

**SAN ANTONIO:** Ford  
Holiday Boat Caroling  
Nov. 30-Dec. 18.  
San Antonio River Walk.  
thesanantonioriverwalk.com

**SAN ANTONIO:** Rock N'  
Roll Marathon Dec. 3-4.  
Downtown.  
runrocknroll.com/  
san-antonio

**SAN ANTONIO:** Tamales!  
At Pearl Dec. 3.  
The Pearl Brewery.  
atpearl.com  
210/212-7260

**SAN ANTONIO:**  
Celebrate San Antonio  
Dec. 31. HemisFair Park.  
saparksfoundation.org  
210/212-8423

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# TEXAS HIGHWAYS

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

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| <b>A. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)</b>   | 174,091  | 176,250   |
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| 3. Sales Through Dealers & Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Non-USPS Paid Distribution | 4,261  | 3,677   |
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| <b>D. Free Distribution by Mail Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free</b>                               |  |   |
| 1. Outside-County as Stated on Form 3541   | 46,526   | 50,232  |
| <b>E. Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)</b>                                   | 1,369  | 1,369   |
| <b>F. Total Free Distribution (Sum of 15D and 15E)</b>   | 47,895   | 51,601  |
| <b>G. Total Distribution (Sum of 15C and 15F)</b>  | 162,014  | 162,784   |
| <b>H. Copies Not Distributed</b>   | 12,077   | 13,466  |
| <b>I. TOTAL (Sum of 15G and 15H)</b>   | 174,091  | 176,250   |
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| <b>L. TOTAL Print Distribution (Line 15F) + Paid Electronic Copies</b>                                   | 175,430  | 176,335   |
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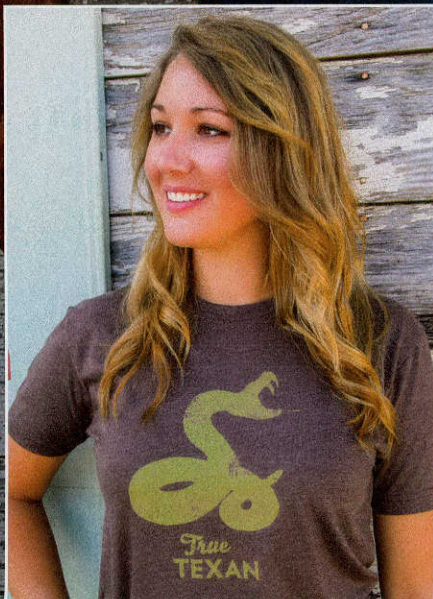
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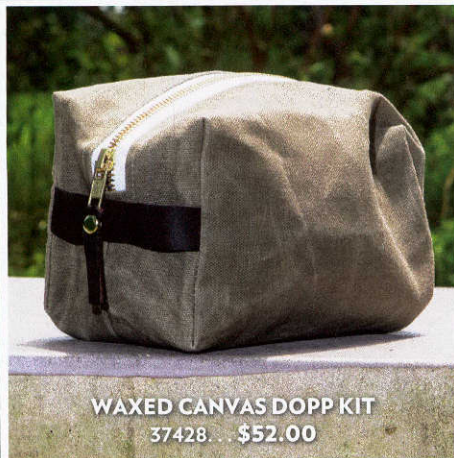
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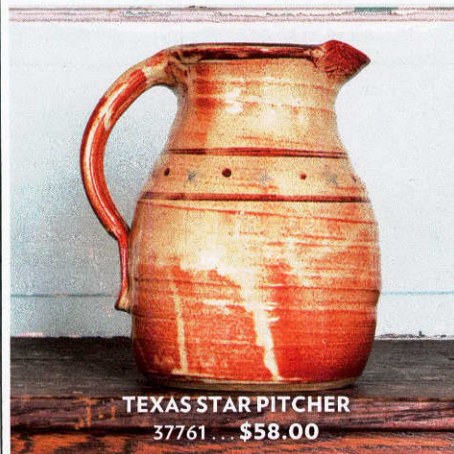
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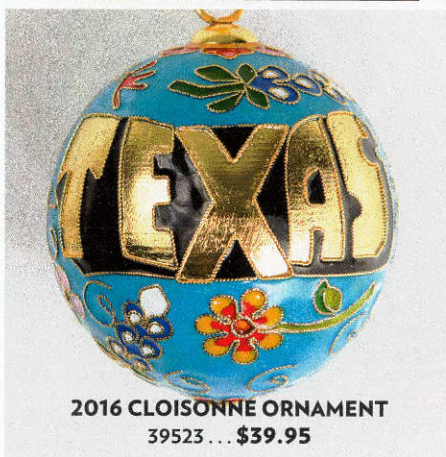
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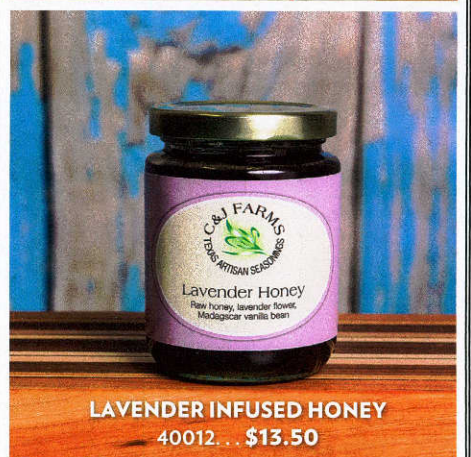
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# THE DAYTRIPPER

WITH CHET GARNER



## Have a Holly, Jolly Day Trip!

**T** WAS THE DAY TRIP BEFORE CHRISTMAS and all through the state, the towns were decked out, and Chet could not wait." We always say, "Everything's bigger in Texas," and the phrase definitely applies to the way we celebrate Christmas, especially in Grapevine, the "Christmas Capital of Texas." Donning my best reindeer sweater and Santa hat, I pranced to the metroplex to catch the holiday spirit.

**10:00 A.M.** I parked my sleigh at the **Gaylord Texan Resort** and walked into a lobby filled with millions of dazzling lights. I tipped my hat to giant toy soldiers and Texas-size Santa boots. The gingerbread houses were so big I considered moving in. But most astonishing was the indoor snow hill tucked into a conference room. I grabbed a tube, sped down the hill, and then got in line to do it again.

**11:00 A.M.** While the snow was cold, it was nothing compared to the Gaylord's **ICE!** exhibit, which is kept at a frigid nine degrees. Luckily, the ticket price includes the use of a heavy parka. I walked through the winding display of towering ice sculptures, amazed at the detail and color of reindeer, elves, and old Kris Kringle. My favorite was the Nativity scene, reminding me of the true meaning of Christmas. The sculptures were breathtaking, but I was about to turn

into a block of ice myself and decided to step outside.

**12:15 P.M.** It was lunchtime and there's no better way to warm up in Grapevine than beside the smoking pits at **Meat U Anywhere BBQ**. My plate of brisket, pork loin, and sausage was so good I wouldn't mind finding this tasty 'cue under my Christmas tree.

**1:15 P.M.** After lunch, I went to **Main Street**, the heart of this Texas-style North Pole. Lights and garlands covered every light post, and Santa Claus waved on every corner; I counted over a dozen, and I'm still not sure which was the real one. As I window-shopped, I stepped into the tinsel-covered **Good Things for all Seasons** to pick up some decorations for my Daytripper Tree. Of the hundreds of ornaments, I figured the barbecue,

**Chet Garner** is the host of *The Daytripper*® travel show on PBS; [www.thedaytripper.com](http://www.thedaytripper.com).

cowboy-boot, and beer-glass ornaments would do the trick!

**2:30 P.M.** While it was winter, in Texas there's never a bad time for ice cream. So I stopped into **Napoli's Italian Café** for a bowl of cappuccino-flavored gelato. It was delicious, but soon my stomach was as round as jolly St. Nick's, and I decided to go for a walk.

**4:00 P.M.** In search of the perfect gift for my wife, I discovered **Vetro Glassblowing**, which was hosting make-your-own ornament sessions. Standing just feet from a 2,000-degree oven, the glassblowers helped me turn a glowing ball of melted glass into a stunning handmade ornament.

**6:00 P.M.** It was time for dinner, and what could be more appropriate at Christmastime than the colors red and green? I headed to **Esparza's Restaurante Mexicano** for a feast of green guacamole and red *pico de gallo*, followed by a plate of *roja* and *verde enchiladas*. *Feliz Navidad* to me! Just as I finished my meal, I heard a train whistling in the distance.

**7:00 P.M.** I arrived at the **Grapevine Vintage Railroad** in time to hop aboard the **North Pole Express**. Wearing my worst pink bunny pajamas—in the spirit of the movie *A Christmas Story*—I joined the children hoping to catch a glimpse of Mr. Claus. We sang Christmas carols

with the elves and arrived at a magical place filled with snow and Christmas trees. It could only be ... the North Pole. We entered the toyshop to discover none other than Santa himself.

I sipped my frosty chocolate snow milk and remembered why this really is the most wonderful time of the year. From snow sledding to ornament-making, I definitely had one holly, jolly day in our Christmas capital. So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road. 🎅

Contact the Grapevine Convention & Visitors Bureau at 800/457-6338; [www.grapevintexasusa.com](http://www.grapevintexasusa.com).



# TRAVEL MATTERS

TRAVEL TALK WITH TRUE TEXANS



## For the Love of Life, Land, and Cowdogs

John Erickson, the cowboy-writer behind Hank the Cowdog

text by **Matt Joyce**

**Y**OU'D BE HARD-PRESSED TO FIND A TEXAS SCHOOLKID from the mid-1980s forward who doesn't crack a smile at the mention of Hank the Cowdog. Hank, the self-assured yet blundering hero of John Erickson's long-running Hank the Cowdog series, narrates his adventures as the self-appointed "head of ranch security" on a Panhandle cattle ranch.

Millions of readers have followed along as Hank has tackled one mysterious case after another—dead chickens, silver monster birds, trashcan-raiding raccoons—all the while chastising his middling

Keep up with John Erickson and Hank the Cowdog at [www.hankthecowdog.com](http://www.hankthecowdog.com).

**Erickson has also written six Hank musicals, including one recently presented in China.**

deputy Drover, squabbling with Pete the ranch cat, and nurturing his unrequited love for Beulah, the collie next door.

Erickson wrote his first Hank the Cowdog story for *The Cattleman* magazine in 1982, creating Hank and company from his observations as a working cowboy on ranches near his hometown of Perryton and in Oklahoma. In October, Erickson published the 68th Hank the Cowdog book, *The Secret Pledge*.

Along with 25 non-Hank books about cowboy life and the Panhandle, Erickson has also written six Hank musicals, including one recently presented in China. In all, Erickson has sold more than 9 million books through his independent Maverick Books publishing house.

Erickson, 72, still travels around Texas frequently for Hank the Cowdog programs, including banjo and mandolin performances with his wife of 49 years, Kris.

**Q:** *Is Hank's ranch based on your ranch (about 40 miles south of Perryton in the Canadian River Valley)?*

**A:** Hank's ranch is a combination of my ranch and a ranch I used to work on south of Perryton in the Wolf Creek Valley. I wrote the first Hank book when I was working as a cowboy on that ranch.

**Q:** *Is Hank modeled after a specific dog?*

**A:** He was a ranch dog that belonged to our nearest neighbor. He was an Australian shepherd, and he wanted to be head of ranch security. He tried to help but he was always in the way, and the cowboys screamed at him all the time, "Get in the pickup, go to the > continued on page 74



# SIGHTSEER

GO. SEE. DO—TAKING IN TEXAS



**WHAT:** HOLIDAYS AT THE GALLERIA DALLAS **WHERE:** 13350 DALLAS PARKWAY, DALLAS **WHEN:** NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

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Ice rinks across Texas welcome skaters for holiday thrills. At the Galleria Dallas, catch performances by a pyrotechnic, ice-skating Santa Claus known as “Missile Toes.”

Here in Texas, we know there’s little sense in pinning your hopes on a white Christmas. But thanks to the modern marvel of climate control, Texas provides a glacier field’s worth of chances to slip and slide across freezing sheets of ice. At the Galleria Dallas Ice Skating Center, glide around a 95-foot Christmas tree and check out daily light shows. Seasonal rinks also crystalize around the state at places like The Woodlands Town Center, Moody Gardens in Galveston, Eisbahn in Fredericksburg, and Whole Foods in downtown Austin. [www.galleriaiceskatingcenter.com](http://www.galleriaiceskatingcenter.com).



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North Pole Express® ★ Texas' best Christmas lights — by the millions  
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