

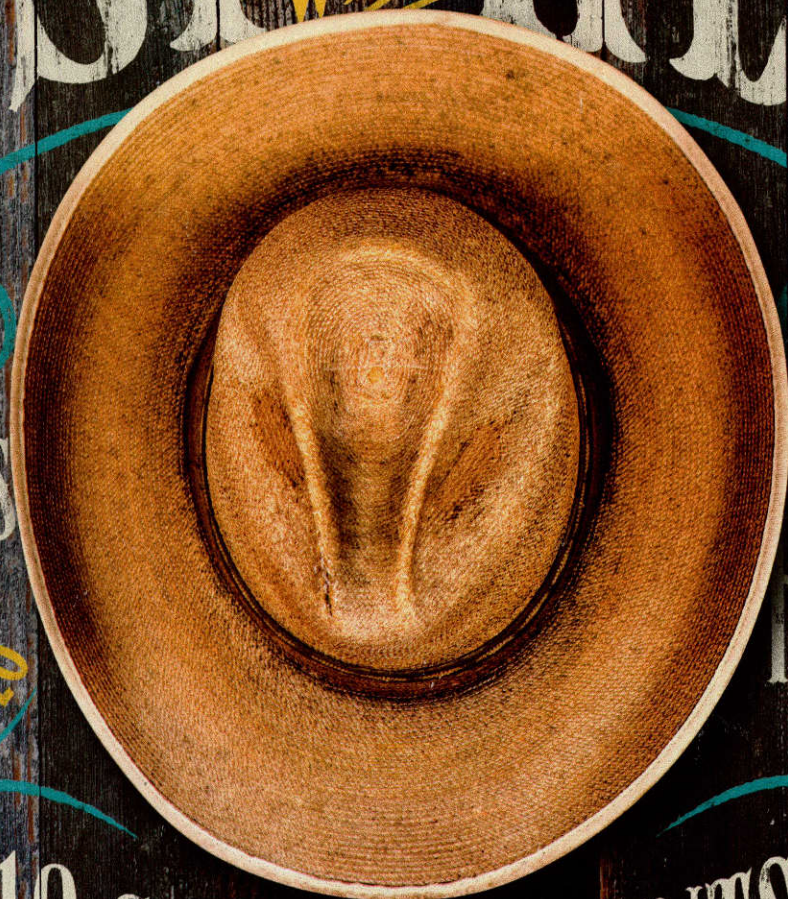
# TEXAS

HIGHWAYS

THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

# BEST OF THE WEST

*of the  
WILD*



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# The Cowboy Way

**T**HE MYTHOLOGY OF THE Wild West looms large over Texas. Tales of heroic cowboys and gritty ranchers dominate much of the state's literature. And from outsiders' perspectives, led by depictions in film and TV, every Texan wears a cowboy hat and owns a horse. As Amarillo-bred journalist Jason Boyett writes in his feature about his hometown (Page 32), "This is what they think Texas looks like."

Andy Wilkinson of Lubbock, a fifth-generation nephew of Charles Goodnight—perhaps the most widely venerated of ranching legends—explains the allure this way: "There are a number of reasons for it. My late and dear friend Buck Ramsey, who was a cowpuncher and later become one of the great writers and poets of the West, said the cowboy and that way of life is a cult of skill. What that means is a rancher in the West, they're valued for what they can do, not who they are, not where they came from, and for that matter, not what they own."

Wilkinson, whose own creative output as a singer-songwriter and author centers on cowboy and ranching culture, points out another key component of the enduring appeal of the lifestyle: "They're not even mythical, people are still out there doing this."

Though most modern-day Texans, including Wilkinson, might never lead a cattle drive or shoe a horse, city-dwelling Texans can find plenty of places across the state to experience that lifestyle for a day, a week, or even an afternoon. In this issue, we join the largest trail ride in the world, visit three countryside dude ranches, ride horseback with city slickers, and provide a number of other options to keep you busy until the cows come home. Saddle up!

*Emily R Stone*

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**, *Executive Editor*

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# FEBRUARY

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## **That Was Then. This is Wow.**

Amarillo's Western roots run deep with iconic landmarks like Palo Duro Canyon and The Big Texan Steak Ranch, but the city's newer offerings prove it's more than a cowboy town.

*Story by* **JASON BOYETT**  
*Photographs by*  
**ERICH SCHLEGEL**

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Leave the hustle-and-bustle of modern life for wide expanses, hearty breakfasts, and activities like trapshooting, fishing, and horseback riding at these three Texas dude ranches.

*Story by* **DAN OKO**  
*Photographs by*  
**KENNY BRAUN**

**50**

## **Hoofbeats of History**

In anticipation of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, 12 trail rides journey to join the spectacle. With dozens of wagons and hundreds of riders, these old-time caravans keep the legends of cowboys and cattle drives alive for future generations.

*Story by* **SUSAN L. EBERT**  
*Photographs by*  
**WILL VAN OVERBEEK**



*Trick roper Kevin Fitzpatrick lassoes good times at Mayan Ranch in Bandera.*





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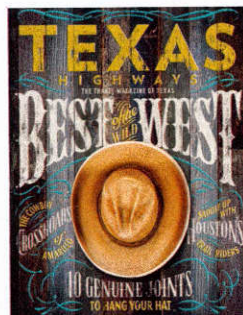
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Valentine's Day in Valentine

## MOST ROMANTIC PLACES IN TEXAS

We want to hear from you: What are the most romantic destinations in the state? Head to our Facebook page in mid-January to add your submissions, and then vote in our poll. We'll crunch the numbers and present a full list with links and recommendations on **texashighways.com** before Valentine's Day on Feb. 14.



### MARDI GRAS EVENTS

Head over to **texashighways.com** for details on Fat Tuesday (Feb. 13) celebrations. There are plenty of Mardi Gras-inspired parades, festivals, and events to enjoy all over the state.



### STOCKYARDS HOTEL WEB EXCLUSIVE

After you read our story on Fort Worth's Stockyards Hotel (Page 20), visit **texashighways.com** to learn more about the history of the renowned lodging.



### SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER

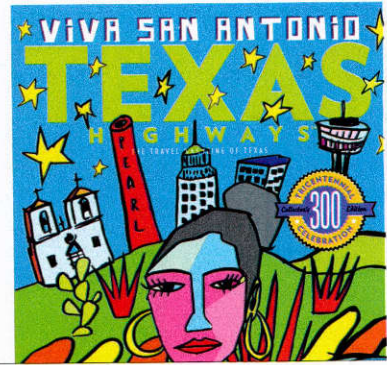
Keep up with the latest *Texas Highways* news and events by signing up for our bimonthly email newsletter at **texashighways.com/resources/texas-highways-extra**.



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### Warm Fuzzies

“Stitching Through Time” [December] captured the history of quilts, their purposes, and the enjoyment these creations bring. All the exhibits at the Texas Quilt Museum are great. Hurray for quilts!

**Cherie Spacek Harris, Houston**

### Citrus Season

My grandfather had a citrus orchard outside of La Feria until the freeze of 1983. At Christmas, he would bring us baskets of oranges, tangerines, and grapefruit. He even had a lemon tree or two that grew the largest lemons I’ve ever seen! I remember picking, peeling, and eating lemons like oranges. It makes my mouth pucker just thinking about it!

**Becky Montgomery, Houston**

### Big Bend Snow

Once when I was in Big Bend National Park on a geology field trip, intending to camp on the river, we drove to Chisos Basin for dinner. While we were eating it started to snow, and the road

down was closed due to icy conditions. We had brought only light weather supplies, had no lodging, and the group ended up spending the night on the restroom floors in the basin campground! In the morning the sun came out, and we went on our way.

**Linda Badgett Forward, Odessa**

### Cowboy Poets

If your readers haven’t experienced an event like the Texas Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Alpine, it is a wonderful opportunity to immerse themselves in America’s true Western heritage and way of life. While many such events have become festivals, the Texas gathering has remained true to the cowboy and ranching

tradition. There will be over 60 performers from 10 states, Canada, and Australia. Most of these folks are ranch people and working cowboys, who also happen to be incredibly talented, presenting their music and poetry. The free daytime sessions held in classrooms at Sul Ross University provide an intimate atmosphere between performer and audience. The night shows are only \$15 and showcase the best in Western entertainment. And all are very family friendly.

**Don Cadden, president  
Texas Cowboy Poetry Gathering**

*The Texas Cowboy Poetry  
Gathering is March 2-3 at  
Sul Ross State University in  
Alpine. [texascowboypoe.com](http://texascowboypoe.com).*

READER'S  
FAVORITE

### Two Cents on Ten Bits

*Ten Bits Ranch is absolutely wonderful. Sit on the porch in the morning, coffee in hand, with the desert all to yourself. It’s conveniently close to Study Butte, Terlingua, and Big Bend National Park. It looks like a town out of the Old West!*

JACQUELYN RANNEY, Dallas

Ten Bits Ranch Bed and Breakfast, located off State Highway 118 about 15 miles north of Study Butte, offers four guestrooms that accommodate up to 12 guests. Activities include horseback riding, target shooting, geology tours, and ATV rentals. Call 432-371-3110; [tenbitsranch.com](http://tenbitsranch.com).

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!** Send feedback and recommendations to:  
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## SCENIC ROUTE

### Route Kicks

*35° 12' 23.69" N  
101° 28' 17.63" W*

#### **ENJOYING ROADSIDE**

attractions while traveling Route 66 is a time-honored tradition. While not a typical destination, this weathered barn along the route east of Amarillo—now Farm-to-Market Road 2161—takes on a warm glow with photographer Clark Crenshaw's addition of LED lighting. From Conway, head about 5 miles west along FM 2161 to find the deserted outbuilding along the south side right before the road curves toward Interstate 40. For more information, visit [nps.gov/nr/travel/route66/sh\\_207\\_interstate\\_40\\_conway.html](https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/route66/sh_207_interstate_40_conway.html).







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# DRIVE

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## In the Saddle

With the right teacher,  
you're never too old for  
a horseback ride

story by Gene Fowler



Maverick Horseback Ranch in Lockhart offers a wide range of lessons and rides for all ages and levels of experience.



**T**HE COWBOY PHILOSOPHER WILL ROGERS once said, “A man that don’t love a horse, there is something the matter with him.” A bona fide movie star, Rogers also observed that an actor isn’t anything special: “He’s a fellow that just has a little more monkey in him.”

Both those maxims came to mind recently when my actor friend Joe Stevens, who’s got enough monkey to have appeared on the silver screen in *True Grit* and other flicks, got to talking about horses. Joe commented that some actors, when auditioning for a role that required riding, fibbed about their experience on horseback and found themselves in a pickle when called upon to prove it. Joe also allowed that while he’s not a “real cowboy,” he does fine on a “movie horse.”

That got me to thinking about my bucket list. I don’t quite have a bucket yet, but as a geezer-in-waiting I do have some mileage on my mortal chassis. And while I’m not particularly stove up from age, I feel an urgency to get up and go for the

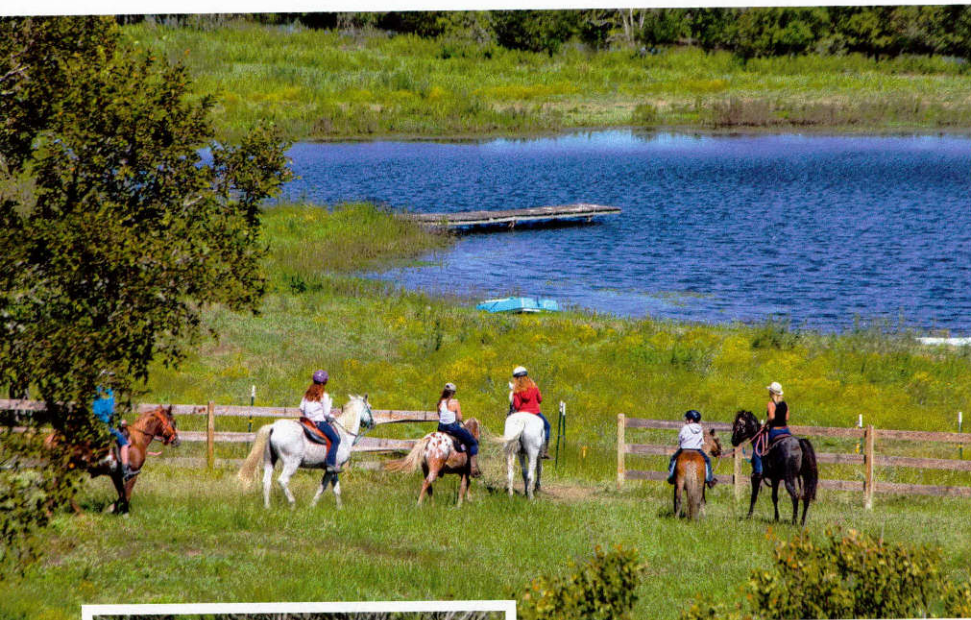
**“Our brains are trained to glance and move on. You have to see where you are asking the horse’s feet to go.”**

gusto in certain areas. Among those long-simmering, better-get-after-it desires is riding a horse.

Until recently, I had ridden exactly once in my life, for about 20 minutes. To remedy that shortcoming, I made an appointment for a lesson with horsewoman Joan Marie MacCoy at Maverick Horseback Riding in Lockhart, one of many horse stables across the state that teach beginners of all ages. I am of the opinion that “maverick” is one of the finest words to ever stray into the English lexicon—I aspire to personify its definition—and I found that Lockhart’s Maverick lives up to that storied name.

A North Carolina transplant, Joan

Joan Marie MacCoy leads a group of riders at Maverick Horseback Ranch on her trusty horse Maverick.



Marie began her equestrian education at 4 years old. From 7 to 16, she was schooled in the hunter-jumper field of riding, and by 18 she was training horses. After relocating to Central Texas, she founded her own horseback riding educational facility nearly six years ago.

While I normally jump at any opportunity to wear my black felt Resistol from Sam's Boot Corral in Del Rio, I opted for a riding helmet for the lesson as a precaution. Before saddling the horse I was going to ride, an Appaloosa named Rowdy, Joan Marie had me groom him with a brush to get acquainted. Then she said we needed to let the horses stand a bit, to let some air out, before tightening the cinch. Rowdy, she explained, came from a rescue facility and earned his

name due to the "pep in his step."

Six or seven other riders also joined the ride. One of our group saddled Apache, the other resident Appaloosa, and another rode Ghost, a horse Joan Marie described as "a flea-bitten grey." She led the group on her horse named Maverick, half Percheron and half Arabian. In the horse's online biography, Joan Marie describes the 23-year-old as a "stickler for the rules" who "expects his riders to sit up with poise, think about what they are asking the horse to do, and execute their request without yanking or popping the reins or losing focus."

The first rule, Joan Marie elaborated before we mounted up, is to "look."

"We don't normally process things the way we need to when on horseback," she explained. "Our brains are trained to glance and move on. You have to see where you are asking the horse's feet to go."

Next, your heel should be lower than the rest of your foot, and the balls of your feet should be secure in the stirrup. Third, it's important to sit up straight in the saddle and breathe. Hold the reins on the other side of the saddle horn from your body, and keep your hands active. Pay attention. "Be present in the moment," Joan Marie instructed.

That last rule might sound unnecessary, but it's one of the most important. I had a blast on the ride, but I noticed from the get-go that I had to maintain focus. "There's a common misconception that horseback riding is not a sport," Joan Marie later explained. "But it's really the hardest sport." She grew up competing in soccer and other sports. But a horse, of course, changes the equation. "They have their own emotions and feelings—they could have a headache or a sore back and decide to chuck you off. It's really an intense physical activity."

Fortunately, none of our group hit the sod as we rode for an hour and a half through 100 scenic acres comprised of a valley, pond, and hilly trails shaded by stands of live oak, mesquite, willow, and cedar elm trees. Joan Marie has access to another 400 acres nearby for longer rides. Fluent in English and Spanish, she also offers a wide range of lessons and rides for all ages and levels of experience, from individual instruction to group outings, equine and ranch care classes, birthday parties, summer camps, horseback yoga, and programs for families with autistic children.

Joan Marie even accepts students of greater vintage than me, cautioning that falls can be worse for older folks. Everyone said I would be sore as heck the day after the ride, but I wasn't. Instead, I felt physically tuned up and centered.

"Riding increases mobility of the human spine," Joan Marie said. "I've had back problems, and it really helps with that. Simply being around horses can be therapeutic and calming."

Amen. Like another Gene from Texas, I can't wait to say, "I'm back in the saddle again." 🐾



### MAVERICK HORSEBACK RANCH

is on the outskirts of Lockhart, about 30 minutes southeast of Austin. Reservations are required. Call **512-230-8413**; [maverickhorsebackriding.com](http://maverickhorsebackriding.com).

# Flower Power

Daffodils bloom on 28 acres in Gladewater, bringing sunshine to winter

story by Jennifer Babisak



**L**AST WINTER HAD BEEN DRAGGING ON—NOT FRIGIDLY cold, but devoid of the sunshine that Texans crave year-round. One February day, I followed a tip from friends and took my children on a day trip east of our Dallas-area home in search of a dose of sunshine. As I exited Interstate 20 near Gladewater, bare tree branches stretched toward blue sky, their silhouettes like sculptures against the clouds. I drove on, following a line of cars through rolling hills of brown grass, forests of stark trees, and houses scattered here and there. But at the crest of one hill, the entire landscape changed before our eyes. The horizon erupted in color, and the monochrome winter scenery became washed in cheer. Fields of bright yellow daffodils stretched out like a sea of sunshine. We had arrived at Mrs. Lee's Daffodil Garden—a 28-acre haven boasting millions of blooms.

It's hard to catch the daffodils blossoming—a quest to see Mrs. Lee's in its splendor requires perfect timing. To maximize your chances, call the garden's hotline daily beginning in early

**At Lee's  
doorstep  
arrived not  
a box of  
daffodil  
bulbs, but  
a boxcar.**

February for recorded daffodil status updates. Once the flowers begin blooming, they're in full glory for only a couple weeks. The gardens themselves open seven days a week from mid-February until the flowers are no longer in bloom, which can last through March. The garden takes its name from Helen Lee, the wife of East Texas oilman T. W. Lee. Despite a hardscrabble beginning, the oil business treated T. W. well, and the couple began purchasing land just outside Gladewater in the 1940s. Initially, they used the property's abundant gravel to pave Gladewater's roadways and the municipal airport runway. T. W. improved the

Mrs. Lee's pioneer cabin replica, built in 1954, peeks out from the sea of yellow daffodils.



town's fortunes in other ways as well, founding Gladewater's first newspaper and radio station.

After her husband died in 1954, Helen decided to turn their primitive landscape into a thing of beauty. She began purchasing adjoining properties, eventually extending her claim to more than 1,000 acres. And then she decided to bring in the flowers. At first, she turned to crepe myrtles, but they took too much time and effort to maintain. Then she thought about trying azaleas and daffodils. She ordered a box of the latter from Holland. There was miscommunication somewhere in the cross-Atlantic transaction, and at Lee's doorstep arrived not a box of daffodil bulbs, but a *boxcar*. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by the unexpected influx, Helen simply shrugged and got to work, hiring a handful of workers to help her plant the bulbs across her property.



### MRS. LEE'S DAFFODIL GARDEN

From mid-February through March (or until the daffodils are no longer in bloom), the garden is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. Call the garden for road conditions and a predicted blooming schedule, **903-845-5780**, or the Gladewater Chamber of Commerce at **903-845-5501**; [daffodilgarden.com](http://daffodilgarden.com)

Then Helen moved to the next phase of enhancing her estate, transforming the gravel pits into a 5-acre lake and 3-acre pond, and stocking them with bass, perch, and catfish. She had a one-room pioneer log cabin replica constructed in 1954. It overlooks the pond Helen named Lake Josephine, after her mother. As a nature enthusiast Helen enjoyed the vantage that the cabin gave her, frequently retreating to the rustic structure to seek solace in the croaking of frogs and chirping of birds and to feast on fresh fish from the pond. Though her gardens remained private during her lifetime, Helen stipulated they open to the public upon her death, which occurred in 1984.

These days, The Helen Lee Foundation maintains the gardens and opens them to the public each spring. Administrator Carolyn Owens Johnson grew up among the daffodils as her grandparents were friends and employees of Helen for decades. In fact, Johnson's grandmother would frequently accompany Helen on retreats to the cabin. "How much she loved nature and how much my grandmother enjoyed being out there with her," Johnson remembers of Helen. "She was like family to us. She was considerate and a giver."

Johnson's descriptions evoke the image of Helen as a modern-day Saint Francis (the patron saint of animals and the environment) in her primitive cabin.

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Johnson recalls she put out birdseed and erected bat houses. “But the cows had the run of the place,” Johnson says, reminiscing about the Santa Gertrudis herd that roamed the property for years. “Some of them had cowbells on and they would run through two pastures, but they wouldn’t dare eat the flowers.”

And visitors to the gardens today dare not destroy the flowers either.

We learned that when we pulled up to the entry gate, where a volunteer gave us directions for the driving route and reminded us of the rules, “Don’t pick ’em. Don’t stomp ’em.” Volunteers personally greet the nearly 6,000 visitors who make the pilgrimage each year. Entry to the gardens is free, but donations are welcome as they help with maintenance.

Once inside the gates, we meandered along the 4-mile driving trail, which winds through the picturesque 28 acres of daffodils—delicate golden petals perched on stems stretching skyward sway like long-legged dancers in the breeze. The trail provides several parking areas that allow visitors to stop and explore the landscape by foot. Steep grades and tight curves along the trail made me glad we didn’t attempt this excursion on a rainy day. Rainstorms had showered the grounds earlier in the week, and the creeks running through the property flowed at a brisk clip.

When we stopped at the first parking area, set adjacent to hills abloom with daffodils, I noticed the diversity of botanical enthusiasts the gardens attract. A Harley motorcycle was parked beside us, and a leather-clad couple hopped off to admire the flowers. Nearby, grandparents and grandchildren, dressed in crisply pressed pastel outfits, positioned themselves in the blooms for a round of photographs. Young adults lounged on blankets on the hill, enjoying the sunshine on their faces and the glow of yellow at their feet.

After roaming through miles more of daffodils, we stopped at another parking area situated across from Helen’s primitive cabin. We hiked around the cabin and peeked into its windows to view the furnishings. Johnson says Helen constructed her retreat as a replica cabin because she “wanted people to know how our foreparents lived.” Glancing at the minimalist wooden furniture, we decided they lived very sparsely indeed.

In looking at the richness of natural wonder around us, we don’t think Helen aspired toward asceticism. Her cabin seems humble but magnifies the grandeur of endless yellow fields meeting vast blue sky. And we’re glad her Dutch needed improvement. That boxcar of daffodils may have been a mistake, but it’s a mistake that brightened our winter day—as well as the winter days of thousands of others for more than 30 years. **L**

**thin line**  
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## Music, Motion, and Media

URBAN-15 stretches the arts in San Antonio and beyond

story by **Gene Fowler**

**W**HEN NIGHT FALLS IN SAN ANTONIO during the annual spring Fiesta Flambeau Parade, URBAN-15's troupe of drummers and dancers draws howling *gritos* of delight from the crowds packed along downtown streets.

Adorned with synchronized lighting and costumed as stars, butterflies, and other dancing characters, the URBAN-15 performers have also entertained throngs at San Antonio Spurs games and championship parades, *Día de los Muertos*

**"We merge traditional Latino culture with contemporary aesthetics and the creative use of technology."**

celebrations, and the Alamo City's annual contemporary art festival, Luminaria. Outside of San Antonio, the group has toured Mexico and performed at the inaugural balls and parades of Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama.

The parade spectacles are just part of URBAN-15's endeavor to spread the arts throughout its hometown of San Antonio and beyond. Headquartered in a 1930s former church on San Antonio's South Presa Street, the non-profit organization produces a dizzying array of artistic and community activities, including the drum and dance parades, laser light and music shows, poetry and film festivals, dance and rhythm workshops, and much more.

"We merge traditional Latino culture with contemporary aesthetics and the creative use of technology," says George Cisneros, URBAN-15's music and media director and co-founder with his wife, Catherine Cisneros. Through events and classes, the group promotes its ideals of living more fully through creativity and the "Three Ms"—music, motion, and media—with populations young and old. "We want to motivate people to engage their imaginations and get moving," adds Catherine, the group's artistic director. "It's important that there be lifelong participation in the arts."

URBAN-15's panoply of creative expression started in Austin in 1974, when 15 artists gathered at Clark Field, the former University of Texas baseball stadium, to perform George's experimental composition "Six Point Gestures" with sound and movement. (I was one of the 15 participants and recall the piece as one that expanded my notions of art and performance.) From that production, the Cisneroses and a core group of artists, dancers, and musicians formed an ensemble—dubbed "URBAN-15" because of the number of people in the group at the time—and continued exploring

URBAN-15's *Carnaval de San Anto* troupe performs during *Día de los Muertos* at Hemisfair park in San Antonio.



movement, sound, and installation art in Texas, Washington D.C., and elsewhere. They established their home base in San Antonio in 1980.

The group's educational and participatory objectives encompass several annual events that have become Alamo City favorites. The Holiday Laser Show is presented free for 8,000 school children every December. "My friend Tim Walsh, a reed player and co-founder of the 'nuclear polka' band Brave Combo, got the idea to work with light connected to musical pitches," George explains. "We started experimenting with that and got a commission to create an opening ceremony with lasers for the Texas Sesquicentennial, which was performed on Town Lake in Austin in August 1985."

After additional experimentation with laser technology, the Cisneroses debuted the Holiday Laser Show in 2004. Presented for a time in the

**At a Día de los Muertos celebration, the URBAN-15 *Carnaval de San Anto* troupe invites the audience to participate in the dance.**

Mesoamerican atmosphere of the Aztec Theater, the show now takes place in the Henry B. González Convention Center's Lila Cockrell Theater. One performance each year is reserved for the general public.

The popular *Carnaval de San Anto* dance troupe performances began in 1987. "The Fiesta Flambeau organizers called us and asked, 'What can you do that's fantastic?'" Catherine recalls. "We knew we couldn't use lasers in a parade, so we created *Carnaval* as a new form of folk art with avant-garde influences."

George describes the group's sound as a combination of African, Brazilian, and other Latin rhythms. "Our two most popular dance rhythms are variations on *son clave*, which is the root of

the famous Bo Diddley riff, and samba reggae, which combines elements of reggae and samba."

The Cisneroses studied Brazilian and Caribbean traditions of parade music and dance at workshops around the country, including at San Antonio's Carver Cultural Community Center. "Over the last 30 years, we've become most known for *Carnaval*," Catherine says.

URBAN-15 also promotes the medium of film with two innovative events. Each fall, the URBAN-15 Studio is one of 300 venues worldwide—including Texas sites in Commerce, Houston, and Grapevine—that screen films as part of the annual Manhattan Short Film Festival, a New York City-based event dedicated to independent filmmakers. Audiences in San Antonio vote with others around the globe on their favorite selections, actors, directors, and other categories.

At the Josiah Media Festival, URBAN-15 invites entries from filmmakers age 21 or younger. The festival's namesake, Josiah Miles Neundorf, was a San Antonio media artist who died of cancer at the age of 20 in 2006. "He was a friend of our cinematographer son, Antonio," George says. "Josiah worked as a video editor at URBAN-15, and in 2005 he participated in our *Nos Unimos* community technology

program, creating video slide shows of images of families from San Antonio's West Side." Last year's three-day festival featured narrative, animated, documentary, and experimental films by 55 young artists from across the United States and from Australia, Denmark, Peru, Estonia, and Egypt.

Each April, URBAN-15 hosts the Mega Corazon Poetry Festival, which is recorded and streamed live on its website. "Our slogan for the program of live readings and performances by San Antonio's most inspirational poets is 'A poet in the hand is worth two in the book,'" George says.

This spring, George's non-narrative sound installation, *Cacophony*, will convey a sonic history of San Antonio as part of the Witte Museum's exhibition honoring the city's 300th birthday. In addition to capturing audio produced by everything from horses to helicopters, George also recorded words in



## AGENDA FOR THE ARTS

URBAN-15, located at 2500 S. Presa St. in San Antonio, produces a series of performances, events, and workshops throughout the year to engage people in the arts. Call 210-736-1500; [urban15.org](http://urban15.org). Here are some of the group's upcoming events:

**Hidden Histories.** On the first Monday of each month in 2018, URBAN-15 will screen videos on family and community histories of San Antonio. The program is part of the city's tricentennial activities.

**Lucia in the Faerie Garden.** 8 p.m. Jan. 26 and 27. A multimedia exploration of imagination and magical realism, featuring original music, choreography,

video projection, and costumes.

**Martian Mardi Gras Fundraiser.** 8 p.m. Feb. 10.

**Mega Corazon Poetry Festival.** 1-9 p.m. April 6.

**Incognito: Fiesta's Masquerade Dance Dance Dance! Party.** 7-11 p.m. April 21 at Mission Marquee Plaza.

**Fiesta Flambeau Night Parade.** 7 p.m. April 28.

**Summer Solstice Performance** 2 p.m. June 21, San Antonio International Airport parking garage.


**Manhattan Short Film Festival.** Sept. 27-Oct. 7.

**Josiah Media Festival,** featuring young filmmakers. October.

**Carnaval de los Muertos.** Nov. 1-2.

**Holiday Laser Show.** Early December. Lila Cockrell Theater.

17 San Antonio languages, from Lipan Apache to Korean. Inspired by composers like John Cage and Pierre Schaffer, the piece speaks clearly to one of con-

temporary art theory's central tenets—that art is everything and everything is art. Few places embrace that maxim as fully as URBAN-15. 



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# Where the Rest Begins

Fort Worth's Stockyards Hotel lassoes travelers with its mix of history and present-day cowboy culture

story by John Lumpkin

**M**ORE THAN A CENTURY'S WORTH OF TIME TRAVEL awaits guests at the Stockyards Hotel in Fort Worth, which opened in 1907 at the fabled junction of Main Street and Exchange Avenue. Affixed to the hotel's brick exterior, a Texas historical marker introduces its intriguing history and sets the mood for a relaxing and rewarding stay.

A wrought-iron portico shelters the hotel's brass-handled entryway. Inside, the lobby unfolds with Western paintings, ceiling fans, antique rugs, a gilded mirror, and deep-cushioned leather couches. The saddle of Wild West entertainer "Pawnee Bill" Lillie reminds visitors of his early 20th century shows in Texas and beyond, events now re-enacted weekly at nearby Cowtown Coliseum.

Hotel Director Paul Gallagher, who has spent most of his professional life at the hotel, is usually at the registration desk

**The Bonnie and Clyde Suite occupies the southwest corner of the third floor, where the couple allegedly cased a nearby bank or watched for law enforcement during their stay in 1933.**

to help welcome new arrivals to the hotel's 52 rooms and suites. Reach the upper floors via a slow-moving automatic elevator; while you're riding to your room, take note of the antique brass hand-crank that once did the heavy lifting. Thus begins an overnight stay at Stockyards, which has hosted stars like Willie Nelson, George Strait, and Tanya Tucker, as well as famous outlaws Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow.

The hotel reinforces Fort Worth's identity as the place "Where the West Begins." It thrived during the Stockyards' 1920-40s boom and hung on as the last meat-packing plant closed in 1971. Encouraged by preservation efforts that targeted Fort Worth's north side, a series of owners since the 1980s converted a failing eyesore into a "cattle baron's hotel," Gallagher says, his eyes brightening.

"We epitomize the upscale cowboy from back in the day," he says. So, naturally, there is a Cattle Baron Suite. Its sleeping quarters include a king bed, boot jack, horseshoe-based lamps, a bathroom with pull-down chain toilet, and complimentary earplugs. A note explains the plugs are "the cure for loud cowboys," a reference to weekend revelry on the cobblestone street below.

A mounted Longhorn head above the wet bar oversees the suite's spacious living area. Rough-hewn chairs are upholstered with multi-hued cow hides, accented by a table for in-room dining or perhaps a late-night poker game. A framed poster recounting the history of three Texas cattle legends—Sam Maverick, Oliver Loving, and Charles Goodnight—hangs on the south wall.

The smaller Bonnie and Clyde Suite occupies the southwest corner of the third floor, where the couple allegedly cased a nearby bank or watched for law enforcement during their stay in 1933. Newspaper clippings of the couple's exploits, as well as a revolver that purportedly



A highlight of Fort Worth's Stockyards National Historic District, the Stockyards Hotel—which opened in 1907—offers luxurious lodging infused with Western history.

belonged to Bonnie Parker, decorate the walls.

Hotel patrons hail from as far away as Australia and Japan and as close as Fort Worth, Dallas, and Austin.

Families and newlyweds book the Celebrity Suite months in advance; it sports a fireplace, private covered patio, and hot tub. Valet parking costs \$15, a big-city bargain.

Next door, Fincher's White Front Western Wear, which stores its finest model boots in an antique vault, also has a century-old pedigree, as it dates to 1902. From this storied spot, you can walk to Billy Bob's Texas, Stockyards Championship Rodeo, and the twice-daily Fort Worth Herd cattle drive, as well as to bars like the White Elephant Saloon and restaurants like Lonesome Dove Western Bistro, Risky's Barbeque, or Tex-Mex favorite Los Vaqueros.

Better yet, don't leave the hotel for food and drink. You could start the evening at Booger Red's Saloon, named for the late Samuel "Booger Red" Privett, an early 1900s hotel guest and legendary bronc rider. There's no need for formalities; grab a seat at the bar on a weathered saddle and order a draft of Buffalo Butt amber, made by Fort Worth's own Rahr & Sons Brewing Company.

Beyond Booger Red's is the hotel's H3 Ranch restaurant, its name invoking more history. Brothers Robert, William, and David Hunter immigrated to the United States from Scotland in 1844 and eventually founded the H3 ranching empire in Nebraska. But first they hunted buffalo for William "Buffalo Bill" Cody, prospected for gold, and arranged for the first railway shipments of Texas cattle to northern markets. During their time in Fort Worth, they maintained an office at Main and Exchange.

Visible to diners, the kitchen is the centerpiece of the restaurant; there's a smoker for ribs and brisket, a hickory-fired grill for steaks and



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rainbow trout, and a rotisserie for pig and prime rib. Kimmie Gordon, who started working here 19 years ago as a busser, oversaw the cooking on my recent visit—10 hours for brisket, four hours for St. Louis-cut ribs, and

**You could start the evening at Booger Red's Saloon, named for the late Samuel "Booger Red" Privett, an early 1900s hotel guest and legendary bronc rider.**

just minutes for the trout, flavored with lemon butter, salt, and pepper. Good bets for sides: roasted ears of corn, baked pork and beans, or a Hunter family specialty known as Anita's Rice, made with wild rice, white rice, chives, celery, and onions.

Lunch can go another route—a sampler piled high with shredded-pork tacos, nachos, smoked chicken thighs, and H3's meaty ribs, glazed with Tabasco sauce. On a recent visit when I ordered that feast, server Kodi Cline, who's been working here 14 years, scooped a ripe avocado from its skin tableside to make guacamole, mixing in bits of red onion, lime juice, minced garlic, and serrano peppers.

Back in the lobby, a version of *The Cheyenne*, a classic early-1900s sculpture by Western artist Frederic Remington, rests prominently on a marble table. From the landing of the lobby's staircase, a portrait of Fort Worth's adopted son, humorist Will Rogers, looks down with his smiling visage, lariat in hand. He seems to be saying, "This is my kind of place." 🐾



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# PLATES

EAT + DRINK + TRAVEL

## Heaven on the Half Shell

Gilhooley's Restaurant  
and Oyster Bar

story by Heather Brand

The restaurant's signature dish, Oysters Gilhooley, features buttery pit-smoked oysters topped with Parmesan cheese.



**O**YSTERS HAVE THE REPUTATION OF BEING AN expensive delicacy—high-end fare offered at fancy eateries with prices to match. Not so at Gilhooley’s Restaurant and Oyster Bar. There is nothing highfalutin about this ramshackle seafood joint in the tiny coastal town of San Leon, located about 40 miles southeast of Houston on a small spit of land stretching into Galveston Bay. This corner of the bay was the stomping grounds of the French pirate Jean Lafitte in the early 1800s, and Gilhooley’s looks like the perfect haven for sailors and vagabonds. Situated about a block from the water, its weathered building has been cobbled together with salvaged lumber and corrugated metal, and its parking lot is paved with cast-off oyster shells from countless dinners. Inside, a horseshoe-shaped bar dominates the center of the room, and framed vintage photos, license plates, and Tiki masks crowd the walls.

**Aside from the signature Oysters Gilhooley, you can order the Oysters Picante, a spicy variant with Colby jack cheese and a splash of salsa.**

The rustic setting is part of Gilhooley’s charm, as is its no-frills attitude. Out front, a handpainted sign nailed to a tree near the entrance warns “No kids. No pets.” And while I once spied a one-eyed tomcat patrolling the patio for scraps, the ban on kids younger than 18 stands firm. The unapologetic ambiance and outstanding food attract a regular clientele of locals and a steady stream of outsiders who drive the distance to taste its signature dish, Oysters Gilhooley—a dozen pit-smoked bivalves slathered in garlic butter and topped with Parmesan cheese. This

Diners can nab a seat inside, near a horseshoe-shaped bar surrounded by vintage photos and Tiki masks, or relax outside on the shaded outdoor patio.

out-of-the-way spot recently drew media attention from Andrew Zimmern, who called it the “ultimate seafood dive” on his Travel Channel show *Bizarre Foods*, and from *GQ* magazine, which included Gilhooley’s on its list of “24 Best Restaurants in the Most Unexpected Places.”

Despite its recent acclaim, the restaurant has humble beginnings. Its original owner, Phil Duke, opened the business in 1987 in an old ice house with a view of the bay in nearby Bacliff. His supplier was Misho Ivic, a Croatian native who operated Misho’s Oyster Company just a few blocks away. According to Ivic, Duke’s priority was keeping prices affordable for his neighbors. “It never was a money-maker,” Ivic says. “Phil wanted to have good food for locals without much money, so someone with \$10 could have a decent meal and a beer.” In the mid-1990s, when the rent increased,

Duke relocated inland to San Leon, to an inauspicious patch of swamp-land plagued by mosquitoes. With Ivic’s help, he used truckloads of discarded shells to raise the ground and drain the standing water, and in three months’ time he and his kitchen crew had constructed the restaurant’s new venue out of recycled materials. When Duke decided to retire and sell the business in June 2016, Ivic stepped in and took over. “I was the first person he offered it to. I couldn’t tell him no,” Ivic says.

These days, Misho’s Oyster Company is one of the three top producers in the state. As Ivic is the supplier for his own restaurant, he can offer topnotch quality while keeping prices low. (A dozen raw oysters will set you back only \$12.95.) Ivic has also kept the original recipes intact—recipes he says Duke’s mother helped develop. “The barbecued-oyster recipe is best,”



**GILHOOLEY'S  
RESTAURANT AND  
OYSTER BAR**

is at 222 Ninth St. in San Leon.  
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he says, “but the fried shrimp is also good, and the boudin, the barbecue crab, and the seafood cakes. What I eat most often is the beef vegetable soup. You need to experiment with other things. You cannot eat oysters all the time.”

But why not? After all, Gilhooley’s has several varieties to choose from. Aside from the signature Oysters Gilhooley, you can order the Oysters Picante, a spicy variant with Colby jack cheese and a splash of salsa, plus you can add shrimp to either one. Both dishes are cooked over an open fire and are flavored by the fragrant smoke from burning pecan and oak logs. There’s also the fried

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oyster dinner, the fried oyster po'boy, and the seasonal oyster stew. And you can always have them raw as well, served chilled on ice with lemon wedges, saltine crackers, and cocktail sauce. The menu extends far beyond oysters, offering everything from the usual burgers and fries to Cajun dishes like boudin balls, étouffée, and the "Everybody Gumbo"—a mélange

of oysters, shrimp, chicken, and sausage swimming in a savory roux. Everything pairs perfectly with a cold longneck and a side of hushpuppies. Gilhooley's also has a full bar, but frozen drinks are as verboten as children here.

Although Ivic has kept Gilhooley's unchanged for the most part, he has made a few tweaks. Under his

management, the restaurant, once notorious for being cash-only, started accepting credit-card payments. It also introduced live music on alternating Friday and Saturday nights, when bands perform outside on a newly constructed stage at the back of the patio.

**Everything pairs perfectly with a cold longneck and a side of hushpuppies. Gilhooley's also has a full bar, but frozen drinks are as verboten as children here.**

Last summer's Hurricane Harvey brought some changes of its own. Gilhooley's sustained some minor damage from a roof leak, yet the restaurant was patched up and reopened for business within a few days. However, some of the reefs on which it depends were less fortunate. Oysters are finicky critters in that they require a balanced mix of fresh and salt water to thrive. The storm system dumped so much rainwater on the area that it killed off the oysters in East Bay, the span of water between Bolivar Peninsula and the mainland. Fortunately, Ivic has other leases, and he has faith the East Bay colony will rebound. The oyster business is all about cycles, he says. "It's kind of like gambling, but you have a better chance than at a casino," he affirms. In fact, he believes the last three years of flooding will help balance out the salinity created by the preceding years of drought. Less salinity equals fewer predators such as sea snails, resulting in more oysters that can be harvested.

In the end, even with environmental challenges, fickle weather, oil spills, and leasing issues, Ivic finds his work worth the effort: "I just love oysters. By now, I have oysters going through my veins." For some people, the world is their oyster, but for Ivic the opposite is true: "Oysters are my world." When you eat at Gilhooley's, you can taste why. **L**



## Get Your Motor Running

The Lone Star Throwdown returns to Conroe February 23-25 at the Lone Star Expo Center and Montgomery County Fairgrounds. This annual custom truck show brings aficionados and spectators alike to see the latest and greatest as well as compete among the best. Check out [PlayInConroe.com](http://PlayInConroe.com) for lodging options and more information.

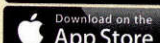


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## The Proof is in the Chocolate

Wiseman House raises the bar

story by **Cynthia J. Drake**

**I**'M STANDING INSIDE THE WISEMAN HOUSE chocolate-making studio in downtown Hico, and the chocolately, slightly salty aroma reminds me of a mug of hot cocoa. A few blocks away, the Wiseman House retail shop sells chocolates and chocolate-themed gift items, but here is where the *real* chocolate magic takes place.

The front of the studio features floor-to-ceiling windows that flood the room with warm light. It brings to mind what an old-world European confectionary might look like with stone

**As an artist, he began thinking of chocolate as his medium, bringing it to Hico from Belgium.**

walls, trays of chocolates in various stages of preparation, and apron-clad workers bustling around various work stations.

“Can you stand some toffee?” chocolatier Kevin Wenzel asks me, placing a few broken pieces in my hands. I take a bite, and the soft buttery crunch of the nutty toffee mixes with warm chocolate. Its light texture balances the rich flavors.

Making chocolate keeps Wenzel and his crew busy year-round, but from March through August, visitors can take a 45-minute guided tour (by appointment only) or take a hands-on chocolate-making class from Wenzel himself.

Wenzel grew up in the hospitality business. His family owns Dutchman’s Hidden Valley Country Store in Hamilton, and he was raised learning the finer points of making pastries, breads, candy, fudge, and charcuterie. “Except we didn’t call it that back then, we called it ‘meats,’” Wenzel says.

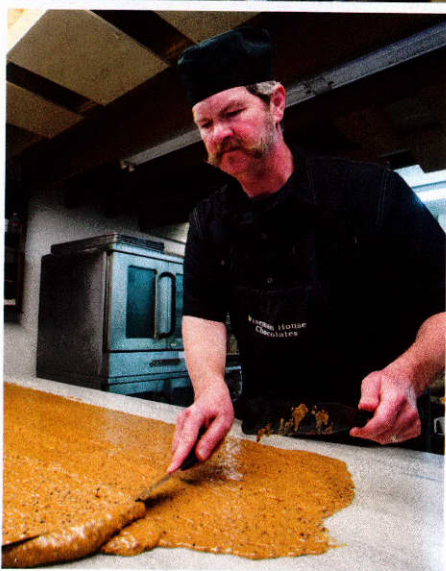
After school, the four Wenzel kids would pitch in to help out with the family business, which is run these days by their sister Kara Chorenziak. It’s still a popular road-trip stop for travelers seeking a stretch break, a bag of penny candy or other old-fashioned treats, or a sandwich such as the delicious toasted ham with sauerkraut and dill mayonnaise.

As a young adult, Wenzel went on to study art, backpacked in Eastern Europe and Asia, and worked a stint waiting tables at the Neiman Marcus store in downtown Dallas. Around that time his perspective changed.

“I came back here to Texas, met a girl, and fell in love,” he says.

The girl was LaDonne DeWitte, who had studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, was new to Dallas, and looking to meet some friends. They first arranged to meet at a church in Dallas.

**Wiseman House Chocolates’** retail shop offers truffles and other candies (with lots of samples), plus chocolate-themed gifts.



“She was leaning against a stone archway in a stone-colored dress,” Wenzel remembers. “She seemed to be part of something wonderful—this wonderful gothic arch in this cathedral, as if she had stepped down out of the rockwork to meet me.”

But for all his studying,

**Kevin Wenzel, left, welcomes visitors to the production studio for prearranged classes and tours of the production facility, March through August.**

volunteering, and life experiences, Wenzel didn’t yet have a profession—something he felt he needed for a proper courtship. Wenzel’s father, Ron, planted the seed for a chocolate business. First he took his son to a few chocolate conventions. Then the senior Wenzel found a Victorian house on West Grubbs Street in downtown Hico for sale. “Why don’t you look at this little house?” Wenzel recalls his father saying. “I think it could make a nice retail shop.”

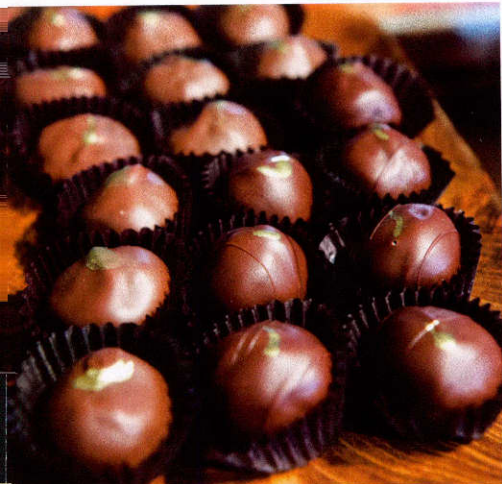
Wenzel gets choked up thinking about how he and his new bride hung a sign on the door of their new business in September 1997, indicating they

were going on their honeymoon in Big Bend. “People still say they remember seeing that sign,” he says, marveling at the customers who’ve been with them all this time.

In the beginning, the Wenzels sold pre-made chocolate and observed what their customers enjoyed. “I figured out how to make other people’s chocolate, and then I started making other things,” he says. As an artist, he began thinking of chocolate as his medium, bringing it to Hico from Belgium. He started experimenting with ganache, a creamy glaze or filling that is challenging to make because of its exacting temperature requirements.

“You know how your eye travels through a painting?” Wenzel says. “Your tastebuds should travel through a ganache.”

When he was first getting the retail



shop ready for business, he found several treasures during renovations, including an old bottle of whiskey. Experimenting, he mixed whiskey into a batch of ganache instead of cream, and he liked the result. Inspired, he started tinkering with brandies, chiles, spices, and fruits.

In 1998, he created a treat that has become a signature of Wiseman

House: the Wild Woman truffle, a combination of two kinds of Belgian dark chocolate both in the shell and the inner ganache, where the chocolates are mixed with whipping cream.

**In 1998, he created a treat that has become a signature of Wiseman House: the Wild Woman truffle.**

“Slightly sweet, bold, and never bitter, that’s a wild woman,” Wenzel says.

Wiseman House chocolates were named Best Truffle in the Austin Chocolate Festival for several years, and in 2009, Wenzel brought his chocolate to President Obama’s inaugural ball in Washington, D.C. But Wenzel says what keeps him going is his customers.

“I’m proudest that we have ladies who come in and say, ‘I’ve had chocolate all my life, all over the world, and yours is the best,’” he says. “I love to

see someone who is really enjoying the experience.”

Two decades after Wiseman House Chocolates opened, the historic brick buildings of downtown Hico are starting to welcome new tenants, ushering fresh energy to a town that is still fairly under the radar for most Texas travelers.

“I think it’s moving in a good direction. It’s not a ‘status town;’ it’s definitely a comfortable town and very approachable,” Wenzel says. “The proof is in the pudding, the secret is in the sauce; that’s true about chocolate, and it’s true about our town.”



**WISEMAN HOUSE CHOCOLATES'**

retail shop is at 406 W. Grubbs St. in Hico; the studio is at 106 Pecan St. For details about hours, tours, and classes, call **866-460-3571**.  
[wisemanhousechocolates.com](http://wisemanhousechocolates.com).

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# Murphy's Steakhouse Delivers

Fine dining, country-style, in Winchester

story by Michael Corcoran

**T**HERE'S NOT MUCH TO DO IN WINCHESTER, population 50, on the western lip of Fayette County. So when someone in neighboring Bastrop or Lee Counties says, "Let's go to Winchester," they're talking about eating at Murphy's Steakhouse. It's fine dining, country-style, with an old Western look and a chargrilled rib-eye steak that's to drive for. And you can mail a package from there, too, as the steakhouse's co-owner and manager, Georgianna Fox-Orona, is also Winchester's postmaster. If you open the wrong door to enter the building on Thomas Street, constructed in 1913 by German immigrant C.H. Schmidt, you'll be facing a wall of post office boxes.

Go in the other door and you're at the restaurant's antique hostess station, which Georgianna bought on eBay 10 years ago for \$20. She was so ecstatic when it arrived, she sent the seller

**The steakhouse attracts diners from nearby La Grange, Giddings, and Smithville, but many fans drive from hours away.**

in California another \$200. "This was exactly what I was looking for," Georgianna says. "We're all about preserving history here." The hostess station is from the early 1900s, and the tin ceiling and exposed brick walls are original to the building. The wooden bar, with a giant mirror backdrop, six original barstools, and a sign prohibiting dancing on tables with spurs, resembles Miss Kitty's saloon from *Gunsmoke*.

It's a rustic, old-fashioned ambiance, but folks drive to Murphy's for the food, not the décor. All the steaks are hand-cut, so no two are alike. And if you order the 6-ounce, you just might get 8, as the sizes are eyeballed, not weighed. Everything here is done the old-fashioned way.

In 2004, Georgianna was working for a petroleum services company with Prince "Boykie" Murphy, who owned the restaurant with his wife, Sherry, but had been thinking of selling it. A waitress as a 15-year-old in Rockdale, with two decades of restaurant jobs to follow, Georgianna had long dreamed of owning her own eatery. She told Murphy she was interested but first had to talk to her boyfriend, Richard Orona. "I was persistent and he finally gave in," she says. The couple took another plunge together when they married in 2015, after 25 years together.

Schmidt opened the building just before World War I as a shoemaker's shop, but he gradually added food items and other necessities, including cheese and crackers, sausage, sardines, a pickle barrel, and dry goods. "He even sold coffins," Georgianna says. Winchester prospered in the early 20th century when cotton was king, so Schmidt's shop grew into the town's general store. After Schmidt died in 1921, the store was passed down to his daughter Hattie and her husband, M.V. Harris, and it thrived for five decades as Harris General Merchandise Store. The Murphy family bought the building in the 1970s and in 1995 renamed it Murphy's Steakhouse, though they still sold merchandise.

When Georgianna and Richard took



In a 1913 building that once served as Winchester's mercantile, fabulous rib-eyes and other specialties await.



over in 2005, they cleared out the merchandise and dedicated the space to food service. “We’ve had to expand the kitchen six times just to keep up with the demand,” Georgianna says. Making food the one and only priority was a smart move. On weekends, the 29 tables fill up rapidly, though on weekdays there’s rarely a wait. The steakhouse attracts diners from nearby La Grange, Giddings, and Smithville, but many fans drive from hours away. If you’re going from Austin to Houston, or vice versa, the steakhouse is just a 10-mile detour off State Highway 71.

It’s only a matter of time before The Food Network discovers Murphy’s, as if Georgianna and her crew aren’t busy enough. But there’s always time for a post office customer. “They come into the steakhouse and track me down!” she says with a laugh. But she complies because, while Murphy’s may put Winchester on the map figuratively, the post office does that literally.

Mail has always been important in Winchester (est. 1851), where the townsfolk used to go down to the depot and wait for the “Dinky” (a two-car train on the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad) to bring the day’s post. Locals say you could set your watch according

## RECIPE

### MURPHY’S STEAKHOUSE TUSCAN RIB-EYE

- ◆ 1 18-oz. bone-in, rib-eye steak
- ◆ 2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- ◆ 4 sprigs fresh rosemary
- ◆ 4 sprigs fresh thyme
- ◆ 2 cloves garlic, peeled and smashed
- ◆ 1 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- ◆ 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice
- ◆ 1/4 tsp. fresh ground black pepper

Place steak in a sealable container. Mix olive oil, rosemary, thyme, and garlic together, then pour over steak to marinate an hour or longer. Heat grill pan over medium-high heat. Sprinkle steak evenly with salt. Place on pan and sear five minutes without moving steak. Flip and repeat on other side. Add fresh lemon juice and pepper to taste. Serve.



### MURPHY’S STEAKHOUSE

is at 204 Thomas St. in Winchester.  
Hours: Tue-Sat 11 a.m.-9:30 p.m.  
Call **979-242-3433**;  
[eatatmurphys.com](http://eatatmurphys.com).

to that train, which served the town until 1949.

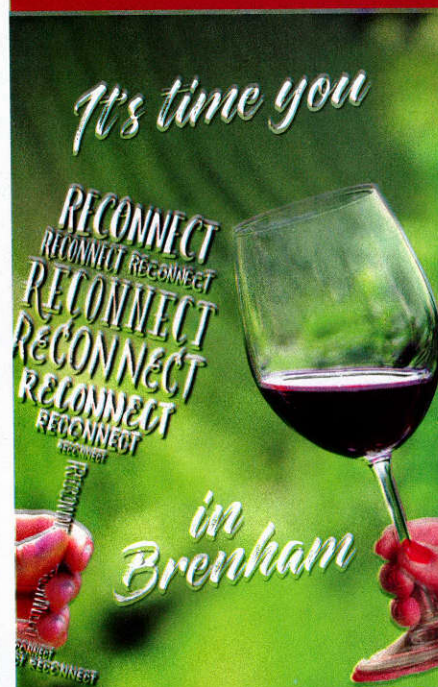
Things still sometimes move at that old-timey pace at Murphy’s, where everything is made to order. Service is rarely fast, especially when a group of motorcyclists shows up en masse on a Saturday afternoon. Your growling stomach will appreciate the bountiful salad bar with a kettle of savory pinto beans, which is included in most orders. You can also order the salad bar à la carte (\$4.99 for one trip or \$6.99 for all you can eat).

Murphy’s has won multiple accolades, including Best Overall Restaurant, in *The Fayette County Record’s* 2017 restaurant awards. Customers and critics alike love its wide menu, which features everything from fried oysters and cheeseburgers to pastas and blackened catfish. But if you’ve come this far, why not choose the filet mignon (\$22.99)? Have your companion order the gorgeous butterflied jumbo shrimp and share, along with a platter of award-winning onion rings. There are none better in all of Texas—which can also be said for the chicken-fried steak, which comes in small and large sizes, though the menu really should say “huge” and “I’m-gonna-have-to-take-the-rest-to-go.” Murphy’s goes through a lot of Styrofoam for a town of 50.

Room for dessert? That’s a good one, but temptation is strong with the delicious homemade pies, banana pudding, and molten chocolate cake, whose thick liquid center oozes out like lava. If you’re craving ice cream, Georgianna and Richard’s Winchester Depot and Ice Cream Junction is right around the corner at 211 Front St.

What more does Winchester need? Maybe a health club to help diners work off all that delicious goodness! 🍷

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ECLECTIC EATERIES ★ HISTORY  
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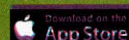
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*That was then.*

**THIS IS  
WOW**

**AMARILLO**

*has surprises in store*



STORY BY *Jason Boyett*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL



# LIKE MANY TEXAS PANHANDLE NATIVES

I grew up on a steady diet of rodeos and stick horses. So when I think of my Amarillo childhood, I think about Boots'n Jeans. Not the attire, but the retail store. The rustic wooden doors of Boots'n Jeans once beckoned shoppers beneath a life-size sculpture of a wild, rearing horse. Every year, for my birthday, my grandparents took me there for a new pair of ropers.

That was then. In the decades since, the store sold to a big corporation, transformed into a national Western-wear chain, and finally closed for good in 2016 after 43 years. A Jimmy's Egg opened in its place a few months ago.

You can deconstruct that metaphor anyway you like: "Amarillo sheds its Western heritage" or "Progress replaces boots with brunch" or—because I can't remember the last time I shopped there—"People change." But those sentiments are too simple. Amarillo's Western history is too entrenched to be yanked off like a dusty pair of Tony Lamas.

The first pioneers arrived here in the late 1880s, staking a railroad trading stop in the middle of the Texas Panhandle. Before long, Amarillo had become the largest cattle-shiping station in the country and a financial hub for the ranchers who lived here.

Today it's another kind of hub, and the 230,000 residents in Amarillo's immediate metro area are only part of the story. The "Yellow City"—*amarillo* means yellow in Spanish—serves as the cultural, retail, and medical heart for the Panhandle's 26 counties and 400,000 residents. And with 8 million travelers barreling across Interstate 40 every year, it's also an unexpected tourism destination. For many visitors, including British tourists traveling historic Route 66 and Germans looking for genuine Texas, the only part of Texas they see is Amarillo. Says one local hotelier, "This is what they think Texas looks like."

That's not a bad thing. Within a mile of my southwest Amarillo home lies actual rangeland complete with rickety old wooden windmills. To the north, the Canadian River carves rugged mesas. You can see for miles in every direction. If you

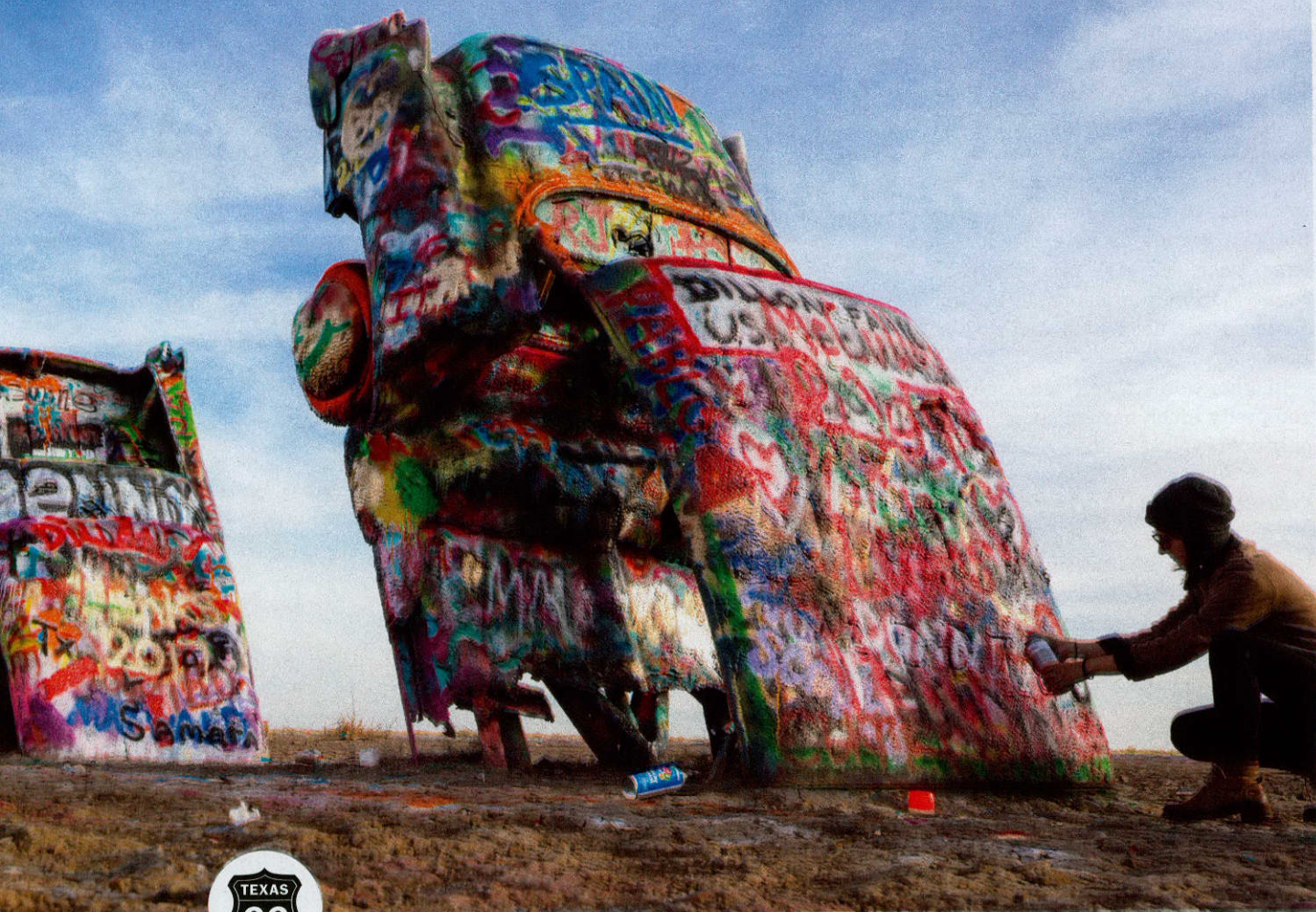


squint—and ignore the modern-day wind turbines—you can pretend you're in a Larry McMurtry novel.

I guess that's another metaphor.

Today, in downtown Amarillo, construction cranes interrupt the city's skyline as Amarillo builds a \$45 million ballpark that will house a Double-A team in 2019. The interstate is subject to constant construction, with traffic cones demarcating sections of heavy use and future growth. Hungry travelers stop at legendary Western-themed restaurants like the Big Texan Steak Ranch and at newer joints they saw on the Travel Channel.

In other words, Amarillo is currently at a crossroads between its past and future. Wondering where we might end up, I decide to do something that always brings insight: I try a new perspective. I decide to become a hometown tourist, sampling highlights from Amarillo's traditional past and forward-looking present. What does the city have to offer outsiders? And where is Amarillo headed?



## OLD-SCHOOL AMARILLO

### *The Big Texan*

Worldwide, Amarillo is probably most famous for The Big Texan Steak Ranch and its free 72-ounce steak (“if eaten in one hour”), a deal promoted on billboards from Arizona to Arkansas. R.J. “Bob” Lee opened the restaurant in 1960. In front of the grill, he reserved a table for cowboys from the nearby stockyards, selling them nickel beer and watching them devour beef. Lee settled on the steak challenge and over-the-top Western décor because he saw how these real-life cattlemen captivated travelers and thought a Texas-style eating contest could attract new customers.

Ten spray-painted vintage Cadillacs, buried nose-down in the dirt, make up Amarillo’s irreverent Cadillac Ranch. At The Big Texan, a 72-ounce steak is yours for free—if you can eat it (and a slew of side dishes) in an hour.



Today, Lee's sons Bobby and Danny manage The Big Texan, which now operates a craft brewery on-site. The restaurant's interior is a cinematic saloon come to life, complete with taxidermy mounts, Longhorn displays, and tables laden with all manner of steaks. Danny tells me about a customer who visited The Big Texan with his granddad decades ago, and as an adult made a point to bring his own grandkids here just for the experience. He says the family encounters those comments all the time. "I never get tired of hearing that," Bobby adds.

In other words, if you visit Amarillo, you pretty much have to come here, if only to say you've been.

### *Oliver Saddle Shop*

The steaks at The Big Texan notwithstanding, the best-smelling place in Amarillo is this saddle shop operated by Richard Oliver and his sons, Bryan and Zeb. My nose guides me to the back workshop, where Richard finishes a custom saddle for a rancher in Palestine while Zeb sews medicine bags for their booth at a rodeo. Beautifully designed, hand-tooled chaps, belts, and other products round out the retail side of the shop.

Richard's grandfather, C.W. Oliver, opened the business in 1917 in Vernon

**YCSF Craft veers from tradition with its Korean-style tacos and other delicious items. Oliver Saddle Shop has been in business since 1917. Nine bronze sculptures outside the American Quarter Horse Museum commemorate famous horses and their riders.**



### *AQHA Museum*

Whenever I drive past the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum, I see horse trailers from throughout the United States in the parking lot. That's because while the museum showcases artwork and sculpture celebrating the American quarter horse, the adjacent building is the headquarters of the American Quarter Horse Association, the largest single-breed animal registry in the world. Engraved on the concrete floor of the museum's Grand Hall is a lineage chart going all the way back to the early 1700s. Even if the names mean nothing to you, it's fun to trace, say, the progeny of prominent quarter horses Old Fred and Little Joe.

But if you're not a rancher or horse owner, this highly regarded museum is still worth a stop. Kids and adults alike will love the theater and enter-



### *Palo Duro Canyon*

Fifteen minutes by car southeast from Amarillo, the flat plains give way to an ancient geological wonder. Palo Duro Canyon is 800 feet deep and 120 miles long. As locals like to remind outsiders, that makes it the second-largest canyon in America. Outdoor enthusiasts stream to Palo Duro Canyon State Park to enjoy its stunning scenery. Hiking trails take visitors past goblin-like orange hoodoos—the Rock Garden Trail is my personal favorite—and a growing mountain-bike community enjoys streamside pedaling as well as more challenging terrain.

The area used to be part of Charles Goodnight's JA Ranch, once one of the largest cattle operations in the world. Near the entrance to the park, a few grazing Longhorns represent that history. Before you enter, stop at the new Palo

## **YOU CAN SEE FOR MILES IN EVERY DIRECTION ... AND PRETEND YOU'RE IN A LARRY MCMURTRY NOVEL.**

before bringing the family to Amarillo in 1960. "We're among the oldest working saddle shops in Texas, at least under the same family," Richard says. These days, many saddles are mass-produced, so it's refreshing to see a family practicing a traditional, meticulous craft. If you're ever at a rodeo or around working cowboys, ask them about Oliver Saddle. They'll know the name. Then they'll show you their saddles.

taining exhibits on the first floor, and the well-designed displays of memorabilia and photos on the second floor make for fascinating browsing. "The horse has been a partner to man for as long as man can remember—a partner in work, a partner in play, a companion," museum Curator Crystal Phares says. "They're a huge part of our history. It's amazing to see the way horses affect people."



Duro Canyon ZipLine Adventure Park. It's not exactly authentic Old West, but I doubt even the stern Colonel Goodnight would have passed up the opportunity to soar a quarter mile across his canyon.

### *Cadillac Ranch*

If Amarillo is famous for its free 72-ounce steak, it's also known around the world for Cadillac Ranch, the much-photographed art installation west of the city. Surrounded by farmland, Cadillac Ranch features 10 vintage Cadillacs buried tail-up in the dirt. The meaning of it all is disputed—Is it a nod to the American dream? The open road?—so don't try to make sense of it.

Just do what everyone else does, and leave some legal graffiti. At some point, spray-painting these cars became the thing to do at Cadillac Ranch. Don't worry about bringing your own spray paint. Just grab a can from the pile near the cars.

## CONTEMPORARY AMARILLO

### *Food & Drink*

These days, there's more to Amarillo's dining scene than chicken-fried steaks and T-bones, thanks to a rapidly growing culinary community. In east Amarillo, a cash-only dive called the Coyote Bluff Cafe, located south of I-40 on Grand Street, offers a spicy Burger from Hell. The devilish half-pound burger is accompanied by sautéed jalapeños, Tabasco sauce, and a secret habanero-based "Coyote Hell Sauce."

Then there's YCSF Craft. Just a couple years old, this establishment has already been featured on the Travel Channel for its unusual dishes, from rémoulade-drenched "Animal Fries" to Korean-style bulgogi steak tacos. YCSF stands for "Yellow City Street Food," and Chef

Scott Buchanan is all about experimentation. "We're taking different regional cuisines and focusing them through a local lens," he explains. "We want to try and capture an experience and share it with the city." In addition to YCSF, Buchanan and his business partners will soon open Six Car Pub & Brewery, a downtown restaurant on Polk Street.

### *Jack Sisemore Traveland RV Museum*

Whether they cruise in Winnebagos or not, locals are as familiar with Jack Sisemore's Traveland as any other Amarillo business, thanks to a catchy jingle and ubiquitous local TV advertisements in the 1980s and '90s. Sisemore started the dealership in 1974 and, until selling to Camping World last year, owned and managed the business with his son,

**The Galleries at Sunset Center occupy a former shopping mall. Dozens of vintage RVs recall old-school road-tripping at the Jack Sisemore RV Museum. The Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts boasts world-class acoustics.**



Trent. Nationwide, the duo are known as the founders of the Keystone line of recreational vehicles. Less familiar, however, is the real jewel of the dealership: the Jack Sisemore Traveland RV Museum, which is tucked behind the rows of travel trailers.

Decades ago, the Sisemores began collecting and restoring vintage RVs, including the oldest Fleetwood RVs, existence and the bus that appeared in the 2006 Robin Williams comedy *RV*. What catches my attention is a shiny 1935 Torpedo, the world's oldest Airstream. Most of the museum's vehicles allow visitors to explore them, but this one is so rare it has a "please don't touch" sign. I'm tempted to disobey, but Trent is standing right beside me. He guides me through the exhibits because Jack is away on his annual RV vacation. Of course he is.

"Whenever my dad saw a really unusual RV, he would try to trade for it," Trent says. "At this point, people contact us almost every day asking if we want theirs." The museum opens during



business hours and is accessible from the front desk of the dealership.

### *The Galleries at Sunset Center*

From the Georgia O'Keeffe watercolors at the Amarillo Museum of Art to works by local and national artists at high-end spaces like Cerulean Gallery, Amarillo's art scene is surprisingly robust. Art lovers can experience this diversity at The Galleries at Sunset Center, a concept created by the late Ann Crouch, a local artist and philanthropist who converted the retail spaces of this former mall into working studios and galleries for around 60 different artists. Most are available to discuss their work during the monthly "Art Walk," a free event that runs 5 to 9

p.m. on the first Friday of every month.

One of my favorite galleries showcases the primitive, hand-molded Colombian-style pottery by ceramic artist Luz Angela Crawford. "Pottery" doesn't do these clay pieces justice. They're sculptures.

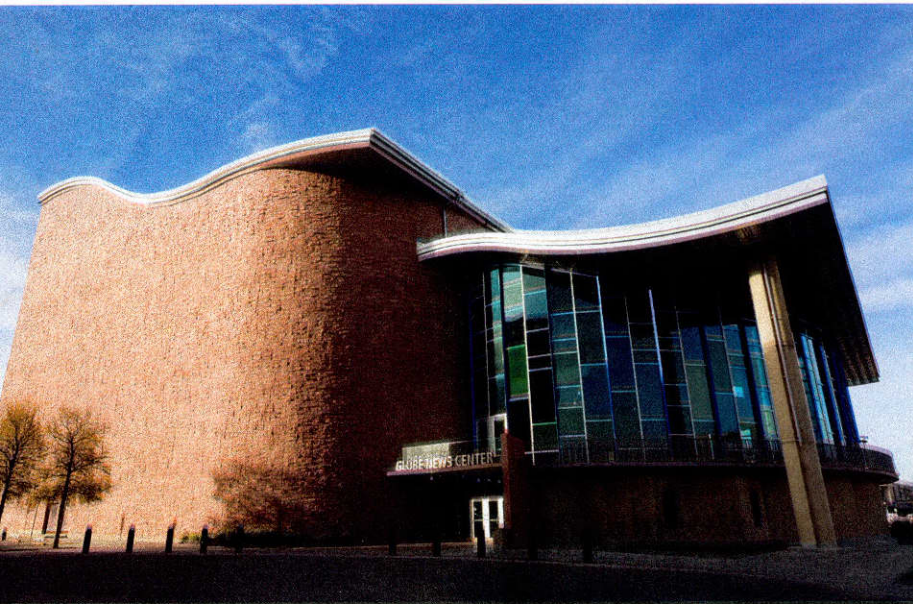
### *Amarillo Botanical Gardens*

Locals mostly know this amazing garden complex for its annual Christmas event, when the 4 acres transform with Christmas lights. We locals are missing out, because—news flash—gardens are a lot prettier during the spring and summer.

Again, we'd do well to follow a tourist's lead. "Hardly a day goes by in the summer that we don't see someone from outside the country," says Greg

## **LOCAL ARTIST ANN CROUCH CONVERTED THE RETAIL SPACES OF A FORMER MALL INTO ARTISTS' STUDIOS AND GALLERIES.**





Lusk, director of gardens. The Amarillo Botanical Gardens include a tropical conservatory, a full-fledged Japanese garden (opening this spring), and plenty of native plants that thrive in this arid, windy landscape. This nonprofit is at its best from May through October, of course, when the colorful outdoor gardens are flourishing in addition to the protected greenhouses.

ABG evolved out of gardening clubs that began in the 1920s. Lusk says he views the gardens as a “museum for plants,” where visitors get an enriching blend of culture, the arts, and science. For some, the existence of such a lush environment in the harsh Panhandle climate may be unexpected. “That’s what makes us valuable here. People assume that it’s difficult to grow plants in Amarillo, so they don’t even attempt it. But if I can grow it here, they can do it at their home,” Lusk says.

### *Globe-News Center*

The most visible building on Amarillo’s skyline may be the 31-floor Chase Tower, known locally as “the tallest building between Dallas and Denver.” But conversation tends to fizzle once you get past its size and blocky vertical lines.

But the Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts? *That’s* a building worth talking about. The Globe opened in 2006 and hosts resident companies like the Amarillo Opera, Amarillo

Symphony, and Lone Star Ballet as well as ticketed single-night shows by performers ranging from Cheech Marin to Lyle Lovett. The undulating roof and multicolored glass—set against a red sandstone exterior—give it a striking appearance. But the real magic is on the inside, where an orchestral shell radiates from behind the stage into complicated layers of stained wooden panels. Everyone says the acoustics here are world-class, but during a recent Amarillo Symphony performance, I got lost staring at the design. Composer Paul Hindemith’s *Kammermusik* washed right over me. Maybe that’s the point.

### *FRONTIER TOWN*

Saddles and steaks. Sculptors, chefs, and symphonic atmosphere. These days, Amarillo is more than a cowboy town. The city definitely has Western roots running deep beneath the hard-packed soil, but the roots only tell part of the story. They serve as a solid anchor—with the wind around here, sometimes you need one—for branches that reach in surprising directions, and continue to grow. 🐾

*Amarillo native Jason Boyett has written for American Cowboy, Paste, The Guardian and other publications. He produces and hosts Hey Amarillo, an interview podcast focused on his hometown. Photographer Erich Schlegel travels the world in search of terrific images, but he always returns to Texas.*

## ESSENTIALS *Amarillo*



For general travel information about Amarillo, contact the Amarillo Convention & Visitor Council, 800-692-1338; [visitamarillo.com](http://visitamarillo.com).

The **Big Texan Steak Ranch** is at 7701 E. I-40. Call 806-372-6000; [bigtexan.com](http://bigtexan.com).

**Oliver Saddle Shop** is at 3016 Plains Blvd. Call 806-372-7562; [oliversaddle.com](http://oliversaddle.com).

The **American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum** is at 2601 E. I-40. Call 806-376-5181; [aqha.com/museum](http://aqha.com/museum).

**Palo Duro Canyon State Park** is in Canyon, about 15 miles southeast of Amarillo. Call 806-488-2227; [tpwd.texas.gov](http://tpwd.texas.gov).

**Palo Duro Canyon ZipLine Adventure Park**; [palodurozip.com](http://palodurozip.com).

**Cadillac Ranch** is at 12601 W. I-40.

**Coyote Bluff Cafe** is at 2417 S. Grand St. Call 806-373-4640; [coyotebluffcafe.com](http://coyotebluffcafe.com).

**YCSF Craft** is at 2916 Wolflin Ave. Call 806-353-9273.

**Jack Sisemore Traveland RV Museum** is at 4341 Canyon Drive. Call 806-358-4891; [sisemoretraveland.com](http://sisemoretraveland.com).

The **Galleries at Sunset Center** are at 3701 Plains Blvd. See [amarilloartists.com](http://amarilloartists.com).

**Amarillo Botanical Gardens** are at 1400 Streit Drive. Call 806-352-6513; [amarillobotanicalgardens.org](http://amarillobotanicalgardens.org).

**Globe-News Center for the Performing Arts** is at 500 S. Buchanan St. Call 806-378-4297; [amarillociviccenter.com](http://amarillociviccenter.com).



**THE DUDES**  
*abide on three historic*  
**TEXAS RANCHES**



STORY BY *Dan Oka*  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY *Kenny Braun*



# WAS THERE EVER

a better way to see the Texas countryside than from horseback? Even before cowboys became synonymous with the Lone Star State, the great Comanche horsemen of yesteryear discovered the advantages of riding steeds liberated from the herds that arrived in the desert Southwest with Spanish conquistadors. And how fortunate are we centuries onward to be able to saddle up and experience life from atop a horse?

These were the thoughts that crossed my mind during a trail ride at the Mayan Ranch on the outskirts of Bandera, the western Hill Country town nicknamed the “Cowboy Capital of the World.” On a brisk morning, my family and I rode on a Medina River path overhung by post oak and pecan trees, spotting colorful butterflies coming to life in the sun. The experience may have been more mild than wild, but the easygoing wranglers ensured that everybody in our string of riders had a grand old time.



**Opening spread:**  
A view from inside the Log Cabin at BlissWood Bed and Breakfast Ranch in Cat Spring.  
**Left:** Kevin Fitzpatrick, a Bandera trick roper, performs frequently at the Mayan Ranch.  
**Above:** Cash, part of the trail-riding herd, peeks out from the corral at Mayan Ranch.



“Just keep your horse in order,” cautioned cowboy Ryan Hicks, whose family owns the 350-acre ranch. “Some of them are best friends, but some of the horses don’t like each other.”

For nearly 100 years, would-be buckaroos have been visiting ranches in Texas and beyond for the chance to play at being a *vaquero*. Named for the old-timey term for city slickers in fancy duds, dozens of Texas “dude” ranches from the North Texas prairie to Big Bend’s red-rock majesty provide a chance to escape the big city and saddle up for trail

rides, campfire cooking, fishing, trapshooting, and wildlife viewing. With choices ranging from luxury resorts to budget bunks, I landed upon three ranches for a chance to experience an authentic taste of the Texas frontier.

“You had to be more careful back then—Bandera really was the Wild West when we came into it,” said Judy Hicks, who in 1951 acquired the Mayan Ranch along with her husband, Don Hicks. Before the Hickses came along, the Mayan was so rowdy that Lackland Air Force Base officers in nearby



San Antonio had declared the ranch off-limits for enlisted military. “They had entirely different clientele back then,” Judy said. The Hickses raised a brood of 13 children on the Mayan. Today, four generations of the family help run operations, and other than a 21-and-up watering hole in the main lodge, the Mayan offers a kid-friendly experience.

Based in Houston, after nearly two decades in Texas, I don’t get to enjoy the state’s cowboy heritage nearly enough, unless you count the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, which each spring dominates the city’s collective calendar. So, I was delighted that the Mayan Ranch—one of about 10 dude ranches in the Bandera area—checked all the boxes with a wide range of activities from breakfast hayrides to trick-roping demonstrations, and country-and-western dinner concerts.

The Mayan offers a motel-type facility to

accommodate weddings and conferences, but my family opted for one of the guest cabins hewed from rough timber. Our cabin resembled an old jailhouse, complete with a cell enclosed by metal bars, which my daughter, Ursula, adopted as her office for the weekend. Along with dinner buffets serving barbecue and Tex-Mex in the lodge, another highlight of the Mayan is the hearty hayride breakfast—eggs, bacon, biscuits and gravy, and potatoes served around a fire pit along the Medina River.

Closer to my Houston home, I located the BlissWood Bed and Breakfast Ranch in Cat Spring—a little more genteel than the scene at Mayan Ranch, but still plenty rustic. Set among the low-rolling hills that rise from the Katy Prairie, BlissWood is part of the 600-acre working Lehmann Legacy Ranch, featuring a herd of Angus

**Above: BlissWood Bed and Breakfast Ranch offers trail rides that traverse pastures and woodlands. Opposite: Carol Davis, proprietor of BlissWood Bed and Breakfast Ranch, on her horse Corleon.**



**SET AMONG THE LOW-ROLLING HILLS THAT RISE FROM THE KATY PRAIRIE, BLISSWOOD IS PART OF THE 600-ACRE WORKING LEHMANN LEGACY RANCH, FEATURING A HERD OF ANGUS CATTLE.**

cattle. The ranch also keeps a menagerie of livestock worthy of a Dr. Dolittle story: Visitors can see miniature donkeys and horses, a few goats, axis deer, a couple of shaggy American bison, and black buck antelope with long, distinctive corkscrew horns.

Within an hour of my arrival, I was taking a horseback tour with BlissWood's owner, Carol Davis, leaving behind the show barn and heading for the picnic pavilion near the catch-and-release fishing lake stocked with bass. Davis, who also owns a court-reporting business in Houston, purchased the ranch in 1990 because it reminded her of her childhood home near La Grange. As we moseyed across the ranch, Davis pointed out the refurbished lodging called the Texas Farm House, which she first spotted in a Fayette County hayfield. "It was falling down," she said. "But I just had to have

it. So I went door to door until I found the owner."

As we enjoyed a box-lunch picnic of sandwiches and chips outdoors, Davis told me about the film crew that had scouted her property the week prior for a German version of the romantic reality TV show, *The Bachelor*. (They returned in November for seven days to film an episode.) Later, we jumped in Davis' bright yellow Jeep to check out the bison enclosure and the adjacent roomy safari tent, an accommodation with an authentic *Out of Africa* feel.

Rather than camp out, albeit in luxury, I stayed in the comfy Magnolia Suite, part of BlissWood's Dog Trot House, regretting that I had not convinced my wife to join me for this midweek escape. The suite offered plenty of room to spread out, a Jacuzzi-style bathtub, and a shaded porch tucked into a copse of mature live oak trees. In the morning,



**This page:** Activities at BlissWood Bed and Breakfast Ranch include fishing, wildlife viewing, archery, and lodging in various cabins. **Opposite page:** Longhorn rides and hayride breakfasts at Mayan Ranch.

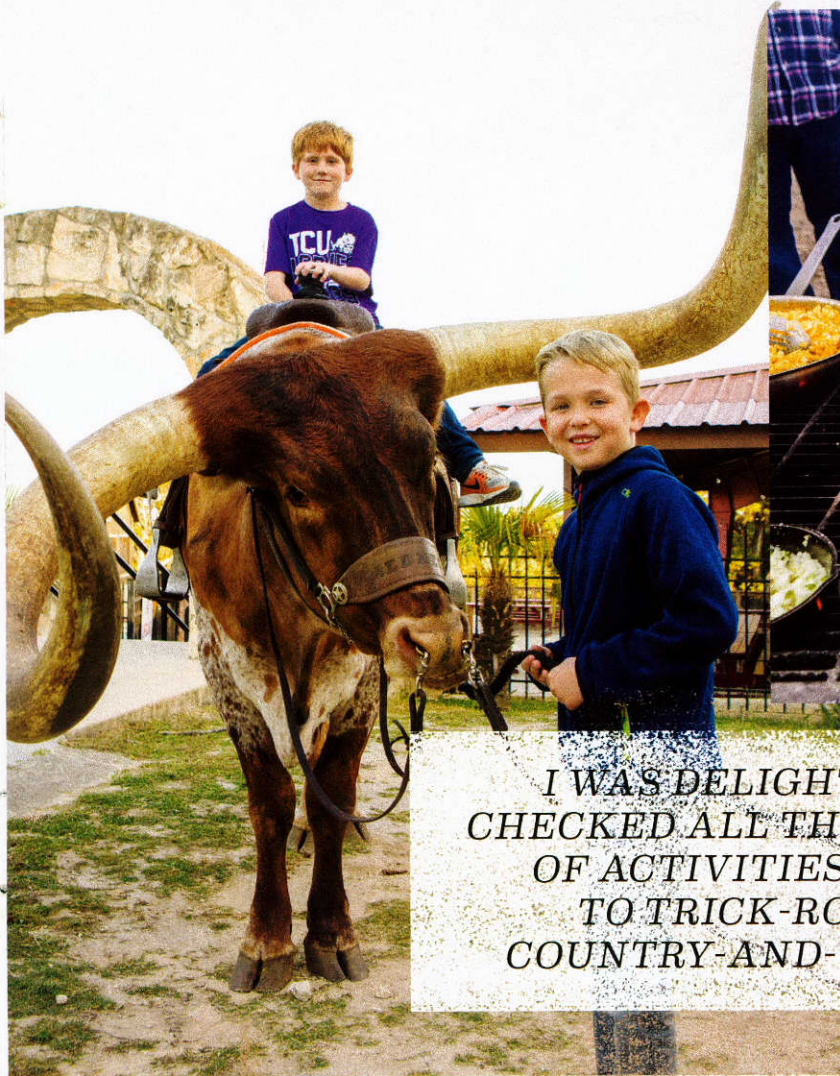
I took advantage of the ranch's simple in-room breakfast of baked goods, yogurt, fruit, and juice. Had I visited on a Friday or Saturday, I could've tried Davis' restaurant—Carol's at Cat Spring—which opens for supper with dishes like flat-iron grilled rib-eyes, pork chops, and grilled salmon.

Later, I made my way to the trapshooting center, where I met Skeeter Hagler, BlissWood's activities director, ranch hand, and official photographer. As I embarrassed myself by missing something like two dozen clays in a row, it dawned on me that as infrequently as I handle the reins of a horse, my skills with a shotgun could use even more work. I managed to salvage the afternoon by mastering the tomahawk throw and successfully sticking a few throwing knives in the board. Finally,

drawing on nearly forgotten summer camp skills, I nailed a few bull's-eyes at the archery range.

Meanwhile, Hagler entertained with key details of his life story, including not just how he had arrived at BlissWood, but also how he won a Pulitzer Prize. Hagler earned the top journalism honor as a staffer at the now-defunct *Dallas Times Herald* newspaper for his photos of working cowboys in the Texas Panhandle, including dramatic portraits, shots of cattle drives, and rodeos. Later, about a decade ago, a freelance assignment for *Texas Highways* took Hagler to Davis' doorstep in Cat Spring. The rest, as they say, is history: Hagler fell hard for the picturesque setting and struck a deal to help take care of the ranch. Guests can now hire a Pulitzer-winner to photograph their vacations





*I WAS DELIGHTED THAT THE MAYAN RANCH CHECKED ALL THE BOXES WITH A WIDE RANGE OF ACTIVITIES FROM BREAKFAST HAYRIDES TO TRICK-ROPING DEMONSTRATIONS, AND COUNTRY-AND-WESTERN DINNER CONCERTS.*

and weddings. “There’s something about the light,” Hagler mused. “I just could not get enough of it, so I decided to move in.”

Of course when people think of Texas cowboys, they often think of the arid mountains of West Texas. And as someone who loves every aspect of the Big Bend region, I was excited to learn about the historic Prude Ranch in the Davis Mountains. Last spring, my family visited the area for a Star Party at the McDonald Observatory and to explore The Nature Conservancy’s Davis Mountains Preserve. Our host there mentioned we would find a warm welcome at the Prude, which has welcomed greenhorns to West Texas’ wide-open spaces since 1921. Workers with the Civilian Conservation Corps were the ranch’s first guests, lodging at the

Prude during the construction of Davis Mountains State Park, located a couple of miles down Limpia Canyon toward Fort Davis.

The history of the Prude Ranch parallels the growth of the dude ranch phenomenon nationally, which took off in the wake of World War II. To offset the vagaries of the post-war cattle industry, ranchers across the West started marketing their spreads as throwback resorts for tourists. The Prude family originally settled its ranch in 1897, comprising a mind-blowing 300,000 acres. But by the 1950s they discovered that families from Texas and beyond would happily pay for their children to enjoy horseback riding and outdoor adventure at ranch summer camps.

Today, summer visitors generally share the

# BUDED UP

## **MAYAN RANCH,**

350 Mayan Ranch Road, is 1 mile southwest of downtown Bandera. Accommodations include lodge rooms and private cabins. Overnight rates for adults are \$165; \$100 for teenagers; \$80 for 12 and younger. The rate includes three meals, two horseback rides, and daily activities. Call 830-796-3312; mayanranch.com.

.....

## **BLISSWOOD BED AND BREAKFAST RANCH,**

13205 Frantz Road, is 15 miles northwest of Sealy. Cabins start at \$199 per night, breakfast included. Adventure options available for additional cost, including horseback rides for \$69 per guest per hour. Call 713-301-3235; blisswood.net.

.....

## **PRUDE RANCH,**

201 Prude Guest Ranch Road, is 6 miles north of Fort Davis off State Highway 118. Lodging in motel rooms, bunkhouses, and cabins starts at about \$95 with deals for large groups. Meals available for groups of 12 or more. Horseback rides cost \$30 per person per hour; the half-day picnic ride costs \$110 per person. Call 432-426-3201; prude-ranch.com.



**Prude Ranch trail rides explore the Davis Mountains of far West Texas.**

ranch with summer campers, but the rest of the year families and individual guests have the run of the place. Lodging choices range from RV spots to family cabins with room for up to six, as well as a bunkhouse row for larger groups and the motel-like rooms of the guest lodge. (The dining hall opens only for groups of at least 12.)

Now comprising 1,300 acres, Prude Ranch remains at the heart of one of Texas' wildest landscapes, where piñon pines dot the desert scrub and tall peaks offer endless opportunities for exploring. As with other favorite ranch getaways, trail rides remain a top attraction—the horse herd runs to 66 head—including a half-day picnic ride to the edge



**PRUDE RANCH REMAINS AT THE HEART OF ONE OF TEXAS' WILDEST LANDSCAPES, WHERE PIÑON PINES DOT THE DESERT SCRUB AND TALL PEAKS OFFER ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPLORING.**

of the Prude property. Beyond horses and hiking, many guests use the Prude as base camp for touring the region.

"We're just about a mile high, so the summers aren't too hot and the winters aren't too cold," said Kelly Prude Boultinghouse, who represents the fifth generation of the Prude family to work the ranch. "And there's no cell phone service, which is something we market. What makes us special is you can get away from the real world. Otherwise, there's plenty to take advantage of once you get here."

Indeed, the nearby Davis Mountains State Park offers miles of trails for mountain bikers and hikers, and Balmorhea State Park is famous for its cool

spring-fed swimming pool. Travelers can also explore a vintage frontier military post at Fort Davis National Historic Site, and the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center, which has several miles of trails and a botanical garden of native plants. But, if you ask me, nothing compares to riding through these hills on horseback. **L**

*Writer Dan Oko first discovered the joys of being a dude nearly 30 years ago at the Diamond J Ranch, outside of Ennis, Montana. Austin-based photographer Kenny Braun's new book of Texas landscapes, **As Far As You Can See**, is set for publication this spring by The University of Texas Press.*





# HOOFBEATS

*of History*

*One of the*  
**HOUSTON  
LIVESTOCK  
SHOW AND  
RODEO'S**

*most iconic events  
ends before the*

**RODEO EVEN  
BEGINS.**



**STORY BY**

*Susan L. Ebert*

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY**

*Will van Overbeek*

# AS I DRIVE WEST ON BECKENDORF

Road in Katy, the riders appear on the western horizon of the road ahead like a mirage. Scores of horseback figures and a group of covered wagons warp on the horizon in the blazing noonday sun, dust blooming in puffy plumes from the horses' hooves and the wagons' wheels. They drift, cloudlike, across the bluebonnet-bedecked pastureland. Having just cleared the Grand Parkway, the third outer loop around Houston, and departed the city's concrete canyons for the rolling grasslands of the Katy Prairie, I might be forgiven if my mind's playing tricks on me.

But it's not. I've been invited to lunch this February afternoon by members of Wagon No. 13 of the 1,200-rider, 24-wagon Salt Grass Trail Ride—the oldest of the 11 trail rides heading for Houston. All in all, nearly 3,000 riders and approximately 100 wagons will converge in Houston's Memorial Park to participate in the Downtown Rodeo Parade, which heralds the opening of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. The 2018 event marks the 80th anniversary of the parade, which commences in downtown Houston on Feb. 24 and showcases the 11 HLSR trail rides that arrive in Houston from all points of the compass.

In keeping with Texas-size standards, it's the world's largest organized trail ride.

The idea for the first ride hatched over lunch at the posh Cork Club in Houston's now-defunct Shamrock Hotel back in 1952: As Brenham Mayor Reese Lockett launched into a romanticized reverie about his younger days spent on horseback driving cattle from the Hill Country to the Gulf Coast as a young man, a buddy chided him, saying, "Reese, you couldn't ride your horse from Brenham to Houston." The gauntlet thus thrown, Lockett determined to saddle up and follow the old Salt Grass Trail into Houston for the opening of Houston Fat Stock Show (the precursor of today's Rodeo). He coaxed rancher friend E.H. Marks into joining him on horseback, with ranch hand John Warnasch driving a mule wagon, followed by a second wagon carrying KPRC reporter Pat Flaherty, who chronicled the adventure. Lockett soon had newspapers and television stations vying for coverage. As they rode toward Houston, a dozen or so other riders fell in. By 1959, Lockett's little "publicity stunt" had swelled to more than 2,000 riders accompanied by nearly 100 wagons and comprised men, women, and children from all walks of life.

**Opener: Members of the Salt Grass Trail Ride, the oldest and largest ride, trot triumphantly on their Appaloosas into Houston's Memorial Park.**

**Opposite: Mules pull one of the Salt Grass wagons out of their campsite at Houston Farm & Ranch Club.**

Celebrating its 66th anniversary this year, the Salt Grass Trail Ride sowed the seeds for 11 more trail rides, 10 from across Texas and one originating in Logansport, Louisiana (see sidebar on Page 56). Each of the 11 rides has its own distinct personality, but arguably none can match the exuberance of "The Granddaddy of 'Em All," the Salt Grass.

The ride takes its name from the region's signature salt grass, which does not die back during winter as other grasses do. Early Texas cattlemen, before northern routes became profitable, would overwinter their herds on the mineral-rich, salt-tolerant, thick grass to fatten up before driving them east to market in New Orleans.

Among the Salt Grass Trail Ride's 24 wagons, arguably none are as style-conscious as the Desperados' Wagon No. 13 with internationally acclaimed Western fashion designer Pat Dahnke, who has ridden the Salt Grass every year for 33 years, serving as its dress code officer. Each day's outfit is classy yet practical: a brimmed dark hat (felt or straw) with a stampede string, dark boots, blue jeans, and matching shirts and bandanas. On the back of the saddle, a neatly rolled yellow riding slicker emblazoned with the Desperados logo completes the look.

"The members of the other wagons poked fun at us when we first started wearing matching outfits," Dahnke says. "But once they saw what an impressive sight we were, most all of 'em

*EACH OF THE 11 RIDES HAS ITS OWN DISTINCT PERSONALITY, BUT ARGUABLY NONE CAN MATCH THE EXUBERANCE OF "THE GRANDDADDY OF 'EM ALL," THE SALT GRASS.*





## DOWNTOWN RODEO PARADE

starts at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 24, at the corner of Bagby and Walker streets. For more on the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, see Page 69.

followed suit. As the Salt Grass Trail Ride stretches out for more than a mile as we come into Houston, it's a breathtaking panorama."

Dahnke started riding the Salt Grass in 1986 with her 5-year-old daughter, Tara. This year marks the 32nd ride for the duo. For the past several years, Tara—a horse trainer by trade—has served as the Desperados' wrangler. The steeds run the gamut from the classic "bulldog-type" quarter horses to spectacular leopard Appaloosas, flashy paints, and caramel-hued palominos. Draft horses—including a particularly striking team of Belgians—pull wagon duty. Riders from as far away as Singapore, Iraq, Germany, and France fly in to participate in this historic event, as do riders from across the country.

## ON THE TRAIL

"THE RODEO STARTS IN WINTER and ends in spring," is an expression you'll commonly hear around Houston—February's fickle weather means those on the trail ride must be prepared for stinging sleet, heavy rains, and possibly even tornadoes.

"Several years ago, a tornado hit just as we were making camp in late afternoon," says Pat Dahnke, as we slurp cowboy stew from plastic cups. "The sky turned that odd blackish-purple with an ominous yellow glow, and suddenly, foot-and-a-half-thick trees were

just popping out of the ground by their roots. The horses turned their rumps to the north and braced themselves against the onslaught. The horses' demeanor calmed the riders as the tornado blustered through."

The Salt Grass, with its size, moves like an advancing army. Before the riders arrive at today's designated lunch stop, a leading battalion comprising RVs, dualies pulling horse trailers, "chuckwagon" trailers, and semitrucks hauling flatbeds of porta-potties had prepared for them. And like drill sergeants, the trail bosses of the 24 wagons hold all riders to the pre-ordained timetable.

Lest this all sounds too structured, don't doubt that the Salt Grass riders can kick up their boot heels with the best of





**Clockwise from left: Two members of the Prairie View Trail Ride move in for a smooch during a stop at Katherine Smith Elementary School in Houston; two participants in the Texas Cattlemen's Trail Ride arrive in style in a fringed wagon; a farrier shoes Beau, a Salt Grass horse; the Salt Grass Trail Ride.**

Mission San Francisco de la Espada.

"We camp nearby and ride to Mission Espada to receive the blessing that commences the trail ride," says Trail Boss Larry Valles, who rides a handsome line-back dun—a buckskin horse bearing the sign of the cross down its spine and across its withers (shoulders). "It's a powerful experience. The next day, we ride into Seguin. As we cross over the bridge in the center of town, so many people are out enjoying Walnut Springs Park, and they line up by the fence to wave and cheer as we ride by. It's a special Sunday morning."

The Mission Trail Ride celebrates the history of the early *vaqueros* and cowboys who drove cattle east from San Antonio to New Orleans over the Opelousas Trail (roughly along the route of modern-day I-10, and along or parallel to the Old Spanish Trail). On the first documented Texas cattle drive in 1779, Francisco Garcia drove 2,000 head of cattle east from San Antonio to New Orleans over the Opelousas Trail—long before the northern-bound Goodnight-Loving, Great Western, Chisholm, and Shawnee trails would enter Texas lore.

Valles, who has ridden with the Mission Trail Ride for 22 of its 27 years, says the camaraderie of the ride is the most rewarding part. "We have three, sometimes four generations of families that ride with us," he says. "Renewing friendships, having a good time being together, celebrating history, sharing this great experience—that's what keeps me involved."

Later that day, I wheel my Jeep into the vast parking lot east of the Sam Houston Race Park, where the Prairie View Trail Ride is stopping for the night. The first thing I notice is the striking difference in their horses

'em. They plan ahead for the pajama parties, costume parties, and motor-home "open houses" at their nightly stops—and enjoy the camaraderie of communal meals around the campfire, often followed by evening sing-alongs. "One year, we had both Elvis and Billy Gibbons look-alikes at the costume party," Dahnke says. "That might have been the year we danced on the tables until they splintered." Clearly, the ride delivers plenty of fun and hijinks alongside its regimented discipline. Generations

of families, plus friends, associates, and total strangers have all become saddle pals because of the Rodeo Parade.

"We band together to keep everyone safe," Dahnke says. "Regardless of whether someone's an attorney or a janitor, everyone's looking out for each other and willing to lend a helping hand with a thrown shoe, a broken strap, whatever."

To the west, the Mission Trail Ride began its ride a full two weeks prior to the parade at one of the oldest missions in Texas—San Antonio's

**"REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SOMEONE'S AN ATTORNEY OR A JANITOR, EVERYONE'S LOOKING OUT FOR EACH OTHER AND WILLING TO LEND A HELPING HAND."**

## HORSEMEN, PASS BY

To learn where you can best see the 11 trail rides pass or enjoy one of their stops at parks, schools, or nursing homes, visit [rodeohouston.com](http://rodeohouston.com).

### 1 MISSION TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1991: celebrates the early vaqueros and cowboys who drove cattle east to New Orleans  
**STARTING POINT:** San Antonio's Mission Espada  
*239 miles, 65 riders, 3 wagons*

### 2 NORTHEASTERN TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1990: pays homage to the Buffalo Soldiers  
**STARTING POINT:** Cheek  
*109 miles, 200-250 riders, 8 wagons*

### 3 OLD SPANISH TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1956: covers the second-longest route  
**STARTING POINT:** Logansport, Louisiana  
*216 miles, 50-100 riders*

### 4 PRAIRIE VIEW TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1957: first African American Houston Rodeo trail ride  
**STARTING POINT:** Hempstead  
*89 miles, 200 riders, 7 wagons*

### 5 SALT GRASS TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1952: longest-running and largest trail ride  
**STARTING POINT:** Cat Spring  
*103 miles, 1,200 riders, 24 wagons*

### 6 SAM HOUSTON TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1955: approximates General Sam Houston's route from Montgomery to Houston in the mid-1800s  
*70 miles, 100 riders, 9 wagons*

### 7 SOUTHWEST TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1993: honors the heritage of the black cowboys  
**STARTING POINT:** Rosenberg  
*123 miles, 275 riders, 10 wagons*

### 8 SOUTHWESTERN TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1973: plans stops at elementary schools to educate and empower youth  
**STARTING POINT:** West Columbia  
*100 miles, 250 riders, 10 wagons*

### 9 THE SPANISH TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1961: family ride dedicated to teaching youth about the hardships and rewards of pioneer life  
**STARTING POINT:** Shepherd  
*109 miles, 125 riders, 9 wagons*

### 10 TEXAS INDEPENDENCE TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1961: ride splintered off from Salt Grass to allow riders not affiliated with a wagon group a way to participate  
**STARTING POINT:** Brazoria  
*100 miles, 100-150 riders*

### 11 VALLEY LODGE TRAIL RIDE

Est. 1959: nicknamed "Champagne Ride" for its gourmet meals  
**STARTING POINT:** Brookshire  
*71.5 miles, 150 riders, 9 wagons*





**Top: Prairie View, the first black trail ride, celebrates its 60th anniversary this year. Bottom: Strong supporters of the military and breast cancer survivors, the Texas Cattlemen's Trail Ride isn't participating in this year's festivities due to Hurricane Harvey's impact on its members. Expect them to ride again in full patriotic force in 2019.**

versus the other rides' horses. Slick, elegant, and leggy, they can be none other than Tennessee walking horses.

"You're right about that," Trail Boss Myrtis Dightman tells me, with his signature booming laugh. "The new generation of the Prairie View ride has moved toward walking horses for speed and comfort." With their distinctive four-beat running walk in lieu of a bouncy trot, Tennessee walkers are among the smoothest-riding saddle horses in the world.

The Prairie View Trail Ride originates in Hempstead on the Sunday prior to the Downtown Parade, spending Sunday night through Tuesday morning in Prairie View. There's a show-and-tell at Jones Elementary School on Monday morning, and its Prairie View Trail Riders Chili Cook-Off takes place just west of the Prairie View A&M football stadium in the afternoon. "We want to communicate and preserve the traditions of the black cowboy," Dightman says.

His father, Myrtis Dightman Sr., co-founded the Prairie View Trail Ride in 1957, at a time when the black trail riders needed to be accompanied by armed guards to enter Houston's Memorial Park. Known as "The Mother of Black Trail Rides," the Prairie View ride focuses on the contributions made by black cowboys to Texas' ranching heritage. Dightman, now in his 60s, has been riding the Prairie View since he was a 2-year-old. He proudly tells me that his grandson Myrtis, 11, has also been on the ride since he was 2.

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## SHOW TIME

DIGHTMAN, WHO HAS BEEN SERVING in a management capacity with the Prairie View riders for more than a decade, divides his trail boss responsibilities into two parts, the ride and the parade.

"I have two different roles," he says. "One is to manage the trail ride itself and do everything I can to keep the

people and the animals safe on the trail ride. But once we've all made it to Memorial Park on Friday, and we meet up with the other trail rides, folks want to relax and celebrate with music and dancing going on into the wee hours. My job as trail boss is to keep on 'em, and remind them that the big parade [starts] early the next morning, with everyone on their best behavior and looking their best."

Indeed, when all 11 of these trail rides have threaded their way into Memorial Park to share tales of the trail—with riders of many nationalities from many walks of life—it's as vibrant a fabric of Texas diversity as one could imagine.

And something magical must be in the moonlight that Friday night. As the sun rises over Memorial Park Saturday morning, thousands of riders and horses, accompanied by hundreds of wagons, have woven themselves into one unified tapestry as rich as Texas itself, unfurling east toward the sun to the Downtown Rodeo Parade.

Participating in the parade has its rewards, of course: In 2017, HLSR named the Salt Grass "Top Trail Ride" of the parade, with my lunch "pardners" of Wagon No. 13 winning "Best Show Wagon." Dightman's diligence in reminding his riders to be at their best for the Saturday parade earned Prairie View the coveted "Best Appearing Group" of the parade.

Still that's not what makes him the proudest.

"When we ride into downtown Houston with a sea of people cheering us and I see the smiles on thousands of children's faces, it still brings tears to my eyes," he says. "There's nothing like it." **L**

*Susan L. Ebert, a lifelong horsewoman, enjoyed getting reacquainted with old saddle pals and meeting new ones while reporting this story. Despite the excellent advice of W.C. Fields, Texas Highways photographer Will van Overbeek often works with animals and children. He has been photographing life in Texas for magazines since 1979.*

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Take a break this spring and experience life on island time. Galveston Island's enchanting views of sparkling waters and sandy shores are a couple of reasons why time seems to stand still in this historic beach town. And while relaxing along 32 miles of coast is worth the trip alone, it's just the beginning.



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Explore the historic elegance of Galveston's 1895 Moody Mansion at 2618 Broadway, and hear stories from family members on a self-paced audio tour. The home is meticulously restored to its 20th Century glory and filled with original furnishings. Rotating exhibits of special interest are installed throughout the year, and premium behind-the-scenes guided tours are also popular – call (409) 762-7668 for premium tour schedules and reservations. Moody Mansion is a popular setting for social events, wedding receptions and bridal photography, and offers group discounts.

Open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Visit [moodymansion.org](http://moodymansion.org) for photos and events.



## 16<sup>th</sup> Annual FeatherFest

Experience the magic of spring migration at FeatherFest, Galveston Island's annual birding & nature photography festival! It's no wonder Galveston is one of the top birding locations in the country with its wide variety of habitats in a small geographical area that some 300 species call their permanent or temporary home throughout the year. Register now to attend the largest birding and nature photography festival on the Upper Texas Coast being held April 19-22 on Galveston Island. Greg Miller, Victor Emanuel, Hector Astorga, and other experts lead memorable field trips and workshops, birding and photography events.

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[www.AmericanUnderseaWarfareCenter.com](http://www.AmericanUnderseaWarfareCenter.com)  
(409) 770-3196



## Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier

Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier is a Gulf Coast destination featuring family-oriented attractions including 16 rides, midway games, waterfront dining and retail shops. From the extreme steel coaster, the Iron Shark to our 5D Theater Ride, kids of all ages will relish in the excitement.

Be adventurous at [pleasurepier.com](http://pleasurepier.com).  
409.766.4950



## The San Luis Resort

Your paradise awaits you at The San Luis Hotel on Galveston Island. The opulent, 16-story hotel offers lavish accommodations, breathtaking Gulf views, and unmatched, personalized service. The ultimate retreat is complete with superior amenities including the indulgent Spa San Luis, an enhanced luxury pool and grotto, two designer boutiques and the finest in award-winning dining. Along with top-of-the-line accommodations, guests of all ages will enjoy an endless variety of spring break activities, events and entertainment perfect for couples, families and groups! Experience the very best in style, elegance and comfort at The San Luis Hotel.

[SanLuisResort.com](http://SanLuisResort.com)  
800-392-5937



## Holiday Inn Resort Galveston

Family-fun is in store at the Holiday Inn Resort Galveston – On the Beach this spring break! Guests ages five to twelve can get their game on playing the latest X-box games in the kid's game room, channel their inner Picasso with painting activities, and partake in fun group games like hula hoop contests and giant Jenga. In the evenings, enjoy family friendly movies poolside or head to B. Jigger's for daily happy hour and nightly live entertainment!

[GalvestonHolidayInn.com](http://GalvestonHolidayInn.com)  
409-740-5300



## Hilton Galveston Island Resort

Soak up the sun at the Hilton Galveston Island Resort. The well-appointed resort offers exceptional accommodations and amenities coupled with fun-filled spring break activities for the whole family to enjoy! Partake in exciting pool games and activities, including beach bingo, contests, and arts and crafts, or sip on a cocktail poolside and enjoy great music from live DJs. Between a dynamic line-up of activities, a vast variety of dining options and a location steps away from the beach, there is truly something for everyone at the Hilton Galveston Island Resort.

[GalvestonHilton.com](http://GalvestonHilton.com)  
409-744-5000



## Pier 21

Pier 21 is a waterfront entertainment and dining area located on Galveston's historic harbor in the Historic Strand Seaport area. Pier 21 offers a variety of attractions, restaurants, and lodging at the Pier's exclusive hotel and marina, Harbor House Hotel & Marina. Mitchell Historic Properties owns and preserves approximately one-fourth of the buildings in the Historic Strand Seaport area including Pier 21.

For more information about Pier 21 visit [www.pier21galveston.com](http://www.pier21galveston.com). Pier 21 is located at 2100 Harborside Drive, Galveston, Texas 77550.



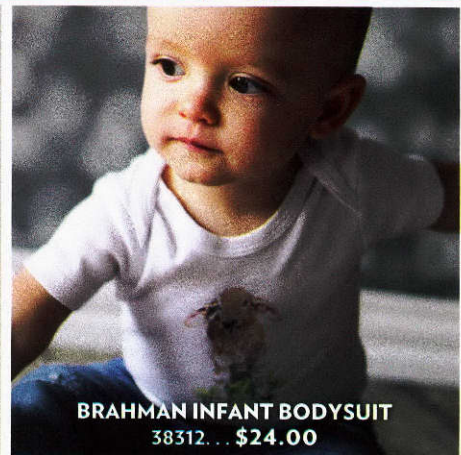
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# HIT THE ROAD

CAN'T-MISS GETAWAYS



DESTINATION: LUFKIN

## Out of the Woodwork

In the heart of the Piney Woods, family-friendly Lufkin finds its groove

story by Jennifer Babisak

### REMEMBER LEARNING THE THRILL OF THE

road trip as a child. Back then, my parents would load us up in the wee hours of the morning to trek hundreds of miles across Texas or to far-flung parts of the U.S. One of those childhood trips took us to Branson, Missouri. The experience has been blurred in my mind by the brush of time, but I remember my dad stoically abandoning his reserved nature at a musical variety show where he was called up on stage to dress as Dolly Parton.

Amusing as that Branson trip was, my children—ranging from toddler to teen—handle short jaunts better than long days in the car. So we find



- ▷ **Nacogdoches**  
30 minutes
- ▷ **Houston**  
2 hours
- ▷ **Waco**  
3 hours
- ▷ **Austin**  
4 hours

a little piece of Branson in the heart of East Texas, only a few hours from our Dallas-area home. We head to Lufkin for a leisurely weekend of family fun, making sure to time our visit with one of the half-dozen performances that Lufkin's homegrown music show, the Pineywoods Jamboree, stages throughout the year.

The Jamboree rocks the old bones of the historic Pines Theater on Saturday nights. Founded in 2010 by locals Jimmy and Leigh Ann Hughes, the Jamboree fulfills Leigh Ann's childhood dream. "People always ask me why I haven't moved to Branson to sing full time," she says, "but I want to

be home with my family. Since I was 12 years old, I've had this thought that I would start my own music show in my hometown."

Each show carries a different theme—ranging from '50s rock 'n' roll to Southern gospel—and the one we attend features music by country artists, including covers of songs from Johnny Cash and a tribute to Glen Campbell and Don Williams. As is typical of opries (as country musical variety shows are known) the Jamboree invites regional guest artists to sing solos and usually includes at least one comedy act in each night's performance.

One particularly impressive guest, a young teen named Colt Varnado, takes the stage to belt out Cash's "Ring of Fire,"

which is met with nods of approval and hearty applause from the multi-generational crowd. Leigh Ann ends the show by taking center stage to sing the gospel classic "The Anchor Holds."

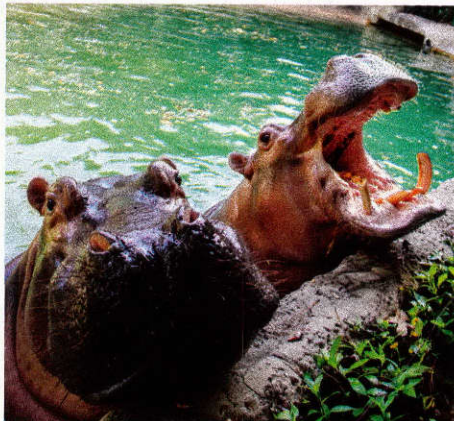
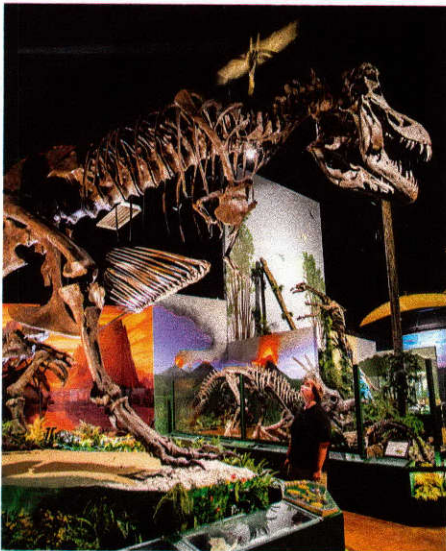
Still feeling our toes tap to the rhythm of fiddle and guitar, at show's end we make our way out of the theater and into another community haven—Standpipe Coffee House next door. A gathering place for local artists, Standpipe hosts poetry slams on the first Friday of every month. We don't find poets but plenty of lively chatter and a gallery of local artists' work lining the weathered brick walls.

One wall features a 100-year-old Coca-Cola mural that workers rediscovered when renovating the building before Standpipe's opening in 2011. The coffee shop's name alludes to another historical link, referencing the 84,600-gallon, 100-foot-tall water

storage tank that stood in Lufkin's town center from 1891 until the late 1920s. I relish this backdrop of history while savoring the decadent caffeine hit of an iced vanilla latte; the kids gobble mini cinnamon rolls with chocolate milk.

Come morning, we set out to explore Lufkin's wilder side—that of dinosaurs and ferocious beasts. Thankfully, the Naranjo Museum of Natural History is still in its sleepy stages of waking for the day's crowds when we arrive because my 2-year-old roars with excitement at first sight of the dinosaur skeletons filling the museum's interior. In fact, she drops into a crawl and begins impersonating a T-Rex. Her more civilized 6-year-old sister, a geology lover, thrills at a vault of precious stones.

The museum opened five years ago as a way to house the archeological collection of Dr. Neal Naranjo, a local who caught the archeology bug as a boy exploring East Texas forests in search of arrowheads. He eventually upgraded these childhood hunts to full-scale paleontological digs, growing his store of



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:**

Naranjo Museum of Natural History; hippos at the Ellen Trout Zoo; Standpipe Coffee House; the Pineywoods Jamboree features Branson-style entertainment for the whole family; downtown Lufkin holds a special kind of charm; Texas Forestry Museum.





artifacts through personal finds as well as collecting treasures professionals have unearthed from around the world. Naranjo's museum includes hundreds of prehistoric artifacts: dinosaur skeletons such as Mary Ann Hadrosaur—discovered in Montana by Naranjo and his crew and named in honor of his wife—and more modern treasures, such as one of the largest moon rock samples (on long-term loan by NASA in thanks for East Texas' assistance in space shuttle Columbia's recovery), and an ornate 18-karat gold and citrine necklace originally purchased by *Jungle Book* author Rudyard Kipling.

Our adventures in the wild continue at Ellen Trout Zoo, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. The zoo started when local businessman Walter Trout Jr. received a hippopotamus for Christmas in 1965. And that was all the prompting Trout needed to turn his dream of a zoo for Lufkin into a reality. That founding hippopotamus, Hippy, delighted generations of children in his 30-year reign at the zoo. We peek

at Hippy's successors in an eye-level hippo-quarium. But not all the animals here are enclosed—dozens of peafowl roam throughout the zoo, occasionally giving a quick flash of their jewel-toned tail feathers.

As much as the kids enjoy admiring the leopards, recoiling from the snakes, and giggling at monkeys, they can hardly wait to leave the animal exhibits. That's because the Z&OO Railroad train awaits us outside the gates, on the grounds of Ellen Trout Park. The

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**I relish this backdrop of history while savoring the decadent caffeine hit of an iced vanilla latte; the kids gobble mini cinnamon rolls with chocolate milk.**

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train, which runs from March through October, skims over Ellen Trout Lake and into the cool shade of the forest surrounding the zoo. The kids would take lap after lap on the train if we let them, but there's more of Lufkin to experience.

Next, we stop by the Texas Forestry Museum, where the kids run straight to Timbertown, the interactive children's area. They scamper about an oversized train table, hauling timber from forests to sawmill with the tiny freight cars. And then they head to the sawmill house, which is outfitted with period décor from a late 1800s/early 1900s sawmill town. Donning pioneer dresses and bonnets, the girls busy themselves cooking play food over an antique stove. Outside, the kid-appeal continues with a caboose and retired steam engine that begs pint-size conductors to climb aboard and ring the bell, and family-friendly trails that wind through forested acreage behind the museum.

Such an active lineup of adventure makes us crave some time to unwind and refresh with a good night's sleep. Our lodging base for the weekend—the Villas of Crown Colony—is tucked into towering pine trees, albeit bordering a



**LUFKIN**

For Lufkin visitor information, call the Lufkin Convention & Visitors Bureau at **936-633-0349**; [visitlufkin.com](http://visitlufkin.com).

golf course, providing a fitting visual of Lufkin's past meeting its present. The condo features plenty of space for us to spread out, with a bedroom overlooking a living area whose sliding-glass patio door affords glimpses of those gorgeous pines. The full kitchen is ideal when the kids are too cranky to venture eating in public.

The next day I claim a slice of this family adventure for some retail therapy within the charming shops of downtown Lufkin. In the artistic spirit of the Pines and Standpipe, First Street's revitalized historic buildings today house friendly boutiques. Walking by shops offering everything from East Texas graphic tees to a velvet leopard-print coat, I duck into Sweet Ethel Mae to pick up a cinnamon-scented candle and inspiration for restoring my own hodgepodge of furniture via the gorgeous chalk-painted and waxed pieces on display. Market to Market reveals sparkling agate coasters in the shape of Texas—perfect for my little geologist.

To reward the kids for their patience with my shopping excursion, I turn to a whimsical bakery called Confections, housed in an antique train car and swathed in cheerful red and white ribbons and décor. The small space practically bursts with tiers of cupcakes and elaborately decorated cookies, in addition to light savory selections like soups and sandwiches. I'm tempted by the banana pudding cupcakes topped with Nilla Wafers and the dainty Mexican wedding cookies, but I fall for the classics, treating the kids to sugar cookies outlined in festive hues and chocolate chip cookies oozing rich sweetness with every bite. It's a fitting finale to our sweet family time in Lufkin. **L**



# WEST TEXAS ROAD TRIP



©Jennifer Boomer

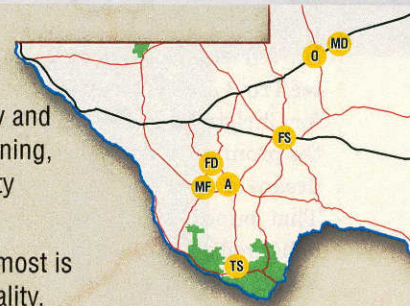


MD

**MIDLAND**—Midland is a great place to eat, play, shop & stay as you explore West Texas! Midland International Air & Space Port is the closest airport to Big Bend National Park. [visitmidland.com](http://visitmidland.com)

**Mar 16-18** - Permian Basin Comic Con  
**Mar 16-17** - Permian Basin Spring Stampede Rodeo

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)

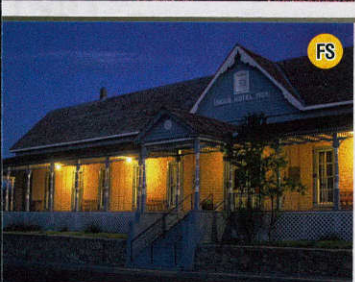
**Feb 22-24** - Odessa College NIRA Rodeo @ Ector County Coliseum  
**Mar 17** - Tap Into Downtown Odessa on Grant Ave.

**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)

**Mar 2-3** - Texas Cowboy Poetry Gathering  
**Apr 12-14** - *Trappings of Texas: Western Art & Gear* @ Museum of the Big Bend



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)

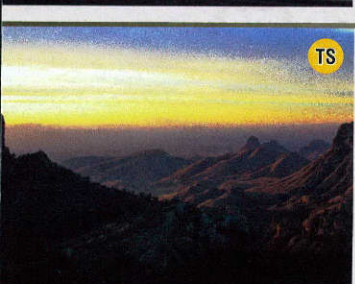
**Feb 10-12** - Sheepdog Trials  
**Mar 9** - Texas History Day

**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)

**Mar 12-24** - Spring Break at the Fort  
**Apr 1** - Easter Egg Hunt & Picnic in the Park



FD



TS

**TERLINGUA/STUDY BUTTE** — "Between the Parks" Big Bend & Big Bend Ranch. Accommodations, dining, golf, horse-back riding & shopping make it a Big Bend Destination.

For events see:  
[bigbendchamberofcommerce.org](http://bigbendchamberofcommerce.org)  
 or [visitbigbend.com](http://visitbigbend.com)

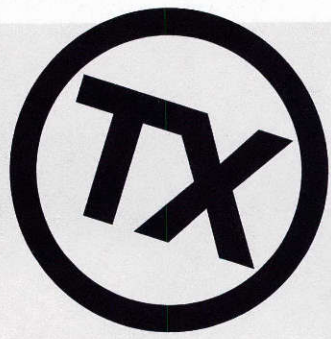
**MARFA**—It defies easy explanation, yet any google search yields thousands of opinions. Marfa is tough to get to—tougher still to explain. But once you arrive, you get it. [visitmarfa.com](http://visitmarfa.com)

**Apr 12-13** - *Marfa Myths* @ Ballroom Marfa



MF

# TRUE



REAL TEXAS STORIES BORN AND BRED

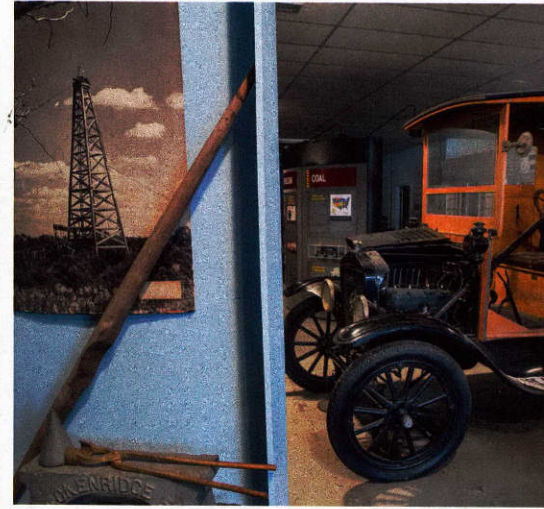
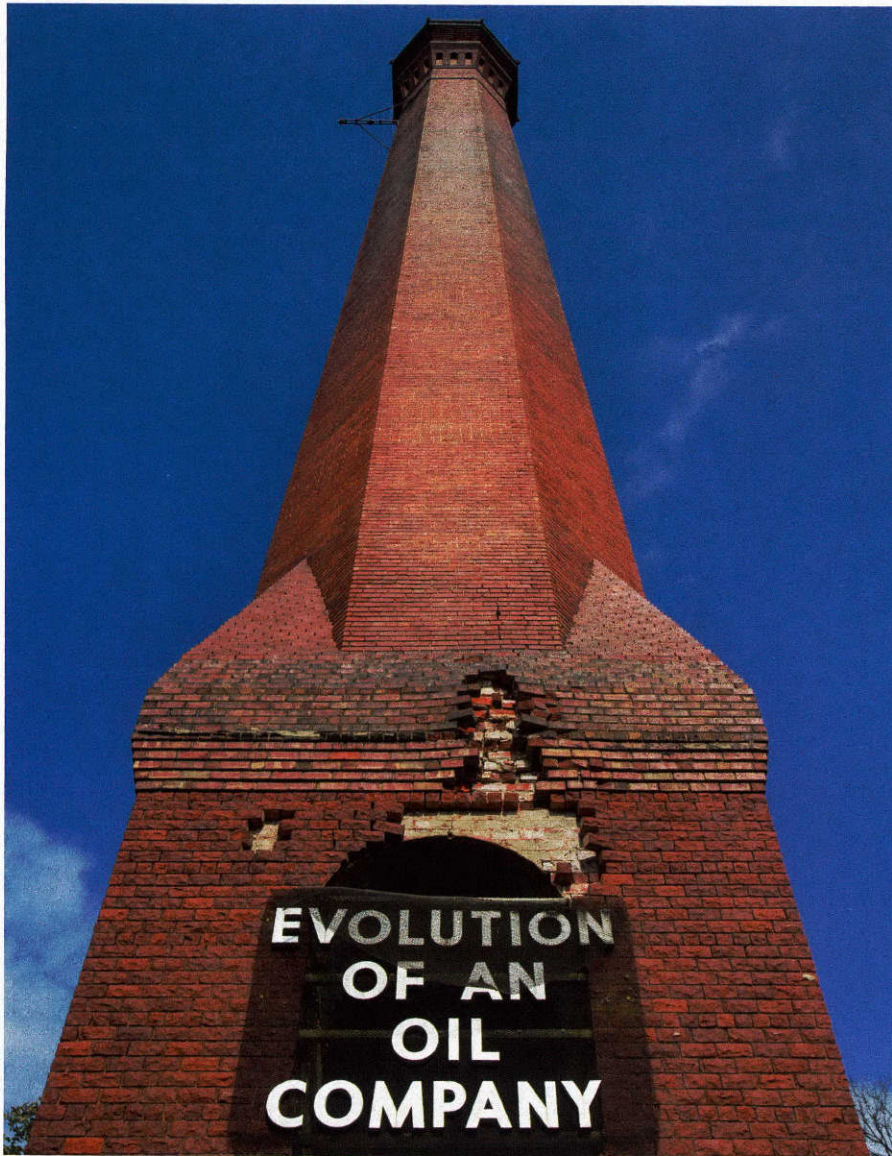


## Boomtown, Ghost Town

Three Rolling Plains museums  
chronicle the region's early oil rush

*Story by Robyn Ross*

Derricks filled the town of Ranger during the oil boom, as depicted in this circa-1920 photo on display in the Roaring Ranger Oil Boom Museum.



**D**RIVING EAST ON INTERSTATE 20, I CREST an incline in the rolling landscape between Abilene and Fort Worth. In the valley below, a brick smokestack cuts a dramatic profile against the surrounding hills. The tower rises from the horizon like a sentinel, watching over the site where the bustling town of Thurber stood at the turn of the 20th century. In those days, the electric plant's 148-foot-tall smokestack loomed over wood-frame houses and grand Craftsman homes, a mercantile and opera house, churches and schools. Now, nothing of Thurber is left but the chimney, a handful of buildings, and a cemetery.

When I've almost reached the smokestack, I exit the interstate and drive a couple of blocks to the W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas, where I've come to learn why Thurber disappeared. The Gordon Center, a branch of Tarleton State University, is my first stop on a trip that includes

**In the early 20th century, the 148-foot-tall smokestack loomed over wood-frame houses and grand Craftsman homes, a mercantile and an opera house, churches and schools.**

the Roaring Ranger Oil Boom Museum in nearby Ranger and the Swenson Memorial Museum in Breckenridge. Together, the three museums (in Erath, Eastland, and Stephens counties, respectively) chronicle the region's booms and busts in the early 20th century, a Texas tale that echoes throughout the state to this day.

#### THURBER

With the advent of mining here in the late 1880s, Thurber developed as one of the state's most prominent coal towns, providing coal to power trains on the Texas and Pacific Railroad. In 1897, a second industry developed in Thurber when the Texas and Pacific Coal Company began using shale from the nearby hills to make bricks. Some of those bricks were used to pave Austin's Congress Avenue and Fort



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:**  
The Thurber smokestack; a 1925 oilfield truck in the Swenson Memorial Museum's oil annex; the W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas; Basil Clemons exhibit at the Swenson Memorial Museum; the Swenson museum; the Roaring Ranger Oil Boom Museum.



Worth's Camp Bowie Boulevard, where they're still visible today.

Inside the museum, I take a seat inside a replica of the Thurber opera house to watch a short film about the town's history. The film explains how Texas and Pacific Coal built an entire town to serve the mines. At its peak Thurber was home to 10,000 people, an ethnically diverse group of mining families that together comprised the largest city between Fort Worth and El Paso. The company owned the houses, stores, schools, and saloons. Residents didn't pay city or school taxes, but the miners worked in dangerous conditions and were subject to the whims of the company officials who ran the town.

After the movie, I wander among the museum's replicas of old Thurber

buildings, including a bandstand and livery stable. When I step inside the drug store, I'm greeted by the voice of an unseen "proprietor:" "Hello! Welcome to Thurber's only drug store, the center of all social activity. We carry an outstanding line of pharmaceuticals and potions as well as toys and fancy goods."

In the Thurber mines, the men crawled into small tunnels and lay on their sides, propped on one arm, to dig the coal. A life-size diorama, complete with the repetitive sound of the pick prying coal from the wall, shows a man working in this uncomfortable position. I crouch to view the scene from a miner's perspective and am overcome with both claustrophobia and gratitude that I work above ground.

With the 1901 discovery of oil at

Spindletop in Beaumont, prospectors ramped up their search for oil in other parts of Texas. W.K. Gordon, the superintendent of the Thurber mines, was among them. He had another motivation to drill: The Allies' need for oil during World War I had created a domestic oil shortage even before the United States entered the conflict.

"Indirectly, the oil booms were because of war," explains Shae Adams, the Gordon Center's curator of exhibits and education. "People knew that if they found oil, they could sell it to the government."

In October 1917, Gordon struck oil near Ranger, 16 miles west of Thurber. At the Gordon Center, a replica of an oil derrick re-creates the drama. Visitors can push a button to hear the rumble in the earth and see a simulated oil gusher. Ironically, Gordon's success indirectly led to Thurber's demise. Railroads began to power trains with oil instead of coal, and roads were paved with petroleum-based asphalt rather than brick. Texas and Pacific closed the Thurber coal mines in 1926 and the brick plant in 1931. It sold the houses and salvaged materials from other buildings. By the late 1930s the town was virtually gone.

## RANGER

As Thurber's fortunes busted, Ranger's boomed. The Roaring Ranger Oil Boom Museum illustrates the transition with a collection of black-and-white photos, newspaper articles,

and 1920s souvenir publications. The museum building—the 1919 red-brick Ranger railroad depot—still has the vintage ticket windows and clock, making it easy to imagine waiting for the next train to arrive from Fort Worth. During the height of the boom, from 1917 to 1921, the depot saw 1,500 people pass through its doors every day.

Ranger's population swelled from several hundred to 30,000 during the boom, and by 1920 more than 800 wells pumped oil from underneath the town. A panoramic photo depicts this otherworldly scene—a town teeming with derricks that rise from the landscape like a futuristic forest. But there was one place speculators couldn't drill. While the Merriman Baptist Church earned \$200,000 a year from allowing wells in its churchyard, it refused a \$1 million offer for an oil lease in its cemetery. A framed photo shows the graveyard, flanked by two giant derricks, with a sign posted on the fence: "Respect the dead."

By 1921 Ranger had paved the streets of its business district, constructed new schools, and rebuilt after a 1919 fire destroyed several blocks of downtown buildings. A booklet published by the West Texas Chamber of Commerce in 1921 explains: "The big permanent building period began immediately after the fire, and a transformation, almost as if by magic, has taken place in a little less than two years. ... Complete systems of waterworks, sewers, natural gas, and electric lights were installed and the city was soon given all the conveniences of older municipalities."

## BRECKENRIDGE

Prospectors found oil in Breckenridge, a half-hour's drive northwest of Ranger, a year after Gordon struck oil. Breckenridge was the county seat of this ranching area, and the boom drove the population up from 1,500 to about 30,000 as oil derricks popped up across town. The boom days were well

documented by Basil Clemons, an eccentric photographer and movie pioneer who spent part of his childhood in Texas before practicing his craft in Hollywood, Alaska, and Seattle. Clemons returned to Texas in 1919 and settled in Breckenridge, where he lived and developed his prints in a converted iron-wheeled wagon that had been a ranch cookshack.

### **In towns like Ranger and Breckenridge, the boom lasted only a few years until the wells' production began to decline.**

"We wouldn't know the history of Breckenridge and Stephens County if it wasn't for him," says Kay Meadows, a staff member who shows me the collection of Clemons photos at the Swenson Memorial Museum. "He went to all the oilfield fires, and he took pictures of everything: the school, the circus, the Rotary club, the football boys, you name it."

I page through the binder of Clemons' photos, all snapshots of Breckenridge in the 1920s. His images preserve scenes like the high school's junior-senior banquet; a 1926 rally for gubernatorial candidate Dan Moody; and the billowing smoke of oilfield fires. Clemons captioned one apocalyptic scene: "Our Fire Chief—Heaven Bless Him For Doing The Best He Can With What He Has To Do With."

In the J.D. Sandefer Oil Annex of the Swenson Memorial Museum, photos by Clemons and others illustrate the mixed blessing of the boom. (Closed for construction, the annex is scheduled to

reopen this spring.) One picture shows the tents, shacks, and boardinghouses cobbled together to house oil workers. Another depicts the courthouse, built partly to handle the exponential increase in crimes like bootlegging, prostitution, and assault.

Yet amid the rowdiness, oil brought Breckenridge better schools, a municipal water system, paved streets, and access to the railroads. It allowed the First National Bank to build, in 1920, the three-story cream-colored Beaux Arts building that today houses the Swenson Memorial Museum.

In towns like Ranger and Breckenridge, the boom lasted only a few years until the wells' production began to decline. "In Ranger, they were still finding oil, but the amount dropped so dramatically that it wasn't as profitable," Adams explains. "Companies couldn't hire as many people because oil wasn't coming in at the same rate as the first two or three years." The transient workforce took off when higher-paying jobs popped up elsewhere. By the 1930s Ranger's population dropped to roughly 6,000, a fifth of what it had been a few years earlier.

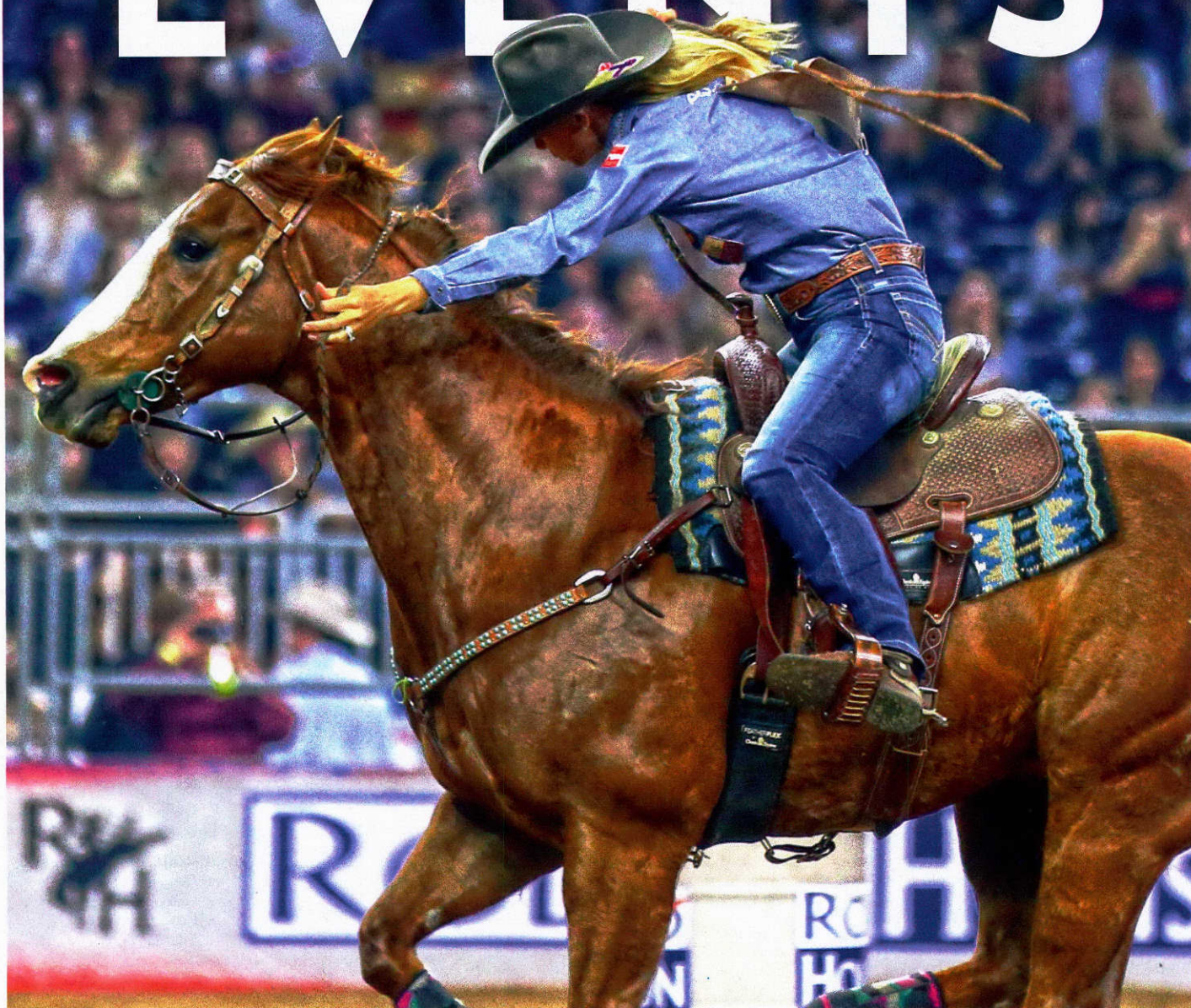
As I drive home from Breckenridge, I find it hard not to consider comparisons with the oil and gas booms shaping towns in Texas today. The discovery of an energy source can pad a town's pockets while simultaneously straining its infrastructure. But before long, the crowds move on, seeking their fortune in the next big boomtown—a timeless cycle well preserved in Thurber, Ranger, and Breckenridge. **L**



## BOOMTOWN MUSEUMS

1. The **W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas**, 65258 I-20 in Mingus, opens Tue-Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sun 1-4 p.m. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children ages 5-12. Call **254-968-1886**; [tarleton.edu/gordoncenter](http://tarleton.edu/gordoncenter).
2. The **Roaring Ranger Oil Boom Museum**, 121 S. Commerce in Ranger, opens by appointment. Admission by donation. Call the Ranger Chamber of Commerce at **254-647-3091**.
3. The **Swenson Memorial Museum**, 116 W. Walker St. in Breckenridge, opens Tue-Fri 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sat 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Free. Call **254-559-8471**.

# EVENTS



## FEBRUARY'S TRAVEL SPOTLIGHT:

GULF COAST > Houston

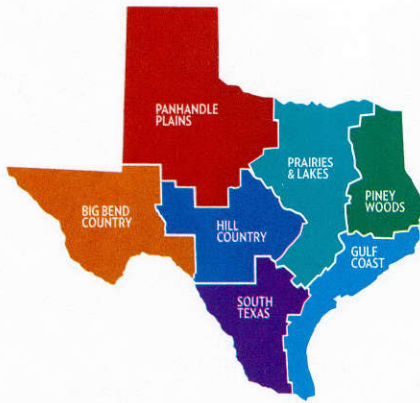
### Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo

**F**ROM ITS HUMBLE BEGINNINGS in 1932 as a cattle showcase, the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Feb. 27-March 18, has evolved into a 20-day bonanza filled with the usual rodeo offerings like bull riding and steer roping, but with the addition of amusement park rides, deep-fried treats, shopping, and big-name concerts—this year, two-time Grammy winner

Garth Brooks performs on opening and closing nights. Rodeo organizers hope to top last year's record-breaking attendance of more than 2.6 million. The event ropes in big-city folk with a spirited parade featuring marching bands and floats through downtown Houston on Feb. 24—see feature story on page 50 for details. [rodeohouston.com](http://rodeohouston.com)

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

## EVENTS



### BIG BEND COUNTRY

**DEL RIO:** Pop-Up Beer Garden Feb. 2. infodelrio.parksfoundation.com 612-850-5617

**FORT STOCKTON:** Sheep Dog Trials Feb. 10-12. Pct. 4 Six Shooter Range. 432-336-2264

**ODESSA:** Odessa College NIRA Rodeo Feb. 22-24. Ector County Coliseum. wranglersports.com 432-561-8978

**PINE SPRINGS:** Desert Discovery (Guided Hike) Feb. 3. Guadalupe Mountains National Park. nps.gov/gumo 915-828-3251

**PINE SPRINGS:** Pioneer Prosperity Feb. 17. Guadalupe Mountains National Park. nps.gov/gumo 915-828-3251

### GULF COAST

**BEAUMONT:** *One Monkey Don't Stop No Show* Jan. 20-Feb. 3. beaumontcommunityplayers.com 409-833-4664

**BEAUMONT:** Symphony of Southeast Texas *The Elegance of Elgar* Feb. 10. Julie Rogers Theatre. sost.org 409-892-2257

**BEAUMONT:** Taste of the Triangle Feb. 13. Beaumont Civic Center. facebook.com/tasteofthetriangle 800-782-3081

**BEAUMONT:** *The Marvelous Wonderettes* Feb. 24-March 10. beaumontcommunityplayers.com 409-833-4664

**CLUTE:** *Cabaret* Feb. 2-4, 9-11. Center for the Arts & Sciences. bcfas.org 979-265-7661

**CLUTE:** Planetarium Show Feb. 14, 21. Center for the Arts & Sciences. bcfas.org 979-265-3376

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Chicken Coops for Backyard Egg Production Feb. 3. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Corpus Christi Chamber Music Society: Jeremy Denk and Stefan Jackiw Feb. 3. Del Mar College. corpuschristichambermusic.org 361-877-8393

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Winter Lecture Series: Wildflower Legends and Lore Feb. 7. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Birds of South Texas, Natural History and Identification Feb. 13, 15-16. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Winter Lecture Series: What Type of Rose Do I Need? Feb. 14. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Ensuring Spring Vegetable Garden Success Feb. 17. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Winter Lecture Series: Raptor Rehab at Texas Sea Life Center Feb. 21. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Introduction to the World of Birds, Identification, and More Feb. 24. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**CORPUS CHRISTI:** Winter Lecture Series: Worm Composting Feb. 28. stxbot.org 361-852-2100

**GALVESTON:** Mardi Gras Galveston Feb. 2-13. mardigrasgalveston.com

**GALVESTON:** *Henry and Mudge* Feb. 8. thegrand.com 409-765-1894

**GALVESTON:** Galveston Symphony Orchestra: *The Tempest* Feb. 11. thegrand.com 409-765-1894

**GALVESTON:** Parsons Dance Feb. 17. thegrand.com 409-765-1894

**GALVESTON:** Yamato: The Drummers of Japan Feb. 24. thegrand.com 409-765-1894

**HOUSTON:** *School of Rock* Jan. 30-Feb. 4. The Hobby Center. houston.broadway.com 800-952-6560

**HOUSTON:** Charles Lloyd and the Marvels Feb. 2. Wortham Theater Center. dacamera.com 713-524-5050

**HOUSTON:** *Light Chamer: Neon and Plasma in Action* Feb. 9-May 13. crafthouston.org 713-529-4848

**HOUSTON:** Sérgio and Odair Assad and Avi Avital Feb. 17. Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. dacamera.com 713-524-5050

**HOUSTON:** *Memphis* Feb. 20-March 4. The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. tuts.com 713-558-2600

**LA FERIA:** Fiesta de La Feria Feb. 17. cityoflaferia.com 956-797-2261

**LAKE JACKSON:** The Summit: Manhattan Transfer Meets Take 6. Feb. 2. clarion.brazosport.edu 979-230-3156

**LAKE JACKSON:** Abner Jackson Plantation Site Tour Feb. 3. lakejacksonmuseum.org 979-297-1570

**LAKE JACKSON:** Bird Banding Feb. 17. Gulf Coast Bird Observatory. gcbo.org 979-480-0999

**LAMAR:** LaMardi Gras Feb. 10-11. Lamar Volunteer Fire Dept. lamarvfd.com

**ORANGE:** *The World War I Homefront: Orange Goes Over the Top* Through July 14. The W.H. Stark House. starkculturalvenues.org/whstarkhouse 409-883-0871

**ORANGE:** *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* Feb. 9. Lutch Theater for the Performing Arts. lutch.org 409-886-5535

**PORT ARANSAS:** Whooping Crane Festival Feb. 22-25. Civic Center. whoopingcranefestival.org 361-749-5919

**PORT ARTHUR:** Mardi Gras Southeast Texas Feb. 8-11. mardigrasportarthur.com 409-721-8717

**ROCKPORT:** Clay Expo Feb. 3-4. Rockport Center for the Arts. 361-729-5519

**ROCKPORT:** 911 Never Forget Mobile Exhibit and First Responders Weekend Feb. 16-18. Rockport Harbor. rockport-fulton.org 361-729-6445

**ROCKPORT-FULTON:** Bountiful Bowl Feb. 2-3. Rockport-Fulton High School Commons. 361-729-5352

**ROSENBERG:** The Houston Glass Show and Sale and The Best Little Antique Show in Texas Feb. 16-18. maxmillerantiques.com 713-410-4780

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND:** SPI Kitefest Feb. 1-3. Convention Centre North Flats. spikitefest.com 956-761-1248

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND:** SPICE Chili Cookoff Feb. 10. Louie's Backyard. sopadre.com 956-761-3000

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND:** SPI Market Days Feb. 23-25. Convention Centre. sopadre.com 956-761-3000

**SPRING:** PuppyUp Spring Feb. 10. Rob Fleming Park. puppyupwalk.org/spring 281-636-1436

**STAFFORD:** Greater Houston Train Show Feb. 17. Stafford Center. sanjacmodeltrains.org 713-899-5127

**SUGAR LAND:** Block Party. Too! Nov. 20-Feb. 25. Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land. hmns.org 281-313-2277

**SUGAR LAND:** Ancient Encounters: Egypt Feb. 3. Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land. hmns.org 281-313-2277

**SUGAR LAND:** Valentine's Dinner and Lecture Feb. 14. Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land. hmns.org 281-313-2277

**SURFSIDE BEACH:** Surfside Marathon Feb. 24. surfsideamarathon.com 409-539-5150

**VICTORIA:** Hot Rod Riot Feb. 10. Schroeder Hall. stp-victoria.com 361-570-7637

**VICTORIA:** Victoria Symphony Master Series—American Folk Masters Feb. 24. victoriasymphony.com 361-576-4500

**VICTORIA:** Victoria Livestock Show Feb. 26-March 5. Victoria Community Center. victorialivestockshow.com

### HILL COUNTRY

**AUSTIN:** Little Big Town in Concert with Kacey Musgraves and Midland Feb. 9. Frank Erwin Center. uterwincenter.com 512-477-6060

**AUSTIN:** FlamencoAustin: Carlos Piñana Feb. 10. austinclassicalguitar.org 512-300-2247

**AUSTIN:** Lana Del Rey in Concert Feb. 11. Frank Erwin Center. uterwincenter.com 512-471-7744

**AUSTIN:** *School of Rock* Feb. 13-18. Bass Concert Hall. austin.broadway.com 512-477-6060

**AUSTIN:** Austin OUTsider Festival Feb. 14-18. outsidersfest.org

**AUSTIN:** *Rodeal The Exhibition* Feb. 17-Jan. 15, 2019. Bullock Texas State History Museum. thehistoryoftexas.com 512-463-6485

**AUSTIN:** Carnaval Brasileiro Feb. 18. Palmer Events Center. sambaparty.com 512-974-6700

**AUSTIN:** *Form into Spirit: Ellsworth Kelly's Austin* Feb. 18-April 29. blantonmuseum.org 512-471-5482

**AUSTIN:** ACG International Series: Duo Deloro Feb. 24. austinclassicalguitar.org 512-300-2247

**AUSTIN:** Austin Oyster Festival Feb. 24. French Legation Museum. austinoysterfestival.com 512-472-8180

**AUSTIN:** Austin Music Awards Feb. 28. acl-live.com

**BANDERA:** 11th Street Mardi Gras Celebration Feb. 1-3. 11th Street Cowboy Bar. 830-796-3045

**BANDERA:** Bandera Cattle Company Gunfighters Feb. 3, 10, 17, 24. banderacattlecompany.com 830-796-3045

**BANDERA:** Mardi Gras Parade Feb. 3. Main Street Bandera. 830-796-3045

**BANDERA:** The Old Timers Trading Post Feb. 3. 830-796-3045

**BANDERA:** Cowboy Capital Opry Feb. 6. silversagecorral.org 830-796-4969

**BANDERA:** Frontier Times Museum Cowboy Camp Feb. 11. frontiertimesmuseum.org 830-796-3864

**BANDERA:** Cowboy Camp Feb. 15. Bandera Beverage Barn Pavilion. 830-796-3045

**BLANCO:** The Miro Quartet in Concert Feb. 17. blancoperformingarts.com 830-385-1173

**BOERNE:** *Incorruptible* Jan. 26-Feb. 10. Boerne Community Theatre. visitboerne.org 830-249-9166

**BOERNE:** Boerne Chocolate Walk Feb. 10. visitboerne.org 830-249-9511 opt. 5

**BOERNE:** Boerne Market Days Feb. 10-11. visitboerne.org 210-844-8193

**BOERNE:** *Accordion Virtuosi of Russia* Feb. 15. visitboerne.org 830-331-9079

**BOERNE:** The Ten Tenors in Concert Feb. 20. visitboerne.org 830-331-9079

**BOERNE:** Boerne Hill Country Spring Antiques Show Feb. 24-25. Kendall County Fairgrounds. visitboerne.org 830-329-2870

**BURNET:** Highland Lakes Quilt Festival Feb. 9-10. Burnet Community Center. hlquilt.blogspot.com 830-693-2173

**CANYON LAKE:** Winter Texan Reception Feb. 8. canyonlakechamber.com 830-964-2223

**COMFORT:** Mardi Gras Library Fundraiser Feb. 10. comfortchamber.com 830-995-3131

**FREDERICKSBURG:** First Friday Art Walk Fredericksburg Feb. 2. ffawf.com 830-992-2044

**FREDERICKSBURG:** Luckenbach Hug-In and Valentine Ball Feb. 9-10. luckenbachtexas.com 830-997-3224

**FREDERICKSBURG:** Texas Hill Country Wineries' *Wine Lovers Trail* Feb. 9-25. texaswinetrail.com 512-914-5561



**FREDERICKSBURG:** Texas Hill Country Home and Design Show Feb. 10-11. hillcountryhomeshow.net

**FREDERICKSBURG:** *The Addams Family* Feb. 16-March 4. fredericksburgtheater.org 830-997-3588

**FREDERICKSBURG:** Fredericksburg Trade Days Feb. 16-18. fbgtradedays.com 210-846-4094

**FREDERICKSBURG:** Kenari Saxophone Quartet Feb. 18. Fredericksburg United Methodist Church. fredericksburgmusicclub.com 830-990-2886

**GRUENE:** Gospel Brunch with a Texas Twist Feb. 11. gruenehall.com 830-629-5077

**GRUENE:** Gruene Market Days Feb. 16-17. gruene marketdays.com 830-832-1721

**INGRAM:** Ingram Farmers and Artisans Market Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22. 830-367-2800

**JOHNSON CITY:** Johnson City Art Walk Feb. 24. lbjcountry.com 830-868-7684

**KERRVILLE:** First Friday Wine Share Feb. 2. firstfridaywineshare.com 830-896-6600

**LAMPASAS:** Trade Days Feb. 3-4, 24-25. marigold santiques.com 512-734-1294

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** *War Stories: New Braunfels in World War I* Through Jan. 31, 2019. sophienburg.com 830-629-1572

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** Friday Afternoon Club Feb. 3, 10, 17, 24. gruenehall.com 830-626-1281

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** Gospel Brunch Feb. 11. gruenehall.com 830-606-1281

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** North American Jewelry & Gift Show Feb. 15-18. nashows.com 210-410-0737

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** Old Gruene Market Days Feb. 18-19. gruene marketdays.com 830-832-1721

**NEW BRAUNFELS:** Dailey and Vincent in Concert Feb. 23. brauntex.org 830-627-0808

**WIMBERLEY:** *Pride and Prejudice* Feb. 2-25. emilyann.org 512-847-6969

**WIMBERLEY:** *Death by Design* Feb. 9-March 4. wimberleyplayers.org 512-847-0575

**WIMBERLEY:** Second Saturday Gallery Trail Feb. 10. facebook.com/secondsaturdaygallerytrail 512-574-2980

**WIMBERLEY:** Susanna's Kitchen Coffeehouse Concert Series Feb. 15. wimberleyumc.org/ministries/susannas-kitchen 512-847-5464

### PANHANDLE PLAINS

**ALBANY:** *Cell Series: Kelly O'Connor* Through Feb. 3. theojac.org 325-762-2269

**ALBANY:** *Ron Watson: Order Among Chaos* Through Feb. 3. theojac.org 325-762-2269

**ALBANY:** *Texas Moderns: Bill Bomar*. Through Feb. 3. theojac.org 325-762-2269

**ALBANY:** *Cell Series: Lily Cox-Richard* Feb. 17-May 12. theojac.org 325-762-2269

**ALBANY:** *Matt Kleberg* Feb. 17-May 12. theojac.org 325-762-2269

**BIG SPRING:** Big Spring Symphony Feb. 10. visitbigspring.com 432-263-8235

**CANYON:** *When Georgia Was Here*. Through Feb. 24. panhandleplains.org

**LUBBOCK:** Day the Music Died Feb. 3. buddyhollycenter.org 806-775-3560

**POST:** Old Mill Trade Days Feb. 9-11. 432-934-1479

**SAN ANGELO:** Richard and Pam Salmon Sculpture Competition. Through Aug. 18, 2019. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** *Light Show: Featuring the Work of Ben Livingston*. Through Feb. 4. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** Gisela Colon: *Glo Pods* Through Feb. 4. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** Art Thursday Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** The Hot Sardines in Concert Feb. 1. sanangelopac.org 325-284-3825

**SAN ANGELO:** San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo Feb. 2-18. sanangelorodeo.com 325-653-7785

**SAN ANGELO:** Gypsy Jazz Feb. 3. sanangelosymphony.org 325-658-5877

**SAN ANGELO:** *Million Dollar Quartet* Feb. 9-10. sanangelopac.org 325-284-3825

**SAN ANGELO:** Family Day Lunar New Year Feb. 10. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** Downtown Stroll Feb. 15. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** New Acquisitions: Spanish Colonial Feb. 15-April 8. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** New Glass Collection Feb. 15-April 8. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** *Crimes of the Heart* Feb. 16-25. angelotheater.com 325-949-4400

**SAN ANGELO:** *Play It Again* Concert Feb. 18. samfa.org 325-653-3333

**SAN ANGELO:** *Peter and the Star Catcher* Feb. 23. angelotheater.com 325-716-4125

**SAN ANGELO:** Buffalo Soldier Heritage Day Feb. 25. fortconcho.com 325-234-0316

**SAN ANGELO:** Yamato Drummers of Japan Feb. 26. sanangelopac.org 325-284-3825

### PINEY WOODS

**CROCKETT:** The Guess Who in Concert Feb. 24. pwfaa.org 936-544-4276

**HENDERSON:** Mardi Gras Gumbo Cookoff Feb. 10. visithendersontx.com 903-657-6551 ext. 238

**HENDERSON:** *Blood Brothers* Feb. 16-18, 23-25. hendersoncivictheatre.org 903-657-2968

**LIBERTY:** Liberty Opry Feb. 3, 10, 24. libertyopry.com 936-336-5830

**LUFKIN:** Corks and Forks Feb. 3. visitlufkin.com 936-633-0359

**LUFKIN:** *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* Feb. 8. angelinaarts.org 936-633-5454

**LUFKIN:** Daily and Vincent in Concert Feb. 22. thepineslufkin.com 936-633-0359

**MAGNOLIA:** Mardi Gras on The Stroll Feb. 10. cityofmagnolia.com 713-542-4358

**MARSHALL:** From the Stars to the Stage Feb. 18. marshallsymphony.com 903-935-4484

**MARSHALL:** Digging Up Your Roots II Feb. 28-March 1. harrisoncountymuseum.org 903-935-8417

**THE WOODLANDS:** Inspire Film Festival Feb. 15-19. inspirefilmfest.com 281-705-1623

**TYLER:** *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* Feb. 3. cowancenter.org 903-566-7424

**TYLER:** *Million Dollar Quartet* Feb. 12. cowancenter.org 903-566-7424

**TYLER:** Complexions Contemporary Ballet: *Bach to Bowie* Feb. 27. cowancenter.org 903-566-7424

### PRAIRIES AND LAKES

**ARLINGTON:** PBR Iron Cowboy Feb. 24. attstadium.com 817-892-4000

**ARLINGTON:** RFD-TV's The American Feb. 25. attstadium.com 817-892-4000

**BRENHAM:** Spring Blossoms Quilt Show Feb. 2-3. friendshipquiltguild.weebly.com 979-830-1950

**CALDWELL:** Caldwell Cruise-In Car Show Feb. 10. caldweltx.gov 979-567-3901

**CALDWELL:** Chocolate, Champagne, and Cake Walk Feb. 10. caldweltx.gov 979-567-3901

**CLIFTON:** *Lonesome Dove* Exhibition Jan. 22-March 3. bosquemuseum.org 254-675-3845



February 16-18, 2017

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Visit [texashighways.com/freepubs](http://texashighways.com/freepubs) or call 877-252-8150 and request Package 2.

**DALLAS:** *Paper into Sculpture* Through Feb. 4. [nashersculpturecenter.org](http://nashersculpturecenter.org)

**DALLAS:** *Journey to Space* Through May 6. [perotmuseum.org](http://perotmuseum.org) 214-428-5555

**DALLAS:** *Three Sisters* Feb. 7-March 4. [undermain.org](http://undermain.org)

**DALLAS:** *Thurgood* Feb. 8. Bishop Arts Theatre Center. [bishopartstheatre.org](http://bishopartstheatre.org)

**DALLAS:** *Screen Play* Feb. 9-11, 16-18. [facebook.com/dallaschildrenstheater](http://facebook.com/dallaschildrenstheater)

**DALLAS:** Jeanne Robertson: *The Rocking Chair Tour* Feb. 10. [attpac.org](http://attpac.org)

**DALLAS:** DCFA Form Follows Fitness 5K Feb. 17. [klydewarrenpark.org](http://klydewarrenpark.org)

**DALLAS:** National Margarita Day Taco & Margaritas Tour Feb. 17-18, 22. [dallasbychocolate.com](http://dallasbychocolate.com) 972-814-5997

**DALLAS:** Conservation of Architectural Heritage—Second Edition Feb. 23-26. [visitdallas.com](http://visitdallas.com)

**DENISON:** *The Birth of NASA* Exhibit Through Aug. 13. [visiteisenhowerbirthplace.com](http://visiteisenhowerbirthplace.com) 903-465-8908

**DENISON:** *Supreme Commander Eisenhower in North Africa* Exhibit Through April 1. [visiteisenhowerbirthplace.com](http://visiteisenhowerbirthplace.com) 903-465-8908

**DENISON:** Celebrate with the Presidents Feb. 17. [visiteisenhowerbirthplace.com](http://visiteisenhowerbirthplace.com) 903-465-8908

**ELGIN:** *Hatitude, Black History Month* Feb. 3. [elgintx.com](http://elgintx.com)

**ELGIN:** Sip, Shop, and Stroll Feb. 8. [elgintx.com](http://elgintx.com)

**ENNIS:** *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Feb. 9-10, 16-17, 23-25. [theaterocks.com](http://theaterocks.com) 972-878-5126

**ENNIS:** *Czech Music Festival* Feb. 9-10. [ennisczechmusicfestival.com](http://ennisczechmusicfestival.com) 927-878-4748

**FARMERSVILLE:** *Farmersville Farmers & Fleas Market* Feb. 3. The Onion Shed. [farmersvilletx.com](http://farmersvilletx.com) 972/784-6846

**FORT WORTH:** *Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo Jan. 12-Feb. 3*. Will Rogers Memorial Center. [fwssr.com](http://fwssr.com) 817-877-2400

**FORT WORTH:** *Cowtown Marathon* Feb. 23-25. Will Rogers Memorial Center. [cowtownmarathon.org](http://cowtownmarathon.org) 817-207-0224

**GLEN ROSE:** *Sweetheart Safari Dinner and Tour* Feb. 10. [fossilrim.org](http://fossilrim.org) 254-897-2960

**GLEN ROSE:** *Learning From The Lorax* Feb. 12. [fossilrim.org](http://fossilrim.org) 254-897-2960

**GLEN ROSE:** *Beautiful Bountiful Biomes!* Feb. 27. [fossilrim.org](http://fossilrim.org) 254-897-2960

**GRAND PRAIRIE:** *Lunar New Year Festival* Feb. 9-11, 16-18. [asiatimesquare.com](http://asiatimesquare.com) 972-988-8811

**GRAND PRAIRIE:** *Dollar Chili Day* Feb. 17. [tradersvillage.com/grand-prairie](http://tradersvillage.com/grand-prairie) 972-647-2331

**HALLETTSVILLE:** *Texas in World War I* Through Nov. 30. [hallettsvillelibrary.org](http://hallettsvillelibrary.org) 361-798-3243 ext. 208

**IRVING:** *Las Colinas Symphony Orchestra: Scott Stratton, Trombone* Feb. 17. [irvingartscenter.com](http://irvingartscenter.com) 972-252-4800

**LA GRANGE:** *Valentine Dinner and Concert* Feb. 10. [czechtexas.org](http://czechtexas.org) 888-785-4500

**LA GRANGE:** *La Grange Uncorked* Feb. 16-18. [lagrangeuncorked.com](http://lagrangeuncorked.com) 979-968-3017

**LOCKHART:** *Hot Rods and Hatters Car Show and Festival* Feb. 2-3. [hotrodsandhatters.com](http://hotrodsandhatters.com) 512-657-4616

**MCKINNEY:** *Dinosaurs Live!* Through Feb. 18. [heardmuseum.org](http://heardmuseum.org) 972-562-5566

**MESQUITE:** *MISD Student Art Exhibit* Feb. 1-28. [mesquiteartscenter.org](http://mesquiteartscenter.org) 972-216-6444

**MESQUITE:** *Florence Ranch Homestead Tours/Be Mine at the Park* Feb. 10. [historicmesquite.org](http://historicmesquite.org) 972-216-6468

**MESQUITE:** *Mesquite Symphony Orchestra Concert: A Night on the Town* Feb. 10. [mesquitesymphony.org](http://mesquitesymphony.org) 972-216-8127

**MESQUITE:** *Tuna Does Vegas* Feb. 16-18, 23-25. [mesquitecommunitytheatre.com](http://mesquitecommunitytheatre.com) 972-216-8126

**MESQUITE:** *Opal Lawrence Historical Park Tours* Feb. 24. [historicmesquite.org](http://historicmesquite.org) 972-216-6468

**NOCONA:** *Mardi Gras Nocona Style* Feb. 8-10. [nocona.org](http://nocona.org) 940-825-3526

**RICHARDSON:** *Randy Noojin: Seeger* Feb. 2. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

**RICHARDSON:** *Martha Redbone and Bone Hill: The Concert* Feb. 10. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

**RICHARDSON:** *Postsecret: The Show* Feb. 15-18. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com) 972-744-4650

**RICHARDSON:** *Keyboard Conversations: Chopin and Bach* Feb. 19. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

**RICHARDSON:** *Mummershanz—You and Me* Feb. 23. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

**RICHARDSON:** *Sammy Miller and the Congregation in Concert* Feb. 24. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

**RICHARDSON:** *BAM Percussion* Feb. 25. [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

**ROUND TOP:** *Valentine's Concert* Feb. 10. [festivalhill.org](http://festivalhill.org) 979-249-3129

**ROYSE CITY:** *Casino for a Cause* Feb. 16. [roysecitychamber.com](http://roysecitychamber.com) 972-636-5000

**SEALY:** *Sealy Main Street Market* Feb. 10. [sealymainstreet.com](http://sealymainstreet.com) 979-627-6136

**TEMPLE:** *The Caring Ball* Feb. 10. Mayborn Convention Center. [templecommunityclinic.org](http://templecommunityclinic.org) 254-771-3374

**TEMPLE:** *Main Street Market* Feb. 24. [discovertemple.com](http://discovertemple.com) 254-298-5378

**WACO:** *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Secrets of the Sewer* Jan. 13-May 6. Mayborn Museum. [baylor.edu/mayborn](http://baylor.edu/mayborn) 254-710-1110

**WACO:** *The Chisholm Trail: Cattle and Crossroads of History* Feb. 1. Mayborn Museum Complex. [baylor.edu/mayborn](http://baylor.edu/mayborn) 254-710-1110

**SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS**

**EDINBURG:** *Fiesta Edinburg* Feb. 22-25. [HEB Park.edinburg.com](http://HEB Park.edinburg.com) 956-383-4974

**LAREDO:** *Laredo Birding Festival* Feb. 7-10. La Posada Hotel. [laredobirdingfestival.org](http://laredobirdingfestival.org) 956-718-1063

**SAN ANTONIO:** *Stock Show and Rodeo* Feb. 8-25. AT&T Center/Freeman Coliseum. [sarodeo.com](http://sarodeo.com) 210-225-5851

**SAN ANTONIO:** *Texas Trail Roundup* Feb. 23-25. Holiday Inn Downtown (Market Square). [texasrailroundup.org](http://texasrailroundup.org) 210-325-3523

**WESLACO:** *Alfresco* *Weslaco* Feb. 15. [weslacodc.com](http://weslacodc.com) 956-969-0838

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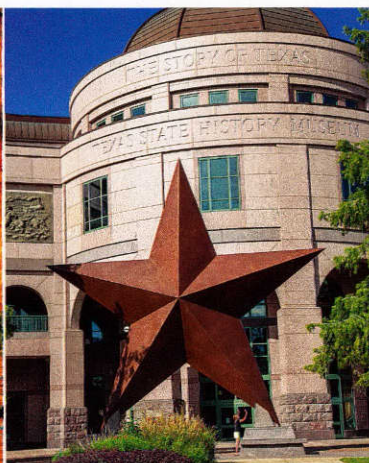
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**LAURA WILSON**

Read more about Laura Wilson and her work at her website, [laurawilsonphotography.com](http://laurawilsonphotography.com). The exhibition *Laura Wilson: Photographs in the West* is on display at the Fort Works Art gallery in Fort Worth through Feb. 3. Her new book, *From Rodin to Plensa: Modern Sculpture at the Meadows Museum*, co-authored with Steven Nash, will be available Feb. 25.

thought would be of interest to him. We started in Texas, first in the oilfields in Shackelford and Throckmorton counties, then Abilene and San Antonio. It was a remarkable education, seeing the American West with a first-rate artist, from Mexico to the Canadian border, and from the 98th meridian to the West Coast. I was inspired by the contemporary West.

**Q:** *Where else do you like to photograph in Texas?*

**A:** I particularly like the prairies and the plains, and far West Texas, the Davis Mountains, and Palo Duro Canyon. I've done work in the eastern part of the state, but really it's West Texas that has a purchase on my soul. I think it's because I grew up seeing Western movies and reading about explorers and the frontier. It all seems so recent, and it's remarkable to be able to see those locations now.

**Q:** *I hear you have quite a boot collection. Do you have a favorite maker?*

**A:** John Weinkauf, who lives in Kerrville. I also admire the shop of Gary Dunshee in Alpine. His Big Bend Saddlery has of all sorts of equipment, bits, and tooled saddles. But John makes the best boots. My favorites right now are ones that he made based on an old pair from the 1940s, with yellow tops and a lime-green boot with turquoise arrowheads on the toe and heel.

**Q:** *Where do you go for artistic inspiration?*

**A:** I go to the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, and to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. I like paintings as much as photographs. I go to the Dallas Museum of Art, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Modern in Fort Worth, the Kimbell Art Museum, and also the

Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum near Amarillo in Canyon, and the Old Jail Art Center in Albany. We're lucky to have these great museums in Texas.

**Q:** *What are you working on now?*

**A:** I'm working on a project of portraits of the very best writers—Pulitzer Prize, Booker Prize, and Nobel Prize winners. It will include 35 writers, and I have 29 completed so far. The photographs will be published as a book with the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, and some of them are already on exhibit there now.

**Q:** *What keeps you interested in photography?*

**A:** I like the idea of telling a story through pictures—not just portraits, but pictures of how people live and exist. All of the work I've done in Texas for over 45 years now, especially of rural people removed from mainstream America, continues to inspire me. I think photography is an incredible form of expression. The idea that 20 years from now I can know what a person looked like on the day I photographed them, at that moment in time, seems magical.

**Q:** *What do you want viewers to take away from your photographs?*

**A:** I hope they respond to the people I photograph, and that my photographs open their eyes to others. The writer Eudora Welty wrote about wanting to “part a curtain” to reveal each other's wonder, each other's struggles. I hope I'm parting that curtain. **L**

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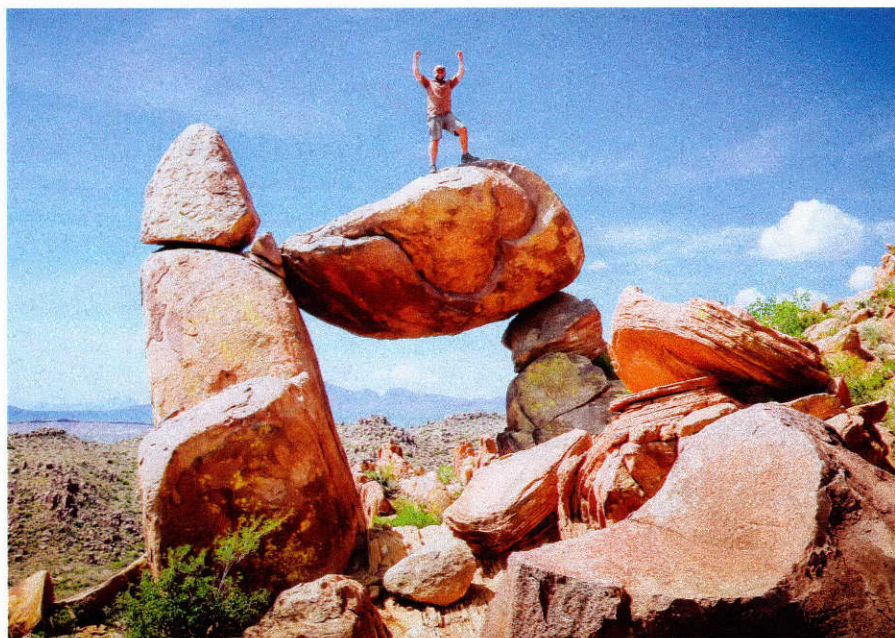
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# THE DAYTRIPPER

WITH CHET GARNER



## Peak Views

**T**HERE IS A place out west where the phrase “Everything’s Bigger in Texas” comes into its full meaning. It’s a near-mythical destination where distances stretch and time slows down, a place that can be as dry as a scorching desert or as wet as a raging river. Those who seek great adventures need look no farther than Big Bend National Park.

**8 A.M.** After driving about 40 miles south from Marathon, I reached the north entrance of **Big Bend National Park** and pulled over to take an obligatory photo at the entrance sign. Although I had technically arrived, I still had 30 miles to go before I reached park headquarters. I rolled down the windows and reset my internal clock to match the unhurried pace of the desert.

**9 A.M.** At **Panther Junction Visitor Center** I strategized my plan of attack. What makes Big Bend so special beyond its unfathomable size (a whopping 801,163 acres) is the confluence of three diverse environmental features: desert, mountains, and river. I wanted to experience them all and spent the next hour studying maps and learning about the park’s history.

**10 A.M.** With a head full of facts and feet antsy to hike, I set out for the **Grapevine Hills Trail** on the desert floor. I was

amazed at the diversity of birds along the way; reflecting the fact that Big Bend has more bird species than any other national park. After a mile of hiking past Dr. Seuss-esque rock pinnacles, I arrived at the famous **Balanced Rock**. It was a mind-bending exercise to imagine how a giant boulder found itself in such a precarious position. I figured if it hasn’t fallen in millennia, it probably wouldn’t fall today. With ranger approval, I scrambled atop for a photo.

**12:30 P.M.** Next, I headed for the **Chisos Mountains**. The prominent sign noting the presence of bears and mountain lions only added to the sense of adventure. It felt like I was driving vertically until the car crested a hill and I could see the entire **Chisos Basin**. It’s in this mountainous bowl

**Chet Garner** is the host of *The Daytripper*® travel show on PBS. To view the Big Bend episode visit [thedaytripper.com](http://thedaytripper.com).

where visitors sleep and eat at the famous **Chisos Mountain Lodge**. Since it was lunchtime, I stopped at the lodge’s restaurant and devoured an excellent plate of beef enchiladas.

**1:30 P.M.** After lunch, I walked over to the short, paved **Window View Trail**, which put me in the ideal spot to look out through the picture-perfect V-shaped gap in the mountains that looks out over the desert floor. I was surprised at how different (and cooler in temperature) this mountain hike felt from my desert hike, making it hard to believe that I was still in the same park.

**3 P.M.** With one major region left to experience, I traveled toward the Rio Grande, which cradles the edge of the park for an incredible 118 miles. I cruised the **Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive** past remnants of old ranches. I eventually arrived at the historic **Castolon** ghost town, which was once a small farming community along the banks of the river. I explored the adobe Alvino House and Harmonia Store, which the U.S. Army built as barracks during the Mexican Revolution. I didn’t expect such amazing human artifacts to be alongside the famous natural history of Big Bend.

**5 P.M.** The road turned right and began to track the river all the way to the stunning **Santa Elena Canyon**.

A short hike put me on the banks of the Rio Grande, staring at the canyon walls rising 1,500 feet above the river bed. I skipped a few rocks across to Mexico and thought about how amazing it is to share such a wonderful region with our southern neighbors.

Part of the magic of Big Bend is its ability to make anybody feel small compared to its seemingly endless expanses. While I had traveled plenty of miles, I had seen barely a fraction of the park. It’s this allure of awaiting explorations that brings me back for more. So whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road. 🇺🇸

Contact Big Bend National Park Headquarters at 432-477-2251; [nps.gov/bibe](http://nps.gov/bibe).

# TRAVEL MATTERS

TRAVEL TALK WITH TRUE TEXANS



## Eye on Texas

Behind the lens of Dallas photographer Laura Wilson

story by **Heather Brand**

**F**OR MORE THAN FOUR DECADES, PHOTOGRAPHER LAURA Wilson has been documenting the American West—and Texas in particular. Her lens has captured such subjects as the drama of small-town football games, the time-honored traditions of ranchers and cowboys, and the challenges of life along the border. Although Wilson grew up in Massachusetts, she has made her home in Dallas since 1966. It was there that she launched her career and, with her late husband, Robert, reared her three sons (Andrew, Owen, and Luke, of Hollywood fame). She got her start in 1979 as an assistant to renowned photographer Richard Avedon. For six years, she served as the location scout for his project *In the American West*. Afterward, she pursued her own photographic vision of the West and began landing assignments from publications such as the London *Sunday Times Magazine*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Vanity Fair*.

Whether in black-and-white or color, Wilson's work uncovers the essential humanity of her subjects, be they Texas Rangers, Laredo

**“I learned that in order to take good pictures, it’s not about the f-stops and shutter speeds, it’s about having something to say.”**

debutantes, undocumented immigrants, or rodeo trick riders. She also has made insightful portraits of famous creative types—among them the minimalist sculptor Donald Judd, musician Jimmie Dale Gilmore, and, of course, her sons. Her various projects have resulted in several books: *Watt Matthews of Lambshead* (1989), *Hutterites of Montana* (2000), *Avedon at Work: In the American West* (2003), *Grit and Glory: Six-Man Football* (2003), and the retrospective monograph *That Day: Pictures in the American West* (2015). The latter accompanied an exhibition of more than 70 photographs that’s currently on display at the Booth Western Art Museum in Cartersville, Georgia.

**Q:** How did you become interested in photography?

**A:** When I was growing up, an uncle would send us *U.S. Camera Annual* each year. It had the most amazing photographs by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, W. Eugene Smith. I got a Brownie camera at 7 years old and started taking pictures. *U.S. Camera* would give technical information, f-stops and shutter speeds. It sounded so complicated. I thought you had to be a scientist to take a picture. But single-lens reflex cameras made it more accessible. That same uncle gave me a good camera when I was in college. I learned that in order to take good pictures, it’s not about the f-stops and shutter speeds, it’s about having something to say.

**Q:** What was it like working with Richard Avedon?

**A:** He needed someone in the West to assist him because he was coming from New York. I was to scout locations and subjects that I > continued on page 74

# SIGHTSEER

GO. SEE. DO—TAKING IN TEXAS



**WHAT:** HORSEBACK RIDING ON THE BEACH **WHERE:** MATAGORDA BAY NATURE PARK **WHEN:** MARCH THROUGH AUGUST

## Coastal Canter

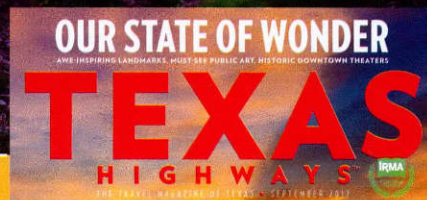
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Indulging in the age-old Texas tradition of riding a horse may be the best way to experience the untouched natural beauty of Matagorda—a secluded sandy treasure on the Gulf of Mexico. Dusty Wells, owner of T&D Adventure Parks—the only service offering equestrian rides on the shores of Matagorda—has been in the horse business for more than three decades, and horseback riding on the beaches of Texas has been in the family for five generations. While the company offers nearly 200 horses for guided beach rides in Corpus Christi and South Padre Island, only 10 of its horses enjoy a quieter career in Matagorda. One-hour excursions are \$60 per person; reservations recommended. [horsesonthebeachmatagorda.com](http://horsesonthebeachmatagorda.com).

# BEEN THERE, SEEN THAT.



TEXAS WONDER #9  
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SEPTEMBER 2017 ISSUE



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