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A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

NOVEMBER 2004

TxDOT

TEXAS HIGHWAYS, the Official Travel Magazine of Texas, received six awards at this year's International Regional Magazine Association (IRMA) conference held in Bar Harbor, Maine, in September. The annual conference recognizes the world's outstanding regional magazines in areas such as writing, design and photography.

The magazine received the following honors:

- ♦ **Travel Feature, Bronze Award:** "Big Bend: A Not-So-Rough Guide" by Lori Moffatt (Jan. 2003)
 - ♦ **Profiles, Silver Award:** "Letter from Fredericksburg: A National Museum Honors World War II Heroes" by Howard Peacock (Nov. 2003)
 - ♦ **Essay, Bronze Award:** "A Highly Personal and Opinionated Essay on Wildflowers" by Howard Peacock (April 2003)
 - ♦ **Feature Photography, Gold Award:** "Scenes from a Texas Town: Roma" by Joel Salcido (Jan. 2003)
 - ♦ **Photojournalism, Silver Award:** "Grit and Glory: Six-Man Football" by Laura Wilson (Oct. 2003)
 - ♦ **Photographic Essay, Award of Merit:** "Autumn in Texas May be Fleeting, But It's Oh, So Sweet" by Joe Lowery, Rusty Yates, Wyman Meinzer and Richard Reynolds (Nov. 2003)
- IRMA's membership includes more than 40 publications in the United States, Canada and Europe.

HERE ARE some new faces in TxDOT's Travel Division. On Oct. 1, **Brenda Flores-Dollar** began her position as **Litter Prevention Program Manager** and **media liaison**.

TOURISM TOOL UNVEILED

THE FIRST edition of *The Official Visitors Guide to Jefferson County* has been launched touting the wonders of **Beaumont, Port Arthur, Port Neches, Groves and Nederland** among other cities. The free guide, available at TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers, Jefferson County hotel rooms and other tourist stops in Southeast Texas, is meant to serve tourists already in the area — helping to make decisions on where to go and what to do.

"Southeast Texas has so much to offer visitors," says Stephanie Molina, Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau Director of Marketing. "This new magazine-style vacation guide is 68 color pages full of gorgeous photography, exciting editorial and useful information on our ecotourism and historical attractions," Molina adds.

"It's very exciting to have a promotional piece of this caliber to represent Jefferson County," Molina says. "Tourism is big business and this piece fits nicely with all other marketing the CVBs produce and distribute."

For more information on the guide, call (800) 392-4401.

Her responsibilities include managing the Don't Mess With Texas litter prevention campaign and Adopt-a-Highway program.

Flores-Dollar was advertising manager for the Texas Lottery Commission for nearly a decade, where her duties included managing the Lottery's advertising efforts and overseeing its contracted advertising agencies.

Other new faces include: **Viola Vasquez**, Rio Grande Valley Travel Information Center travel counselor.

Lorie L. Norton, Texarkana Travel Information Center travel counselor.

Tim Florer, Audiovisual Section video producer.

TRAVEL DIVISION Director Doris Howdeshell was afloat in Eden, Texas that is. Howdeshell, along with TxDOT's Audiovisual Director Geoff Appold and *Texas Highways* magazine Senior Editor Jack Lowry rode in a morning parade

as the City of Eden celebrated its annual Fall Fest Sept. 24-26 at Earl Rudder Park.

The TxDOT representatives (along with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture) were also celebrity judges for events like the Eve's Seduction Dessert and Adam's Rib Barbecue contests.

SUBMISSIONS for the spring *Texas Events Calendar* are due by Dec. 1. This issue will cover events taking place in March, April, and May. You may fax entries to Julie Welsh at (512) 486-5879, e-mail them to trv-tec@dot.state.tx.us, or mail them to P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009.

TRAVEL NEWS

IN TRAVEL WEEKLY'S most recent rankings, **Dallas-Fort Worth airport** is listed as the **fourth busiest in the nation** with 53.2 million in passenger traffic. **Houston's Bush International**

Airport ranked eighth with 34.1 million in passenger traffic.

Three Texas-based airlines made the U.S. Top 10 list for number of passengers. Fort Worth-based American Airlines ranked No. 1 with 72,202,834 domestic boardings and 16,560,176 international boardings. Dallas-based Southwest Airlines ranked third on sheer domestic numbers (74,768,258) and Houston-based Continental Airlines was seventh with 38,853,319 domestic and 7,926,272 international boardings.

Southlake-based Travelocity ranked sixth in *Travel Weekly's* Power List of top travel sellers. The company of about 1,800 employees had \$3.9 billion in sales in 2003.

For more information, visit www.travelweekly.com.

World Birding Center headquarter facilities

officially opened in late October at **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission**. This is the first of three resource center sites — also Estero Llano Grande State Park near Weslaco and at Resaca de la Palma State Park near Brownsville — that will be built and maintained by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. It's part of an effort to restore wildlife habitat and promote birding and nature tourism.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- ★ Fall foliage in Texas
- ★ Amarillo saddles up for world championship ranch rodeo
- ★ A whitewater adventure in Fort Worth?
- ★ Baseball team shuffle

"The Lower Rio Grande Valley is one of the most biologically diverse ecological regions in North America, a critical migratory stopover point for birds that move between the Americas. Yet, more than three quarters of the region's original wildlife habitat has been replaced by human development," says Robert L. Cook, TPWD executive director.

The WBC is meant to showcase ways to restore and protect habitat while providing a tourism destination.

The \$7 million headquarters, covering 764 acres, includes an exhibit hall, lecture hall, gift shop, coffee bar, viewing towers and blinds, tram service to transport visitors within the park, and hiking trails.

Six other WBC sites are being built and/or operated by local communities in Edinburg, Harlingen, Hidalgo, McAllen, Roma and South Padre Island.

For more information, call (956) 584-9156 or visit www.worldbirdingcenter.org.

ACCORDING to the **Travel Industry Association of America**, more consumers than last quarter are **confident** about having enough money to take leisure trips and more are

interested in taking pleasure trips.

"The economy is growing and many consumers feel optimistic about their financial prospects," says Dr. Suzanne Cook, senior vice president of research for TIA. "The good news for the travel industry is that travel demand is improving, but consumers are experiencing higher travel prices because of it."

TIA's quarterly Traveler Sentiment Index, which is conducted four times per year to gauge consumers' interest in leisure travel and their perceived ability to travel, shows that consumers' ability to travel based on personal finances experienced the biggest increase by 5.1 percent. It's now higher than it was in the last two quarters of 2002 and all of 2003. General interest in taking pleasure trips continues to rise; now standing at the highest point since the first quarter of 2001.

EW BRAUNFELS' Schlitterbahn and San Antonio's Fiesta Texas received top kudos when *Amusement Today* announced its annual **Golden Ticket Awards**.

A national survey of park fans revealed results in 17 categories.

For the seventh year in a row,

Schlitterbahn was named Best Waterpark in the nation with 56 percent of the votes. It was also named Most Beautiful Waterpark and its Master Blaster ride won for Best Waterpark Ride, with its Whitewater Tube Chute closing out the top 5 in that category.

Fiesta Texas won for having the Best Shows and the Best Outdoor Night Show.

Schlitterbahn Waterparks' Chief Operating Officer Terri G. Adams says, "Being named America's Best Waterpark took us by surprise seven years ago. Now it's a standard our entire staff takes very seriously and strives to meet every day."

For a complete list of winners, call (817) 460-7220 or visit www.amusementtoday.com.

FACES IN NEW PLACES

THE OFFICE of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism has moved its office to the Insurance Annex building at 221 E. 11th Street, 4th floor, in Austin. Despite the move, the Tourism Division's P.O. box, all e-mail addresses and phone numbers for the staff remain the same.

For more information, call (512) 936-0101.

AVIER RODRIGUEZ, former director of tourism for the Grapevine Convention and Visitors Bureau, left his position to venture into new territory: **his own business, TexTours**, a bilingual step-on guide tour service.

Despite leaving his post at the CVB, Rodriguez expects to maintain close ties with his industry friends and says he will continue to work with Bob Phillips (Director of Visitor Services for the Town of Addison) and TTIA in developing and escorting the Texas Study Tours for TxDOT and AAA travel counselors.

Rodriguez says, "I have been blessed with working among some of the most dynamic professionals in the industry and the Grapevine CVB team is no exception. In my exciting new role, I'm looking forward to working with all our great tourism partners in showcasing Texas to our visiting guests."

THE IRVING Convention and Visitors Bureau has promoted **Lori Fojtasek** to director of sales. The 13-year hospitality industry veteran has worked with the Irving CVB for 10 years as sales manager. In her new role, she will continue to handle a portion of the corporate market and will oversee all the bureau's sales efforts.

MUSEUMS

THE AMON Carter Museum in Fort Worth is exhibiting a **portrait of George Washington** that has **not been on public display** since it was painted in **1782**. The painting, on loan from a private collection, is one of the most historically significant artworks of the Revolutionary War era.

"George Washington at Yorktown" is a larger-than-life oil portrait by Charles Willson Peale, one of the great figures in early American art who also served under General Washington in the Continental army. The painting, one of Peale's six portraits of the new nation's future first president,

TREE-MENDOUS TEXAS TRAVEL

THE MILD climes of Texas aren't always conducive to watching **leaves change with the seasons**, but there still exist **spectacular splashes of fall hues for a day-trip** worthy adventure — most especially, **Lost Maples State Natural Area** near Vanderpool. Its Uvalde Bigtooth Maples turning deep red through mid-November earned it a ranking on www.OutdoorPlaces.com as the No. 10 spot for fall foliage in the nation.

Some other hot spots across the state for colorful showcases of maples, dogwoods, sweet gums, chinquapin oaks, madrone trees, hackberries and more include Angelina National Forest, Caprock Canyon State Park, Davy Crockett National Forest, Daingerfield State Park, McKittrick Canyon in Guadalupe

Mountains National Park, Possum Kingdom State Park, Sabine National Forest, Sam Houston National Forest, Tyler State Park and the Texas State Railroad State Park. Also, the community of Winnsboro is noted for its Autumn Trails.

For more information on these national forests, state parks or national parks, visit www.fs.fed.us, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/park or www.nps.gov. For more information on Winnsboro, visit www.winnsboro.com.

SOME TEXANS are just discovering what has been a well-established **tradition** for many others — **choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms**, where the quest for the holiday tree becomes a family day trip that also supports Texas

Christmas tree growers.

Each year, after Thanksgiving, tree farms open their gates to customers across the state offering hayrides, marshmallow roasts, picnics and more, making the mission of selecting a tree more like a delightful adventure. Texans have plenty to choose from as far west as Abilene and Odessa to the more plentiful farmlands of East and Central Texas.

According to the Texas Christmas Tree Growers Association, more than 100,000 Texas-grown Christmas trees were sold last year.

To find choose-and-cut Christmas tree farms, visit Texas Department of Agriculture's site at www.agr.state.tx.us/picktexas/pyo/xtree/xtree_over.htm or www.texaschristmastrees.com.

SUMMIT UP: THE BEST OF THE BEST

was commissioned by Washington's close ally and friend, the Marquis de Chastellux, an officer in the French army.

"We are very pleased and excited to have the opportunity to unveil this long-hidden, yet very significant painting," says Amon Carter Museum Director Rick Stewart.

The portrait is part of the exhibition, "Compatriots: George Washington, Charles Willson Peale, and the Marquis de Chastellux," on view in the museum's second-floor galleries through Jan. 9.

SPORTS AND TOURISM

AMARILLO is expecting an influx of guests soon as **cowboys and cowgirls** from across the nation converge in the city to show their skills for the **9th World Championship Ranch Rodeo**, set for **Nov. 11-14**.

The event, sponsored by the Working Ranch Cowboys Association, features ranching qualifying teams from Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, South Dakota, Indiana, Arizona, Alabama, Nevada and Wyoming.

"These men and women are the real deal, still patrolling the wide open spaces on horseback at all hours of the day and in all kinds of weather," says Eric Miller, director of communications for the Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council.

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—Eric Miller



The city expects benefits from the influx of guests.

"A team of 5-6 hands usually competes on behalf of their ranch, but frequently the entire ranch brings family and friends with them to the event," Miller says.

AT ITS ANNUAL **Travel Summit**, held September in **South Padre Island**, the **Texas Travel Industry Association** awarded its highest honors — the **Tall in Texas** and **Lifetime Achievement** awards — to two longtime advocates for tourism in the state — **Joe Leising** and **Marion Szurek**, respectively.

Leising, vice president of Business Development for the DePalma Hotel Corporation-NHM Group, received the Tall in Texas award for his more than 35 years promoting tourism in Texas. He was the first to partner with the state and travel to Europe and Mexico to promote the Rio Grande Valley. He also assisted in bringing Southwest Airlines service to the area. Leising was also instrumental in the formation of TTIA, where he serves on the Board of Directors.

"Joe's accomplishments and efforts in the Rio Grande Valley and Texas, as a whole, have made, and will continue to make, a significant difference in this industry," said Paul Serff, President and CEO of TTIA.

Szurek, recently retired vice president of the San Angelo Convention and Visitors Bureau, was presented the Lifetime Achievement Award for making lasting and important contributions to the industry. TTIA describes her as "one of the most consistent and loudest voices promoting tourism in Texas." Her list of leadership positions is extensive and she has served on numerous boards and committees in the state and country.

Mark of Distinction awards were given to **Nanci Liles** of the Abilene CVB, **Frank Smith** of the Sulphur Springs CVB and **Linda Sweatt** of the Odessa CVB.

All the rodeo events, as well as a cowboy art show and sale, an authentic bit and spur show, cowboy poetry and music performances, a junior ranch rodeo and a ranch exposition trade show will be in the Amarillo Civic Center.

For tickets (ranging from \$12 to \$21) or more information, call Panhandle Tickets at (806) 378-3096 or visit Panhandle Tickets at www.panhandletickets.com.

CORPUS CHRISTI and **Round Rock** baseball fans are the **big winners** with a recent **team shuffle** for the **2005 season** — Round Rock Express upgrades from a Double-A to a Triple-A baseball team, and Corpus Christi gets its own team.

The Round Rock Express name and Dell Stadium home base remains the same, but the team stepping into that role is a Triple-A Pacific Coast League team from Edmonton, Alberta in Canada. The Double-A Texas League team from Round Rock moves to Corpus Christi to

become the Hooks. Both are Houston Astros affiliates.

With this change, Corpus Christi also gets a new Class AA baseball stadium — Whataburger Field. The stadium, about 50 percent complete, is expected to draw in more than 300,000 fans a year once it opens in April 2005.

"Baseball in Corpus ... it's going to be huge," says Ronald Kitchens, president and CEO of the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation. Kitchens, who was instrumental in bringing in the minor league team, says anticipation is high, and season passes have sold faster than that of any other team in the nation. The skyboxes are sold two and three times over, he said, with companies resorting to sharing the high-demand spots. "We're ready," Kitchens says.

And home team benefits? "When it's Corpus Christi versus any other team, it becomes about us and them. It becomes a unifying force for the community." He adds, "From a national standpoint, it will

raise our profile, especially with Nolan Ryan, Roger Clemens and the 30-plus professional athletes associated with the team. It brings star power to the community."

IN THE NEWS

LEAR FORK of the **Trinity River** in **Fort Worth** took a travel page spotlight in **The New York Times** as a flowing example of convenient whitewater. The whitewater course — pebbly concrete chutes and slabs of limestone — was built into the once-placid river while the city rehabilitated worn-out flood-control dams.

"Being able to get off work and drive 20 minutes and paddle is a tremendous convenience," Steve Isenburg, a Fort Worth suburbanite and former alternate for the United States Olympic whitewater slalom team, told the *Times*. "Everybody's first preference would be to have a beautiful, natural whitewater river running through the middle of their town, but where that does not exist, this is the next best thing."

TEXAS TRIVIA



Which Texas town is known as "Home of the World's First Rodeo?"

Pecos, a popular stop along the Texas Pacific Railroad, was established in 1881, and gained early fame as a hangout for cowboys and fast-draw lawmen. An 1883 cowboy contest was the precursor to the rodeos as we know them today. The town is also known for producing the sweetest cantaloupe melons in the world. An annual festival celebrates the harvest. Town officials say the association between Pecos and cantaloupes is comparable to the associations of French wines, Maine lobsters and Swiss cheese. Pecos visitors can experience the Maxey Park and Zoo or the West-of-the-Pecos Museum and Park, while hunters can scope out mule deer, javelina and upland game birds.

For more information, visit www.pecostx.com.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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NUMBERS as of September 30, 2004

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	9,204	-7.90	94,233	-3.25
ANTHONY	10,506	+3.60	114,489	+2.64
CAPITOL	6,974	+22.01	72,160	-1.32
DENISON	36,292	+29.59	339,862	+13.58
GAINESVILLE	23,382	+34.46	210,513	-9.73
LANGTRY	4,801	+20.57	57,173	+3.70
LAREDO	9,049	+32.45	114,198	+31.65
ORANGE	52,601	+22.61	470,932	+3.62
TEXARKANA	45,811	+27.73	403,576	-0.09
VALLEY	9,751	-2.38	165,882	+8.99
WASKOM	47,840	+27.86	435,418	-0.41
WICHITA FALLS	15,030	+14.98	143,429	-1.43
CENTER TOTALS	271,241	+22.57	2,621,865	+2.83

*Compared to last year

Dial toll-free (800) 452-9292 for travel assistance from TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers (8 a.m.-6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

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