

★ TEXAS

TRAVELOG

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- ★ Walt Dabney retiring from role as director of Texas State Parks
- ★ New PBS television program to shine spotlight on Texas travel

TRAVEL NEWS

ON JUNE 14, the **Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi** took a big step toward going green by activating the **new solar panels** that were installed on the aquarium's roof.

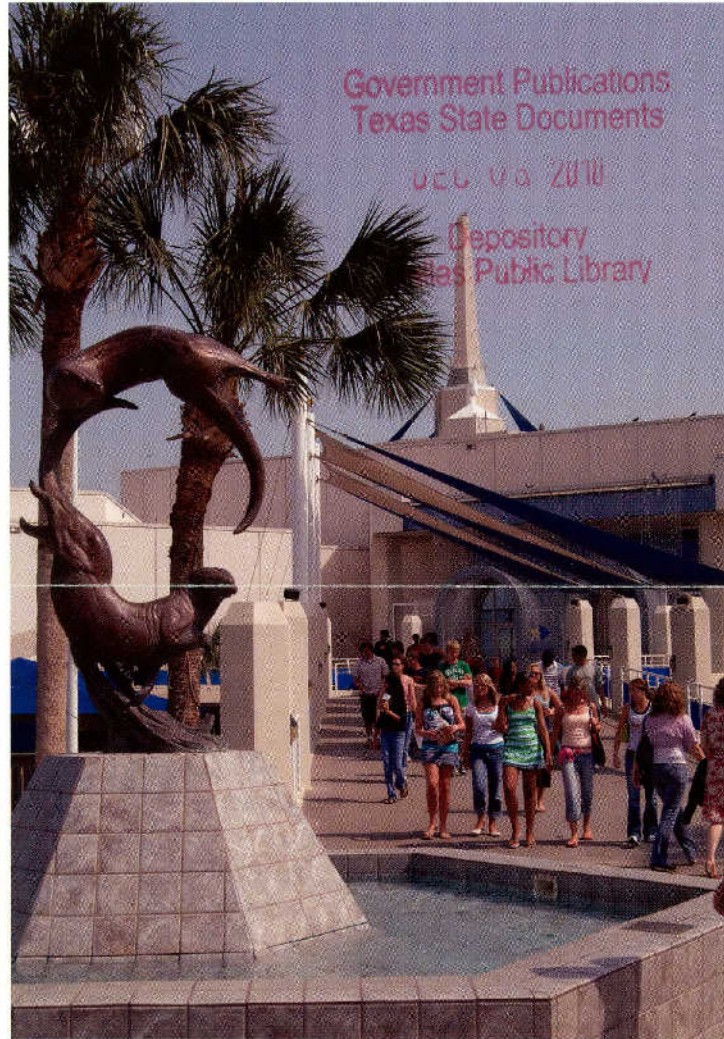
The project, funded by a \$50,000 donation from Green Mountain Energy, is expected to produce more than 12,000 kilowatts a year and save the popular attraction about \$117,000 in electricity costs during a 30-year period. The 36 large solar panels turn sunlight into energy and are expected to help the aquarium reduce its carbon footprint by offsetting about 26,000 pounds of carbon dioxide a year (the equivalent of what is produced by driving 29,000 miles).

The donation by Green Mountain Energy is believed, by aquarium officials, to be the largest of its kind in Corpus Christi. It's the first project of its kind funded and built by the Austin-based energy company.

"We are thrilled with this contribution from Green Mountain Energy Company," says Aquarium President & CEO Tom Schmid. "As one of the leading environmental education facilities in South Texas, we understand how important it is for us to 'walk the talk' in terms of conservation and sustainability. This new solar array will not only reduce our energy costs, it will provide a new opportunity to inform our guests about the importance of solar energy."

THE **GARRETT Creek Ranch Conference Center**, which has been in operation for 22 years just northwest of Dallas, **closes** its doors on **July 31**. According to co-owner Leslie Schultz, the family retains the ranch, but "we felt that the best use of the ranch is no longer in the conference business."

The facility, which had been a hot spot for corporate meetings, will become New Hope at Garrett Creek Ranch, a recovery center for those suffering from alcoholism and addictions.



The Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi goes green with the addition of a solar-panel roof that will help reduce its carbon footprint.

IN THE RANKS

CELEBRATED LIVING, **American Airlines' magazine**, released its special platinum issue to highlight the **best of the best** as selected by its readers. Among the best were several Texas properties.

Noting that "excellence is personal," the magazine shares its list of 20 Top Mainland U.S. Hotels, which includes San Antonio's Omni La Mansion del Rio in the No. 9 slot, Dallas' Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek coming in at No. 14, and the Four

Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas at No. 18. The hotels were in the company of such notables as the Waldorf Astoria (No. 4), The Plaza in New York City (No. 17) and the Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego (No. 1).

In the category of Top 20 U.S. Golf Resorts, Austin's Fazio Canyons at Barton Creek is listed in the No. 6 slot, just after such notables as California's Pebble Beach and Torrey Pines. Coming in at No. 13, TPC Four Seasons Las Colinas made the list for the second year. The

course hosts the HP Byron Nelson Championship, and its Hall of Champions has a trove of Byron Nelson golf memorabilia.

In the list of platinum spas, Lake Austin Spa Resort in Austin was the sole Texas representative, second only to Canyon Ranch in Tuscon and beating out other notables such as The Spa at Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, Ariz., and the Spa Grande at Grand Wailea in Maui.

ACCORDING TO **U.S. News and World Report**, **San Antonio, Austin and Dallas/Fort Worth** are among **2010's Top 15 Best Family Vacations in the USA** — destinations that have an abundance of diverse attractions, unique sights, world-class museums and the best family-friendly hotels.

San Antonio landed the No. 2 slot — between San Diego (No. 1) and Disney World (No. 3) — for its wealth of family-friendly attractions like the Alamo City Ghost Tours, Six Flags Fiesta Texas, SeaWorld, cowboy and music shows, historic parks, natural preserves, canyons, caves and more. "Add to that abundance of family-friendly restaurants and a relatively unique setting, and San Antonio truly is a first-rate family destination."

Coming in the No. 8 spot — bested by The Grand Canyon, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Honolulu, Oahu — is Austin. Credited for having much the same appeal as the No. 1 destination, Austin is described as a "diverse urban environment that is accessible to the outdoors, creating a variety of family attractions.

"Families can enjoy a city tour while taking a tour of the city's million-strong bat colony," the article reads.

"The preponderance of family-friendly restaurants is also available at some of the cheapest prices in the country. Austin lacks the iconic, once-in-lifetime appeal of the top five, but is a great pick for an underrated family travel destination."

TODD PHOTO



Fort Davis is among the many historic sites and museums offering free admission to active military personnel and their families.

Both Dallas and Fort Worth, collectively in at No. 12, were noted for their family-friendly offerings, including Six Flags Over Texas, zoos, aquariums, children's theaters and Wild West demonstrations.

Other destinations making the list were Chicago; Yosemite; Philadelphia; Myrtle Beach, Fla.; Phoenix; and Yellowstone.

MORGAN'S Wonderland, San Antonio's family park for special needs kids and adults, has already **won national recognition** from two prominent organizations, including United Cerebral Palsy's Universal Accessibility Design Award.

The wheelchair-accessible park, which opened in March, features rides, playgrounds, gardens, an eight-acre fishing lake, an 18,000-square-foot special events center, a 575-seat amphitheater, a picnic area and rest areas.

The park also made it as a Favorite Place on Google, based on the number of times people found the parks listing and clicked through for more information. According to Google, less than 1 percent of all U.S. businesses earn the Favorite Place on Google designation.

Gordon Hartman, founder of The Gordon Hartman Family Founda-

tion and the driving force behind Morgan's Wonderland, accepted the United Cerebral Palsy honor at the organization's 2010 annual conference in Chicago.

"We're thrilled to receive this national recognition from UCP because it validates what Morgan's Wonderland is all about — an ultra-accessible park where anyone with physical or cognitive challenges can have a truly enjoyable and memorable experience with family members, friends and other park guests," Hartman says.

ON EXHIBIT

THROUGH Labor Day, Sept. 6, active military personnel and their families will be welcomed, free of charge, to more than **700 historic sites and museums in Texas** and across the U.S. as part of the **National Endowment for the Arts' Blue Star Museums program**.

Participating museums, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, include children's museums and those with a broad range of art, history, science and cultural topics — from the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston to the California Surf Museum in Oceanside.

"We are excited to participate in the Blue Star program this year, which is a great opportunity to recognize active military all summer long and give back to those families who sacrifice so much for our country," says Donna Williams, Texas Historical Commission's Historic Sites Division director. "A number of our sites are dedicated to preserving the memory of military service in Texas. At the THC we strive to educate and broaden people's understanding of the important role that military personnel have played in Texas history from its birth as a Republic to the present."

The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio and the El Paso Museum of Art, as well as all 20 THC sites, are among those offering free admission to visitors with a Geneva Convention Common Access Card (CAC), a DD Form 1173 or a DD Form 1173-1 for active-duty military personnel (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, National Guard, and Reserve) and five immediate family members.

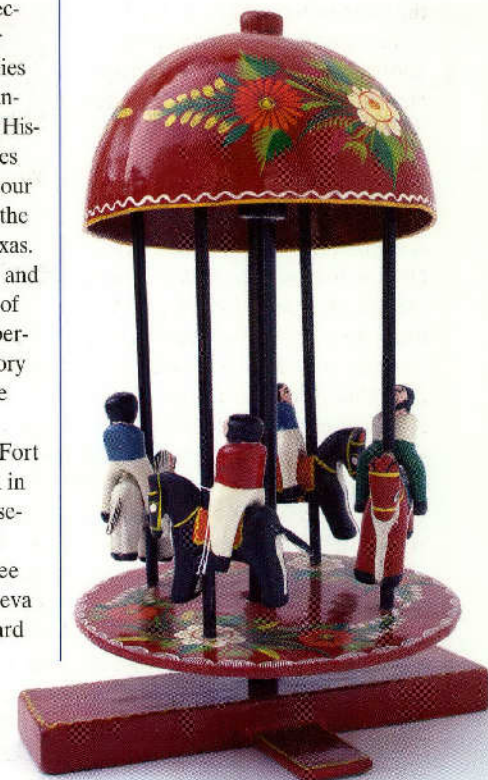
For a list of participating museums and sites in Texas, visit www.nea.gov/national/bluestarmuseums.

THE FORT WORTH Museum of Science and History continues its showcase of handmade toys with *Mexico: Festival of Toys*, an exhibit that opened May 5 in celebration of the Bicentennial of Mexican Independence and the Centennial of the Mexican Revolution. The exhibit, created by the Papalote Museo del Nino in Mexico, continues through Aug. 10.

The more than 600 toys — viewable in the museum's Innovation Gallery — reveal the spirit of play, as well as the beauty and craftsmanship behind an ancient tradition of folk art in toy making. Aside from toys created simply for play, they also feature toys created as important parts of celebrations like Christmas, Day of the Dead, Holy Week and Carnival.

Guests can experience the ingenuity and color of Mexican toys, and the country's tradition of popular art — with diversity of forms, textures, materials and techniques — is reflected in its objects of play both past and present.

"The Museum is proud to partner with the Consulate General of Mexico in Dallas, Texas, and the Papalote Children's Museum in Mexico to bring this exhibition to Fort Worth



Mexico: A Festival of Toys exhibit at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History showcases the artistic and cultural aspects of handcrafted toys.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE FORT WORTH MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY

so that we can share the beauty and playfulness of Mexican craftsmanship with our guests from throughout the region,” says Museum of Science and History President Van A. Romans. “This unique exhibition spans generations and highlights the role of the toy in the diverse and colorful expressions of Mexican folk art.”

“Mexican toys reflect the humor, creative ability, and colorfulness of our nation,” says Consul General of Mexico Juan Carlos Cué-Vega. “We shall also remember that toys are not only used by children, but some of them, like the lottery or the cups and balls, are also enjoyed by adults.”

For more information, call (817) 255-9300 or (888) 255-9300, or visit www.fwmuseum.org.

TEXAS ON TV

A NEW TRAVEL television show, “The Daytripper,” will be introduced to major Texas markets on PBS this spring and summer with its mission to “highlight all the natural and man-made wonders that lie throughout the state and to enrich the lives of viewers by inspiring them to venture out on day-trip excursions of their own to explore the great wonder that is Texas.”

The travel show, produced by Austin-based production company Hogaboom Road, originally launched in Austin last fall on the city’s PBS station KLRU. With increased viewer interest, host and creator Chet Garner decided to expand the show’s coverage area which will now cover College Station, Killeen, Waco, Houston, Dallas, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Amarillo, Midland and Lubbock.

Austin American-Statesman TV critic Dale Roe says, “Garner is a charming and humorous host ... the segments have the quick-cut look and feel of shows you might see on the Travel Channel or the Food Network, and incorporating elements of both.”

The premier episode focuses on Waco, home of Dr Pepper and Baylor University; good, old-fashioned burgers; and mountain biking. Other cities showcased will include Bastrop, Burnet, Luling, Shiner and Fredericksburg.

The program will touch on well-known Texas landmarks, obscure dives and hideaways, the Hill Country, barbecue joints, Texas vineyards and more.

For more information and air-dates, visit www.thedaytripper.com.

KICKAPOO CAVERNS NOW OPEN TO PUBLIC

AFTER MORE than 20 years of limited access, Kickapoo Cavern State Park is now open with full public access for recreation and overnight camping. An activity-filled grand opening on June 14 made it official.

The park, located 22 miles north of Brackettville in south Edwards County, preserves three distinct ecoregions — the Texas Hill Country, Trans-Pecos and South Texas Brush Country — that converge on the 6,300-plus-acre property. It features 14 miles of mountain biking trails, 18 miles of undesignated hiking & birding trails, and more than 15 caves, including Kickapoo Cavern and the Stuart Bat Cave, roost of an estimated 1 million Mexican free-tailed bats.

“The bat flights are pretty spectacular,” says Steve Blair of Texas Parks & Wildlife. “There are 500,000 bats here at the cave. It takes approximately an hour and a half for all the bats to get out of the cave.”

During the opening ceremony, the new Seargeant Memorial hike and bike trail was dedicated and named after the late Tommy Seargeant, a former Kinney County judge whose family owned the property before selling it to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

“I think this is an extraordinary realization of Judge Seargeant’s vision



David Seargeant, left, Nell Seargeant Walker and Tommy D. Seargeant unveil the memorial bronze plaque at the trailhead of the Seargeant Memorial Trail in Kickapoo Cavern State Park.

to see this property transformed to a state park, particularly for the folks of Kinney County,” says TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith. “He had a lot of pride in this part of Texas, and he wanted to protect it so that the people here could always enjoy it.”

Smith adds, “We have the privilege of stewarding on your behalf a hundred state park sites, a hundred of Texas’ most treasured places that literally and figuratively tell the life and history and story and spirit of our great state, places from the birthplace of Texas to the home place of

presidents, grand canyons and grand calderas, bat caves and wonderful pictographs and old German breweries and just about anything you want to come see and enjoy.”

“It’s just a natural place to be,” says park superintendent Mike Knezek. “We’re trying to keep it as natural as possible; trying to make sure that it stays low key, a little laid back, and it’s just a great place to be.”

For more information, contact Kickapoo Cavern State Park at (830) 563-2342, or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

INDUSTRY INSIDER

WALT DABNEY, credited for directing major changes through the Texas State Park system over the past 11 years, will retire as the Texas State Parks director, effective Aug. 31.

Dabney, who came to Texas Parks and Wildlife Department after 30 years with the National Park Service, is noted for being instrumental in working with constituent groups and the Legislature to transform a park system suffering from worn out equipment, deteriorating facilities and sagging employee morale into a better funded, more professional, customer-oriented and technologically savvy operation.

Dabney, 64, cites increased state funding for parks as a high point of his TPWD career.

“It was huge,” Dabney says. “Thanks to the Legislature, we’ve been able to build a programmatic infrastructure that supports a modern-day park system, providing natural and cultural resource management, comprehensive law enforcement and all those components that lead to a successful park system.”

Dabney also is proud of the re-vamping of the state parks’ interpretation, prescribed fire, natural and cultural resource management, and law enforcement programs, as well as the recent implementation of what he calls the nation’s best park business management system, which includes a centralized, electronic park reservation system. He also singled out the Texas Outdoor Family camping and Free Fishing in State Parks initiatives as trend-setting efforts to reconnect an in-

creasingly urban population with nature and the outdoors.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission Chairman Peter Holt of San Antonio says, “Walt’s commitment to a better park system for Texas helped turn the tide, so today our parks are beginning to flourish with increased staff and improved facilities.”

“Texas Parks and Wildlife won’t be the same without Walt Dabney, but it will be better because of him,” says Scott Boruff, TPWD deputy executive director for operations, who oversees the State Parks Division. “Walt will be remembered for his absolute dedication to providing recreational and educational opportunities for the common man and for his fierce and compassionate support for his staff and colleagues.”

A nationwide search is planned to find a new state parks director.

BRUNN FENZLER © TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

TEXAS TRIVIA

Where will you find the largest collection of World War II Aviation Nose Art?

The nationally accredited Commemorative Air Force Airpower Museum in Midland is world renowned for authentic World War II artifacts. The museum's nose-art gallery features 33 original panels designated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as an official project of Save America's Treasures. The museum houses 40,000 square feet of hands-on exhibits that detail the story of World War II airpower and it includes a hangar with vintage aircraft. The museum also hosts the CAF AIRSHO each year in late September/early October. For more information, call (432) 567-3010.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of May 31, 2010

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	9,520	-0.15	33,880	-0.63
ANTHONY	8,535	+16.23	40,781	+1.92
CAPITOL	7,590	-0.04	35,881	+2.62
DENISON	28,505	-2.08	117,458	-15.14
GAINESVILLE	28,191	-6.70	120,775	-1.17
LANGTRY	5,324	-8.96	29,176	-4.16
LAREDO	7,644	-6.29	45,741	+0.98
ORANGE	34,637	-16.86	158,748	-19.42
TEXARKANA	28,278	+8.39	111,630	+7.49
VALLEY	9,017	+7.18	98,657	+11.23
WASKOM	36,150	-10.20	157,121	+2.10
WICHITA FALLS	13,170	-18.86	54,243	-20.79
CENTER TOTALS	216,561	-6.03	1,004,091	-5.04

*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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