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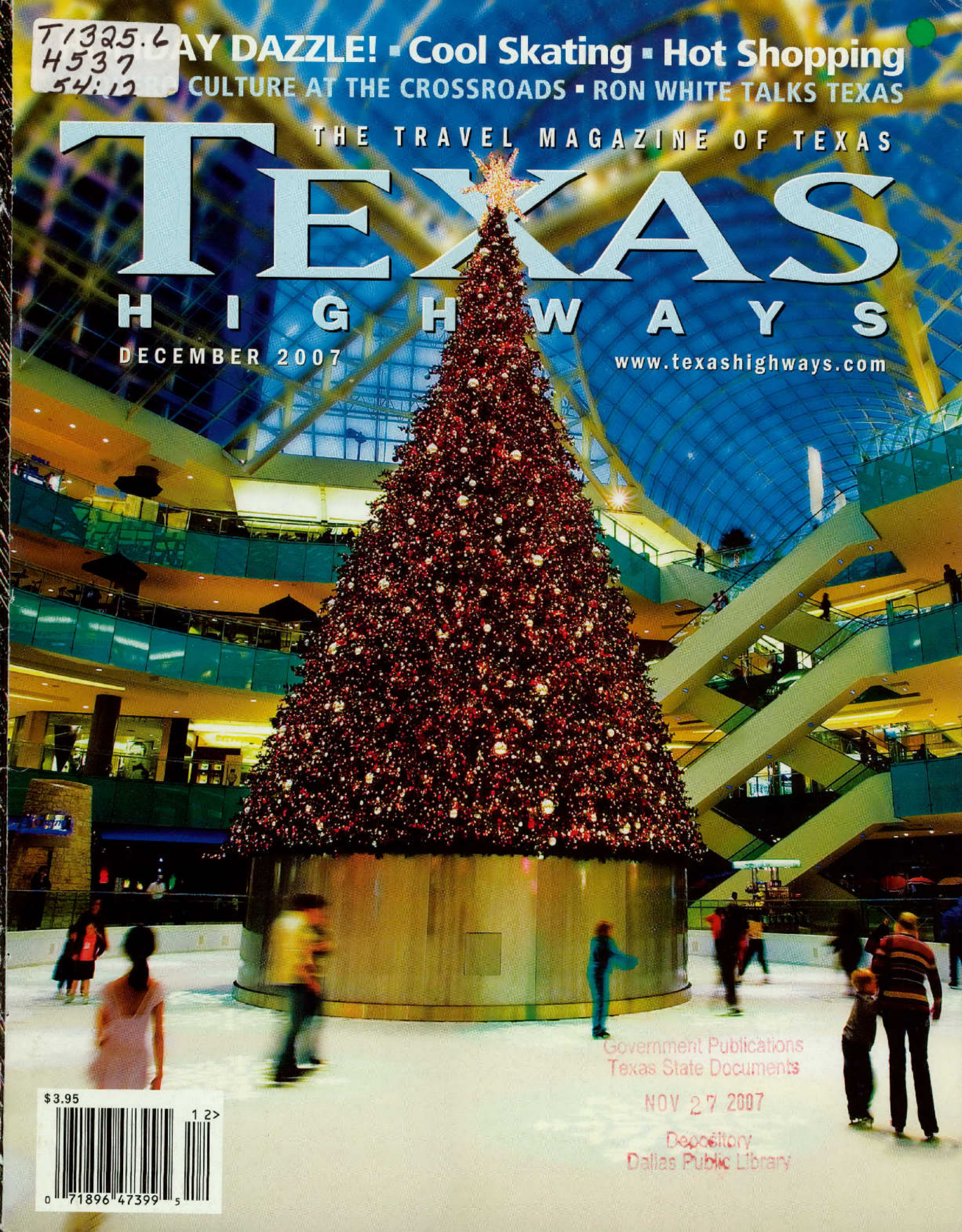
# THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

# TEXAS

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DECEMBER 2007

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KEVIN VANDIVIER



The world seems to stand still at sunset—even for just a moment—so we can see beyond the immediate into the infinite.

**W**HY DO WE TRAVEL? The answer *seems* obvious. City dwellers escape the alarming pace of urban life. Flatlanders want to see the mountains. And landlocked folks long to see the ocean. To get more analytical, I read a couple of 2006 studies into the economic impact of Texas travel. After scrolling through charts on direct spending, accommodation spending, and taxes generated for all of the state's metropolitan areas, I could see the numbers weren't telling the whole story. Fortunately, my wife, Helen, and I were taking a weekend trip, so I could think about it in more personal terms.

We drove from Austin toward **Blanco** to **Juniper Hills Farm**. The upside of all the summer's torrential rains is that the landscape was green and the temperatures were moderate. Even when the gate code didn't work and I had to walk the half mile to the house from FM 165, I was in the spirit of the escape.

A cooking class filled the kitchen of the "main house" when we arrived, so we settled in to our casita to relax before deciding what to do about dinner. We didn't have to wonder for long, because owner **Sibby Barrett** came bustling, apron-clad, to our door to let us know the cooking class had made enough extra to share with us. And they had concocted an icy pitcher of hibiscus margaritas.

Even though the main house is less than 50 yards away, the serpentine paths through the namesake junipers made for a picturesque stroll. We ate perched on bar stools in the midst of the kitchen's spirited activity, where we could catch up with several conversations in progress. The food was Topic One, and the margaritas were a perfect introduction to grilled shrimp in a tequila-lime marinade, chicken with mole that hit a perfect combo of complex and mildly spicy, along with just-made salsa and delectable gorditas. Dessert was a light chocolate cupcake with a Kahlúa-cream-cheese icing injected into its center.

After all the stories were told, we made our way through a grove of junipers to the stone-lined pool on the hillside. I floated dreamily, looking up at a crescent moon that peeked occasionally through the clouds and listened to faraway owls. Less than an hour from home, we had found fabulous food, interesting new people, and a setting that was magical.

I didn't have to think too much more about why we travel.

Charles J. Lohrmann, Editor

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IN MEMORIAM: JACK LOWRY (1951-2006)

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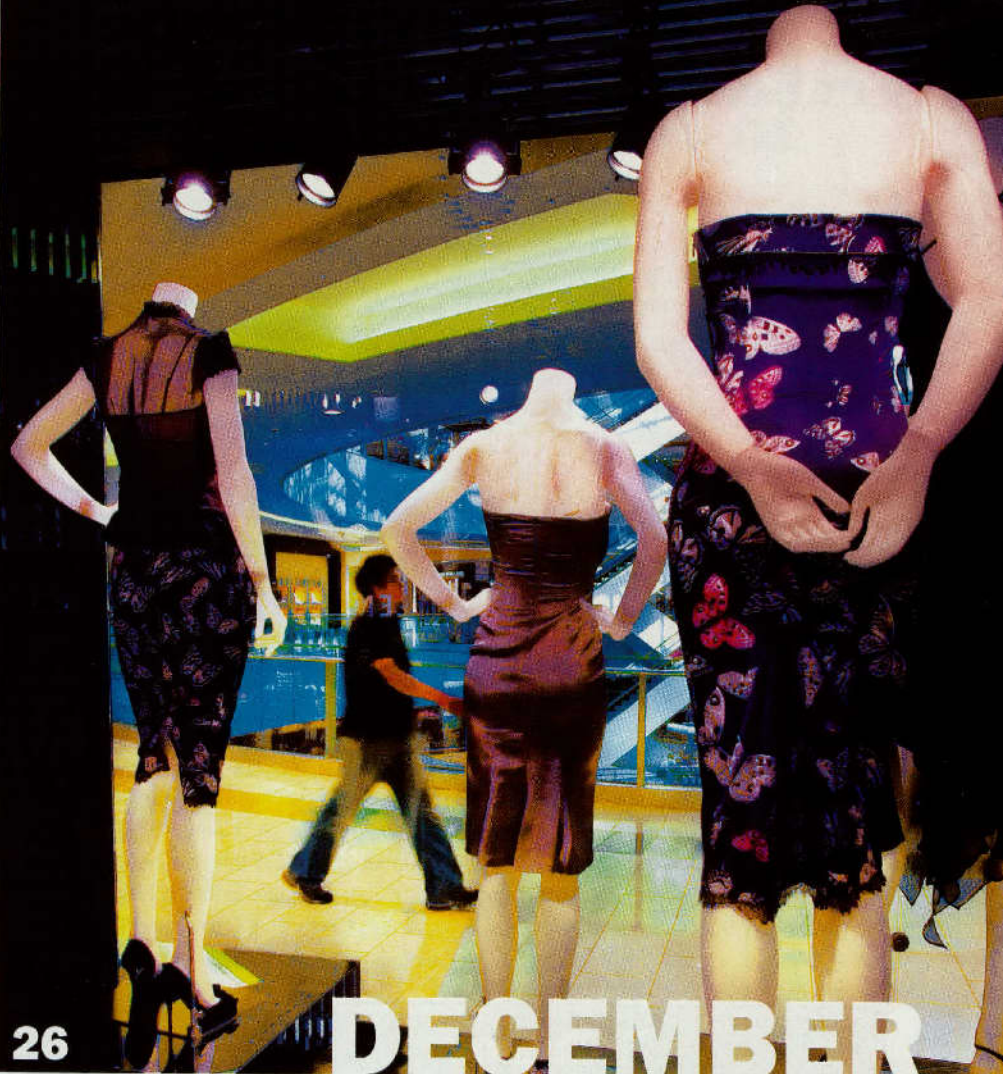
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# DECEMBER 2007



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**ABOUT OUR COVERS** FRONT: Galleria Dallas' 95-foot-tall Christmas tree comes alive five times a day with twinkling lights dancing to recorded symphonic music. For more Galleria fun, see page 26. Photo by J. Griffis Smith. BACK: A close-up of the giant spiderweb at Lake Tawakoni State Park. Photo © Chris Hamilton.

PHOTOS FROM TOP LEFT, CLOCKWISE:  
© DAVID MORRIS/KILLEEN DAILY HERALD; J. GRIFFIS SMITH; © LARRY DITTO

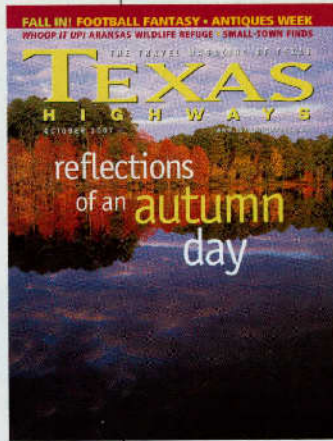
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■ **PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS AVAILABLE** Some images in this issue are available as prints in two distinctive formats. For more information, call toll-free 866/962-1191, or visit [www.texashighwaysprints.com](http://www.texashighwaysprints.com).



CONGRATULATIONS to Daniel Chamberlain of Houston, who won September's "Where in Texas Are You?" contest. Daniel's name was drawn from hundreds of entries with the correct answer: Guadalupe Mountains National Park. Big thanks to Visit Big Bend, the Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and Southwest Airlines for the fabulous prize package!



historic Schuetzen Verein Hall, as well as the pending return of the "Big Joe Polka Show" (Feb. 21-24, 2008) to the Big Red Barn mentioned in your article.

Many of the historic dance halls of Texas

are memorialized in Geronimo Treviño's book *Dance Halls and Last Calls*, available through Texas Highways ([www.texas-highways.com](http://www.texas-highways.com)). We have danced in 331 Texas dance halls and venues. TH helps us "Waltz Across Texas."

JOHN AND  
MARLYS RIVARD  
Houston

## In Step With TH

THERE ARE lots of ways to travel Texas highways. One is by dancing! Three sequential articles in the October issue reminded us of this. Snyder is home to a great five-day Western Swing festival every June. Comfort is neighbor to the Nelson City Dance Hall and the historic hall at Sisterdale. Round Top features the

## Behind the Scenery

LOVE THAT *Texas Highways*! Regarding Ratcliff Lake (on October's cover): Just after 1900, a small tributary of Cochino [Bayou] was dammed by the Central Coal and Coke Company. This was done to form a lake to store saw logs for the Four C sawmill (the lake water protected the pine timber from insects). The

sawmill was disabled by 1920. My father, Henry Albin, was born 13 miles from the lake in 1913 and relayed this information to me. He is still doing well today.

RAY ALBIN  
Channelview

ED. NOTE: Thanks for writing, Ray. Pearlle Green, with the National Forest Service office in Ratcliff, says that in the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps reconstructed the spillway, established a reforestation program at the site, and built structures for the recreation area, which became part of Davy Crockett National Forest in 1937. For more information, call 936/655-2299; [www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas).

## Cholesterol Rise in Wichita Falls

LORI MOFFATT's "Spotlight on Wichita Falls" [October] was a pleasure to read, and the mention of Pioneer #3/P-3 prompted me to send a suggestion for her next visit.

I began making memories in Wichita Falls nearly 48 years ago as a very young Airman permanently stationed at Sheppard AFB in October 1959. The Pioneer chain of family-style restaurants soon became a favorite (especially

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**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**December 2007**

- November 30-December 1 FRONTIER CHRISTMAS - Fort Davis  
[www.fortdavis.com](http://www.fortdavis.com)
- December 8 COWBOY CHRISTMAS BALL - Alpine  
(432) 837-8240 [www.sulross.edu](http://www.sulross.edu)
- December 7-9 SUL ROSS UNIVERSITY STUDIO THEATRE - Alpine  
presents "The Ballad of King Windowglass" [www.sulross.edu](http://www.sulross.edu)
- December 8 & 15 CHRISTMAS TREE HUNT - Davis Mountains Preserve  
[www.fortdavis.com](http://www.fortdavis.com)
- December 14-15 FILM TEXT PERFORMANCE FILM - Ballroom Marfa  
[www.ballroommarfa.org](http://www.ballroommarfa.org)
- December 15-16 47th DAVIS MTNS CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT  
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on payday) and has remained so to this day. It's not all that unusual for my wife, Brenda, and me to persuade each other that a trip in the area should include a detour through Wichita Falls to visit one of the remaining Pioneer restaurants for their Famous Enchiladas! The meal consists of three cheese enchiladas (topped with Bermuda onions and jalapeños), French fries, and cole slaw; with pre-meal chips and hot

sauce, of course! The combination is so high in fat that you can almost hear your cholesterol count increasing and feel your arteries clogging, but it is so good!

WALT DEAN  
Plano

## Touchdown Letdown

WHEN I saw the back cover of the October issue, I nearly threw the magazine in the trash



Prints of Mike Murphy's *Ladies at Louie Mueller's, Taylor* are available from Stephen L. Clark Gallery in Austin (512/477-0828; [www.stephenclarkgallery.com](http://www.stephenclarkgallery.com)).

without opening it. All of the constant media coverage and groveling at the altar of the church of football is sickening. I read *TH* for the great art and travel.

STEVEN HENDERSON

ED. NOTE: *Thanks for sharing your concerns. We think the October covers—with fall foliage on the front and football on the back—provide the bookends for October in Texas.*

Texan and learn more about our great state. Thanks for a job well done.

MARY WINTERS  
Graham

**WRITE OR E-MAIL:** Talk to *TH, Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009; fax 512/486-5879; e-mail: [letters05@texashighways.com](mailto:letters05@texashighways.com). Web site: [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com). Though we are unable to print every letter, we just might select yours to appear in the magazine—whether you send us kudos or criticism. We reserve the right to edit letters.

**Beehives and BBQ**  
MIKE MURPHY's photograph of *Ladies at Louie Mueller's* ["Up Front," October] brought back some great memories of my mother and aunts. You know what they say: "The bigger the hair, the closer to God." And they also say, "The blonder the hair, the closer to God." In this case, both statements ring true!

CAMILLE GILMORE  
Allen

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# For THE ROAD

THIS MONTH'S TOP PICKS AND PLACES

## The Soul of Zydeco

IN PREPARATION FOR THE BOOK *TEXAS ZYDECO* (UT PRESS), writer Roger Wood and photographer James Fraher traveled throughout the Southeast Texas “zydeco corridor” interviewing and photographing musicians, dancers, club owners, and fans. A photographic exhibition based on the book, also called **Texas Zydeco**, appears at the **Witte Museum** in **San Antonio** through January 20, 2008. Dozens of large-scale, black-and-white photos depict a thriving music scene that looks to Louisiana for its roots while reinventing itself in Texas style. (Take, for example, the popular “zyde-rap” movement, led by Houston hip-hop-zydeco bands like J. Paul Jr. and the Zydeco NuBreedz.)

After viewing these photos—zydeco dancers at Pe-Te’s Cajun Barbeque House in Houston in 2004; Billy Poullard performing at St. Pius Catholic Church in Beaumont in 2004; danc-

ers at C.C.’s Hideout in Houston, and dozens more—you’ll be ready to hit the dance floor. Check out the Web site of the **Blue and Gold Creole Zydeco Dance Society**, which lists zydeco events and venues all over southeast Texas: [www.zydecoevents.com](http://www.zydecoevents.com). For more about the Witte, call 210/357-1900; [www.wittemuseum.org](http://www.wittemuseum.org).



© JAMES FRAHER

This 2003 photo of zydeco accordionist Bon Ton Mickey appears at the Witte Museum as part of the exhibition *Texas Zydeco*.

## A NEW WORLD OF ART

ON THE HEELS OF ITS POPULAR *RED HOT-Asian Art Today* exhibition, the **Museum of Fine Arts Houston** continues to fuel America’s fascination with art from Asia with the grand opening of its new **Arts of Korea Gallery** on December 9. Along with items selected from the museum’s permanent collection, the 58 pieces on display include objects loaned from the National Museum of Korea in Seoul, including a royal golden crown and belt crafted during the Silla period, which are designated National Treasures. The new Korean gallery—where artworks represent 5,000 years of cultural history—is the first of several spaces scheduled to open at the museum next year, including galleries devoted to China, Japan, India, and Indonesia. Call 713/639-7300; [www.mfah.org](http://www.mfah.org). —L.M.

## CHRISTMAS IN THE PARK

THE TOWN OF CUERO IS A GREAT PLACE to admire some of southeast Texas’ loveliest (and earliest) spring flowers. But Cuero shines in the winter, too. From November 19 through January 1, 2008, Cuero’s **Christmas in the Park** celebrates the season with nearly 100 lighted displays at Municipal Park, along with carriage rides and a living Nativity. Plan to spend at least 20 minutes driving through the park, not counting stops to take photos. Call 361/275-8178 for more about this celebration, and

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for information about other holiday events in Texas, see page 57. —L.M.

## BASEBALL AS AMERICA

THROUGH JANUARY 13, 2008, THE MUSEUM of Nature & Science at Fair Park in Dallas hosts *Baseball As America*, the largest touring exhibition of baseball artifacts ever assembled by the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown, New York.

The exhibit examines the game's rituals, its heroes, the fan experience, physics and technology, segregation and integration, the evolution of baseball as a business, and its role in pop culture.

Among the hundreds of items on display are the first ball pitched by Cy Young in the first World Series (1903); one of the world's most valuable baseball cards (a T206 Honus Wagner, 1909,

valued at nearly \$3 million); a cap worn by pitcher Satchel Paige; historic photographs of Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio; a Dodgers jersey worn by Jackie Robinson; a pair of legendary broadcaster Harry Caray's eyeglasses; the mitt used by Yogi Berra to catch Don Larsen's perfect game at the 1956 World Series; Roger Maris'

Fewer than 100 examples of the valuable T206 Honus Wagner baseball card are known to exist.

record-breaking home-run bat; Jack Norworth's original 1908 manuscript of lyrics for "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"; and a ball and ticket from Nolan Ryan's 7th no-hitter in 1991. Call 214/428-5555; [www.natureandscience.org](http://www.natureandscience.org). —M.L.

## HOLIDAY CHEER, VERY NEAR

SALADO, A TOWN OF 2,500 BETWEEN Austin and Waco, may strike you as a sleepy shopping village most of the year. Not so during December, when thousands of folks head for its shaded streets to scoop up original art, home-made jewelry, one-of-a-kind furniture pieces, clothing, and rare books. On November 30-December 2 and again on December 7-9, the town's 60-odd shops and galleries host the annual *Salado Christmas Stroll*. The whole town glows with luminarias and carolers wander

amid the crowds. Some shops offer cider and cookies, others host pianists and small choirs, and most stay open past nine to allow for leisurely browsing.

"The goal of the stroll is to put everybody in the Christmas spirit," says Charlotte Douglass, who offers home accessories at her boutique, Charlotte's of Salado. "All the shopkeepers pitch in to decorate," she says, "and since the whole town is only about a mile long, you can park and stroll to each site."

Also part of the festivities, a *Homes Tour* (Nov. 30 and Dec. 1-2) allows access to 10

private residences and historic sites that have been decorated for the holidays. You can also enjoy live performances of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* at the outdoor Tablerock Amphitheater and a holiday variety show called *Let It Snow, Christmas Show, Radio* at the Silver Spur Theater.

If this doesn't put you in the holiday spirit, mark your calendar for next year's *A Christmas Carol* auditions: There's a character named Scrooge that might suit you. For information about the stroll, call 254/947-5040; [www.salado.com](http://www.salado.com). —L.M.

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Bruce Partain Photo

- Sat., November 24th Wassail Fest - Downtown Merchants
- Sat., December 1st Downtown Festival - Children's Activities and Texas' Largest Lighted Christmas Parade
- Fri., December 7th Old Fashioned Christmas at Millard's Crossing Historic Village
- Sat., December 8th Tour of Homes

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## For THE ROAD

### MAP QUEST

IN NOVEMBER, TCU'S CENTER FOR TEXAS Studies and the Museum of the Big Bend at Sul Ross State kicked off a traveling exhibition of 64 maps dating as far back as 1548. Called *Going to Texas, Five Centuries of Texas Maps*, the exhibition appears through January 3 at Dallas' Old Red Courthouse and Museum, which opened this spring in the recently restored 1890 courthouse. While all of the maps depict Texas and its surrounding territories, many of the maps were created overseas at printers in Amsterdam, Paris, Frankfurt, and London. After leaving Dallas, the exhibition travels to Canyon, Midland, Waco, Edinburg, Lubbock, El Paso, Albany, and Fort Worth, where it closes in January 2010. Map your travels now. Call 817/257-6295; [www.texasstudies.org](http://www.texasstudies.org). -L.M.

### ANOTHER DIMENSION

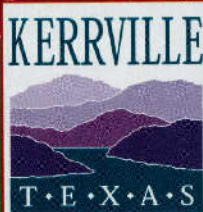
PHILANTHROPIST, ART COLLECTOR, AND real-estate pioneer Raymond Nasher, who died March 16 in Dallas, liked to compare sculpture to people. "Unlike paintings," he said, "sculptures must be seen from all sides."

It's a good month to learn more about the many sides of Raymond Nasher: His fashionable NorthPark Center (which was the largest climate-controlled retail establishment in the world when it opened in 1965) still entices shoppers with public art and a roster of high-end retailers like Nordstrom and Neiman Marcus. Downtown, the serene Nasher Sculpture Center, which opened its doors in 2003, showcases an evolving collection of sculpture and artwork in its indoor and outdoor galleries. Through February 17, the Nasher hosts *Woman: The Art of Gaston Lachaise*, a selection of more than 40 sculptures from the Lachaise Foundation in Boston. Lachaise was born in 1882 in Paris, but emigrated to the United States as a young man, and he sculpted women almost exclusively. When Lachaise died at age 53, his groundbreaking work had just been honored with a solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York—the first solo show awarded to a living sculptor. Now he gets due praise in Texas. Call 214/242-5100; [www.nasher-sculpturecenter.org](http://www.nasher-sculpturecenter.org). -L.M.

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## GOOD SANTA

**T**he spirited jingle, “You better watch out, you better not cry...Santa Claus is coming to town,” rang true for families living along the Santa Fe Railway in North Texas during the Great Depression.

For them, Old Saint Nick was a reality.

Cleburne-based engineer Joe Gerard, also known as “Mister Joe” and “the Santa Fe Santa Claus,” embodied the tale of the jolly old elf with his railroad locomotive, bearing gifts for anyone brisk enough to catch them as his train rumbled by. There was no checking of the list twice; children and adults alike who saw Gerard’s long, white beard and red suit, relished in the fantasy every Christmas for nearly a half century, according to a December 1974



Joe Gerard, the “Santa Fe Santa Claus” (above), with his requisite sack of toys. Right, A.C. Greene’s popular whodunit.

article in *Texas Highways* titled “The Santa Fe Santa Claus.” Each morning, he would hop aboard his train, fire up its engine, and “Ho! Ho! Ho!” all the way from Cleburne to Oklahoma. No reindeer, no chimneys, and no milk and cookies were involved, just the generous spirit of Mister Joe, who would use his own money to buy candy and toys to fill his sack. Often he would head off with local well-wishers, photographers, and reporters trailing along, all trying to catch a glimpse of Santa.

Nancy Lee Foley, Gerard’s great-granddaughter, remembers hearing family stories of his sincerity and kindness. “He was humble and didn’t have a care in his soul that the newspapers wanted to know what he was doing. All he cared about were those people.”

In 1943, at the age of 76, Joe retired and hung up his red suit for good. He hoped that someone would continue his tradition of spreading the holiday spirit, but no one ever did; in 1947, he died.

However, his legacy was later honored when the Cleburne Independent School District named Gerard Elementary School after him. His memory also lives on through the stories people tell about how, for those 46 years, Santa Claus did come to town.

—Regina Philip, Austin

## BAD SANTA

**F**olks ’round Cisco still talk about the time that Santa Claus robbed the First National Bank.

It was two days before Christmas in 1927 when the familiar, red-suited figure strode into the bank. A local ex-con named Marshall Ratliff, well known around Cisco for doing time in prison after robbing a bank in Valera, wore the jolly disguise, complete with a white-whiskered mask. His fellow stick-

up men—former jailbirds Henry Helms and Bobby Hill, and family man Louis Davis—wore plainclothes. The quartet would soon learn what every true Santa knows by heart: It is a great deal healthier to give than to receive.

As A.C. Greene wrote of the caper in his 1972 book, *The Santa Claus Bank Robbery*, the plan went tragically awry from the minute “Santa” and his elves-in-crime pointed guns at the bank teller and demanded their stockings be filled with the spendable green stuff.

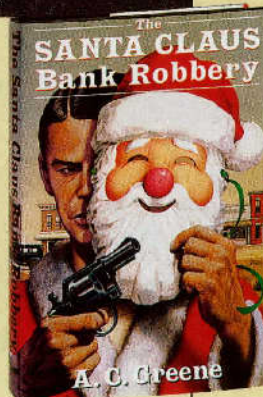
Ratliff’s iconic costume, which naturally served as a magnet for Christmas-crazy kids, proved the hapless robbers’ undoing. Having been promised a visit with Santa Claus, 6-year-old Frances Blasengame dragged her mother into the bank behind Santa. When Mrs. B.P. Blasengame saw that St. Nick was actually holding up the First National, she hurried Frances out the back door and darted to the nearby police station. Within minutes, lawmen were filling the air with gunsmoke; armed citizens joined in as well.

For days, the three surviving bandits (Davis died later that day from his injuries) crept desperately through North Texas in stolen cars and on foot, as newspapers carried the story nationwide. Eventually caught in an ambush while trying to cross the

Brazos River at South Bend, Ratliff was riddled with bullets. He survived only to be hanged by irate citizens who dragged him out of the Eastland County jail after he had killed another lawman in a separate escape attempt. Helms was executed at Huntsville after a theatrical effort to prove himself insane failed in court. Hill, paroled in the 1940s, kept clear of gun-toting Santas for the rest of his life.

Later interviewed by reporters, Frances claimed to have seen through the St. Nick charade all along. “But really,” she said, “that was not Old Santa. I saw his pants and they were just like Papa’s.”

—Gene Fowler, Austin





# Spotlight

## on THE FOUR SEASONS

### Say Spa-aaahhh

THE SERENE GREEN OF THE ROOM REMINDS ME OF the tranquil sea. As I wait for my massage, cocooned in a plush robe and slippers, I sip iced water freshened with slices of cucumber, thumb dreamily through an issue of *Vogue*, and ponder my good fortune to be enjoying a weekend at the **Four Seasons Resort and Club in Irving**. A water sculpture nearby whooshes in a blissful crash of white noise.

Soon, I lay draped with cool sheets as a massage therapist with strong hands dissolves the knots in my shoulders. *This*, I realized, is why people spend time and money to go to a spa or luxurious hotel. Fancy hotels have long offered spa services, but more and more hotels are reinventing themselves as spa destinations, offering an eclectic mix of activities and indulgences. And with a little planning, you can maxi-

mize the experience to take advantage of every little perk, whether it's the Sunday *New York Times* delivered to your doorstep or an Olympic-size saltwater pool within walking distance of your king-size bed.

A world-class golf course, a stellar restaurant featuring classics like risotto and grilled steaks,



Chill out at the lagoon pool at the Four Seasons Resort and Club at Las Colinas, in Irving.

a lagoon-style pool that looks like it belongs in Hawaii, and attentive service bring visitors to the resort from all corners of the globe. And as luxurious as the rooms here are (heavenly beds, European toiletries, rainwater shower heads, tremendous TVs), I would gladly pitch a pup tent on the driving range just to hang out at the spa.

On my recent visit, I took advantage of every amenity I could. I rode a deluxe stationary bike in the Sports Club, where trainers brought me cool towels, new magazines, and glasses of lemonade. I borrowed a pair of goggles and swam laps in the saltwater pool.

Then I drank hibiscus tea and sunbathed beside the landscaped lagoon pool, watching kids play Marco Polo while their stylish parents supervised from teak recliners. I took a challenging Pilates/yoga class, relaxed in the steam room, and cooled off with a dip into a cold-water tub. And of course, I spent plenty of time drooling indecorously onto the massage table.

If you're a hotel guest or you have a spa appointment (manicures cost \$35, Swedish massages cost \$120, for example), you have full access to the Spa and Sports Club, so schedule time to enjoy everything. At the very least, show up early enough to enjoy a cup of hot tea in the softly lit waiting area, where water courses down a translucent, ceiling-to-floor glass wall like a modern, architectural waterfall.

Some people define a spa vacation as a means to get more fit. Some long to relax, while others want to indulge in fine wine and food. Personally, I like to do a little of each; that way, it all evens out, at least in theory.

# Waxahachie

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Dinner at the elegant Café on the Green, where chef Katie Natale prepares dishes such as grilled scallops with creamy Parmesan orzo, foie gras with grapes and cinnamon toast, and beef tenderloin with Hollandaise, isn't the only way to enjoy the resort's imaginative menu. You can also sign up for the monthly Wine Experience reception (\$45), which features a stupendous assortment of Chef Natale's appetizers served with wines chosen by the restaurant's sommelier.

I missed October's Wine Experience, but I made reservations for the Four Seasons Texas Afternoon Tea (\$38 for four people), which is served at Café on the Green every afternoon except Sunday. My companion and I sipped bergamot-scented Earl Grey tea at a table overlooking the pool while we savored elegant canapés made with pecan-studded chicken salad, portobello mushrooms, and roast beef. And then we followed that with a selection of scones and tarts, including a divine chewy pecan concoction that married pecan pie to baklava.

THE TWO OTHER FOUR SEASONS HOTELS in Texas—in Houston and Austin—offer comparable enticements. To make sure what I learned in Irving wasn't too good to be true, I decided to see how I could maximize my experiences at the Four Seasons in Houston and Austin, too.

**THE HOLIDAY SEASON** brings lower rates, with package deals as low as \$230 per night. All three hotels offer specials throughout the year. See [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com).

At \$52 per person, brunch in Houston was a feast I'll repeat next time I visit. After a spicy Bloody Mary made with fresh tomato juice, I couldn't tear myself away from the room dedicated

to salads, charcuterie, seafood, and platters stacked with jewel-like hunks of pineapple, plump berries, and slices of kiwi. I sampled oysters, three types of caviar, pungent smears of goat cheese, bold slivers of prosciutto with melon, and then ended a two-hour feast with an elegant demitasse of creamy chocolate pudding.

Back in our hometown, my husband and I played tourist for the day at the Four Seasons Austin, riding bikes along Lady Bird Lake before swooning over fiery ceviche and a perfect beef tenderloin adorned with a single cipollino onion at the hotel's new restaurant, TRIO. Chef Elmar Prumbs worked on the new menu for a year, and it shows.

I'll have to try to figure out a way to have these extraordinary experiences more often.

—LORI MOFFATT

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# TOP Tables

NOTEWORTHY CULINARY JOURNEYS

BY DOTTY GRIFFITH

## The Gastronomic Gaylord

A CULINARY DESTINATION has arisen in a surprising place: the Gaylord Texan Resort and Convention Center. The massive complex, on a peninsula that juts into Lake Grapevine just minutes northwest of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, includes a 1,511-room hotel, four-and-a-half acres of indoor gardens, and five full-scale restaurants.

A popular site for conventions and meetings (and with locals), the Gaylord is designed to entertain visitors for several days with a variety of restaurants, shopping, and recreational options. It can also be a weekend getaway in a mini-state of gourmet euphoria. The five restaurants in combination could keep guests busy for a couple of days; however, it's possible to hit three of the venues in one spectacular evening of wining and dining. Here's how my friends and I did it.



ALL PHOTOS © LOUIS DELUCA

Check out  
the Gaylord Texan  
restaurant slide  
show at [www.texas  
highways.com](http://www.texas<br/>highways.com).

Among the specialties at Old Hickory Steakhouse is Angus sirloin strip au poivre (shown here with a side of French-fried onions).

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### Begin at Ama Lur

THIS IS A great spot to unwind after a long day or in preparation for a long weekend. From the hotel entrance, you'll wander through the lobby (which resembles a cattle baron's home with posh Texana furnishings) to the atria with acres of temperature-controlled "outdoor" space. Stroll among massive faux rock formations that recall Palo Duro Canyon and winding waterways that mimic the beauty of San Antonio's River Walk. Lush plantings of trees and flowering plants require a full-time horticultural staff.

Follow the sound of salsa music around a bend and find yourself in the festive atmosphere of Ama Lur's margarita bar. Take a seat on the patio (it's indoors, but you'll swear you're outside) and enjoy a mango margarita, an ice-cold cerveza, or one of the sipping tequilas. Or go Texan and chase a tequila shot with a Mexican beer.

Ama Lur has become chef David Woodward's Southwestern palette from which he paints a mosaic of flavors drawn from Mexican, Latin American, and Native American cuisines. Although superstar chef Stephan Pyles, a mentor to Wood-



The Old Hickory Steakhouse is one of five delectable dining options at the Gaylord Texan Resort in Grapevine.

ward, was consulting chef when the Gaylord opened in 2004, the menu has since become distinctly Woodward's own.

Flatbread pizzas with toppings such as honey-marinated organic Portobello mushrooms and buttermilk blue cheese are great for starters. So are barbecued-pork empanadas. Or enjoy a first course of crabcakes in the dining room, where gauzy drapes soften bright colors on the walls. The crabcakes are mostly chunks of jumbo lump meat held together with the tiniest amount of bread crumbs.

Mark my words: You'll be tempted to remain and check out entrées such as coriander-cured beef tenderloin. (Desserts include dreamy options such as banana-rum

cheesecake and Key lime crème brûlée.) But we were on a mission, and we moved on.

### To Old Hickory Steakhouse

IF YOU'RE in the mood to taste some fine wines, head to Old Hickory's upstairs wine bar and check out the Enomatic wine-serving system. This nifty, computerized machine allows wine-drinkers to sample 1-, 2-, or 3-ounce pours of any of 48 wines. Overwhelmed? So were we, but Old Hickory's sommeliers can help you choose.



Old Hickory's desserts include lemon cannoli, chocolate-chip bread pudding, and chocolate Guinness Stout cake (above).

Time for dinner. A winding staircase leads down a level to the wine-cellar atmosphere of the steakhouse's dining room. A relaxed but shimmering setting in subdued light creates an aura of *(continued on page 55)*

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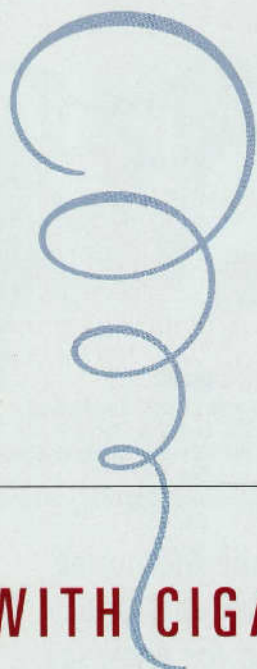
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## WITH CIGAR

IN ONE HAND AND  
A SCOTCH IN THE  
OTHER (“**GEORGE  
BURNS MISDIRECTION,**”  
HE CALLS IT), RON  
WHITE HAS SUCCESS-  
FULLY TAKEN HIS  
DISTINCTIVE, **SAGE  
HICK/SOPHISTICATE**  
COMEDY ACT  
TO MILLIONS.

# JUST CALL HIM TATER SALAD

**BACK IN 2001**, comedian Ron “Tater Salad” White called me at home and asked me if my offer still stood. I lived in a moderately nice house in central Austin and I was single. He was working comedy gigs across the Southwest and needed a place to land after the end of a fizzled relationship. I told him that I had a spare bedroom for him as long as he wanted.

On his next call, he told me that he would be traveling for a while instead. Ron’s friend and fellow comedian Jeff Foxworthy had some “crazy idea” to do a redneck comedy tour. Ron said to hold on to the room, though, because the bubba comedy thang would surely never work out, and he would definitely be back. That was more than six years ago.

**W**HEN I SAT DOWN with Ron before a recent gig at Fort Hood, I broke the news that his room was now a nursery. He was happy for me and my family and delighted to give up the space.

With cigar in one hand and a scotch in the other (“George Burns misdirection,” he calls it), Ron White has successfully taken his distinctive, sage hick/sophisticate comedy act to millions. From a boy growing up in a small town in the middle of Texas oil country to selling windows in Arlington to playing sold-out theaters and arenas as a headlining comedian, Ron’s years of paying dues as a constantly-on-the-road entertainer finally resulted in him hitting the jackpot. His remarkable run as part of the *Blue Collar Comedy Tour* phenomenon; Grammy-nominations, Comedy Central specials, *New York Times* best-selling book, multi-platinum DVD, hit comedy CDs, and appearances on *The Late Show with David Letterman* and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* comprise a classic show-biz-success tale of time, talent, and steadfast determination.









Here's Ron White in his element, performing standup comedy for troops at Fort Hood.

Comics are my friends. Over the years, I've watched them rise and fall with the tides of American taste. I even tried my hand at stand-up decades ago. It's not an easy business, and I quickly realized that I'm more comfortable behind a microphone in a radio studio with no one looking. But out of my affinity for their art and craft, I've always tried to work comedians onto my morning show [93.7 KLBJ-FM's long-standing *Dudley & Bob* program in Austin]—not to do their acts, but just to have them be the funny people they are. Ron White is, to this day, the best storyteller I have ever known. He paints pictures that are pure Texas, the kind that my dad and his friends would tell into the night. And though Ron's career arc and fame have reached meteoric heights, his singular personality remains completely intact.

Once I get through the security area at Fort Hood, the MP's stationed off-stage, then finally the group of fans waiting for a hello, it's like old times—just me and my friend.

**DALE: Ron, you now live in Atlanta and on the West Coast. Do you miss Texas?**

**RON:** We were flying over the Hill Country today, and when I see the hills, I get a big smile because Texas is my home. It is where I was born and raised, and although I live other places now, my heart truly is in Texas.

**DALE: Do you see yourself coming back home to Texas someday?**

**RON:** Absolutely! I used to live on Lake LBJ, and I'm going to go back soon and look for a place to build a small home. I love Lake LBJ. It's just beautiful.

**DALE: I know a lot of your comedy is based on stories of Texas. Where did it all begin for you?**

**RON:** I was born in Fritch, Texas, north-east of Amarillo, in an 800-square-foot white clapboard house that my father

built with his own two hands. It still stands today. The fence he started to put around it is still not finished today. So whoever lives there now needs to get busy on that fence.

**DALE: What did your dad do?**

**RON:** My dad worked for Phillips Petroleum in Sanford, and years later was transferred to the Houston area.

**DALE: So, when you look back, do you remember those long Texas road trips trapped in a car with your family?**

**RON:** Once a year we would travel from Fritch to Houston in a '62 or '63 black Impala. To keep cool, my grandmother had some sort of ice-fed air conditioner that was retrofit and sat on the hump. You poured ice in it, and a fan powered by the cigarette lighter would blow some slightly cooler air on you. There were no real divided highways or interstates yet, but it being Texas, the speed limit was 70 miles an hour anyway. You bounded down the road and held on at full speed in a poorly built car. Just going from Stuckey's to Stuckey's.

**DALE: If you had the time to take 24 hours**





Prior to going on stage at Fort Hood, the celebrated comedian samples the aroma from a gift box of cigars.

**and just drive somewhere in Texas, where would you go?**

**RON:** Can we just spend twenty-four in Austin? (Laughs)

**DALE: OK, then we drive!**

**RON:** First, we must tube the Guadalupe River and drink much libation and just enjoy the most beautiful part of Texas with the big cypress trees and scenic cliffs, soaking in that wonderfully cold, cold water. When it's time to eat, we get in the car and go all the way to City Market in Luling and have some brisket and sausage served on butcher paper with white bread. I believe this, and I am right: It is the finest barbecue on the planet.

**DALE: I've known you for years now, and I remember you working constantly**

**and very hard in comedy clubs across the country. Did you ever envision this kind of success?**

**RON:** I would never even let myself consider it. I saw it happen to Jeff (Foxworthy), but I just didn't think it was for me. I didn't think I would put enough into it, to be honest. I also already considered myself successful. You see, my goal was just to headline comedy clubs, and I did that pretty early in my career. I was making more money than most of my friends in the business. And then, when you don't pay your taxes on top of that, you have even more money. I will tell you that I was required to pay that money back later, but at the time, it was extra cash.

The struggles I had at that time, as you well know, were *(continued on page 56)*

## HE PAINTS

PICTURES THAT ARE  
PURE TEXAS, THE KIND  
THAT MY DAD AND HIS  
FRIENDS WOULD TELL  
INTO THE NIGHT.







# Out

# on the ICE

In one corner of my blissful boyhood memories, across from scraped

knees and Kelly Mathews' soft green eyes, are sweet recollections of winter flurries and gray-

scale landscapes. Intermingled with first best friends and the protocols of Nerf War are snow-

men, snowballs, and snow days—images and textures foreign to most reaches in our Lone

Star State. Those short days are long gone now, like wisps of steam from a cup of hot choco-

late on the windowsill.

I must confess that I'm not a native Texan. Eight formative years spent crisscrossing

the Midwest, with a brief desert dalliance in Yuma, Arizona, preclude me from donning that

badge of honor brandished so proudly by those born and raised in Texas. But in those days,

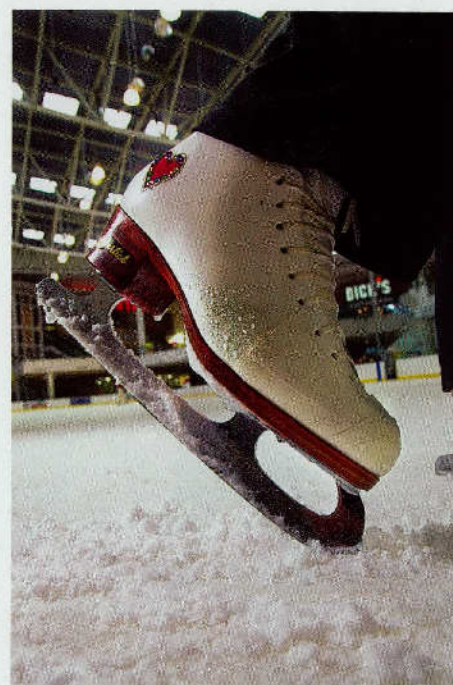
on the frozen lakes and ice rinks of Elyria, Ohio, we were proud, too. My classmates and I

laced up our trusty ice skates on weekend excursions or treasured annual field trips, bravely

attempting figure eights between fumbles and falls.

By Reggie Ugwu

Photographs by J. Griffis Smith



FACING PAGE AND RIGHT: Austin's Whole Foods Market features a holiday outdoor ice nook on the upstairs plaza, and blades swoosh at ICE at The Parks in Arlington year round.



Out on the ice, before global warming was a part of the vernacular, whole worlds melted away as we coasted on high hopes and low friction. Insulated by youth and goose-down, keeping balance was our only concern. We were willing to try anything potentially fun—racing, leaping, and strutting in reverse.

Ice-skating can be liberating. To forego perfectly standard tasks in favor of zig-zags and loop-de-loops. To eschew perfectly reasonable modes of mobility in order to glide blithely for short periods of time along a fleetingly frozen surface. Skating demands a certain flair, a *joie de vivre*, even.

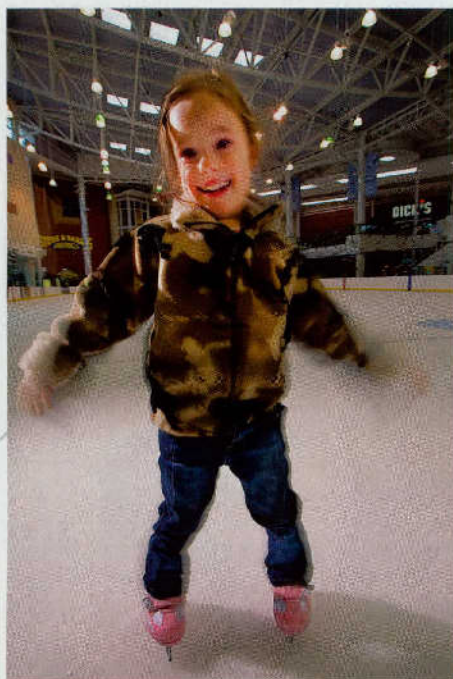
When I moved from Ohio to the sunny skies of Clear Lake in southeast Houston, it didn't at once occur to me that my snow days were behind me. In fact, it wasn't until 11 years later that a particularly glacial winter blessed us with a white Christmas. But just

because most wintertime temperatures south of the Red River fall short of freezing, it doesn't mean Texans can't get out on the ice.

Year round, all across Texas, places like Americas Ice Garden in Dallas and the Ice Center at Northwoods in San Antonio offer icy escapes with fun and exhilarating activities.

LEFT: Molly Jamison soars on pink skates at ICE at The Parks, which offers a Cheap Skate night once a week among other frozen festivities. FACING PAGE: It's oompah-time at Fredericksburg's Eisbahn, where you might find tuba-tooting Gary Trumet. Proceeds from the rink go to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

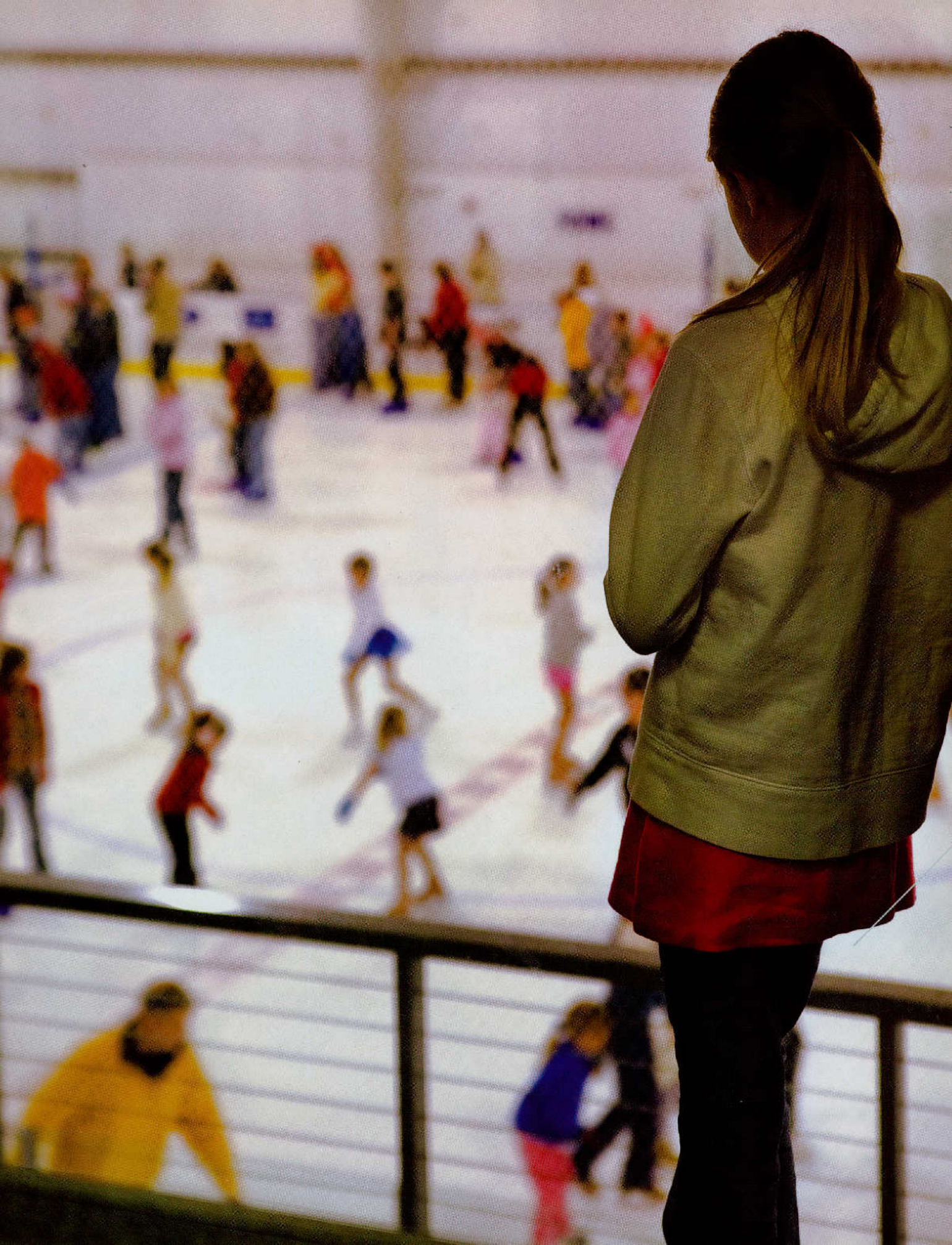
*We* laced up our trusty ice skates, bravely attempting figure eights between fumbles and falls.













Experience the ice floor in your sneakers during a rousing game of broomball at the Ice Garden, or, in Sugar Land, follow in the formidable skate trails of one-time Texan and Olympic Gold Medalist figure skater Tara Lipinski.

This time of year, when the days are short again and the impending holidays have spirits light, dozens of ice rinks and frosty festivities—both indoor and outdoor, cozy and grand—can be found around the state. Here are three to get you started.

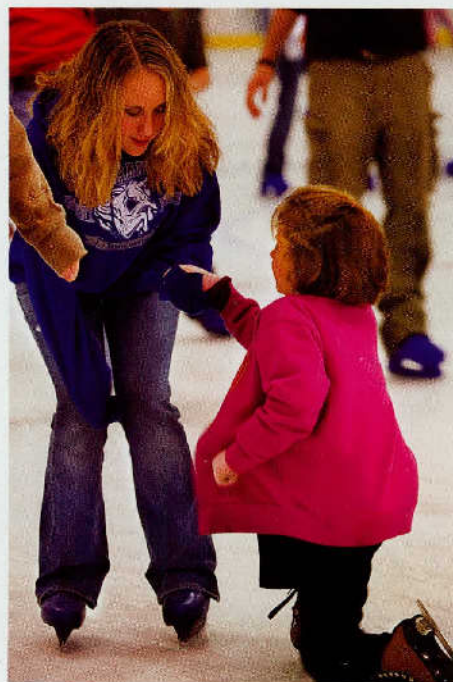
Discover a winter wonderland by the coast at Moody Gardens' Festival of Lights in Galveston. In November, none other than Santa Claus himself descends via parachute upon the typically tropical getaway to switch on the more than one million lights adorning the grounds through January 5, 2008. The large outdoor rink is the only one of its kind in the area.

Also in November, in Houston, the perennially elegant Galleria [see "Holiday Showdown...," page 26] offers a show by the Polar Ice skating school, featuring the indoor rink's most recent graduates, as well as a tree-lighting ceremony and the annual ice-dancing show, the Ice Spectacular.

Meanwhile, in Austin, Whole Foods Market's 80,000-square-foot landmark store becomes the Capital City's coolest destination 'til after the New Year, with an outdoor skating

*W*hole worlds melted  
away as we coasted on  
high hopes and low friction.

FACING PAGE AND RIGHT: Whether you're watching from the sidelines, or getting a boost after a tumble on the rink, San Antonio's Ice Center at Northwoods promises chilly thrills throughout the year, from skating lessons for all skill levels to ice-hockey tournaments.





nook and one-of-a-kind “winter village” perched atop its roof. During the holiday season, all comers, shopping or otherwise, are welcome.

I remember my days as a kid up north, bundled up and skating like it was second nature. But the truth is, out on the ice it doesn't matter if you're just south of Lake Erie...or just north of the Gulf of Mexico. ★

*Skating demands  
a certain flair, a joie  
de vivre, even.*

## SKATE ACROSS TEXAS

(Dates for 2007-'08 season listed below.)

**ARLINGTON** ICE at The Parks, The Parks at Arlington Mall, 3815 S. Cooper St. Open year round, 817/419-0095; [www.theparksatarlington.com](http://www.theparksatarlington.com).

**AUSTIN** Whole Foods Market, 6th & Lamar. “Ice Skating on the Plaza,” Nov. 22-Jan. 14, 512/542-2333; [www.wholefoodsmarket.com](http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com).

**COLLEGE STATION** Arctic Wolf Ice Center, 400 Holleman Dr. East. Open year round, 979/693-3900; [www.arcticwolfice.com](http://www.arcticwolfice.com).

**DALLAS** Americas Ice Garden, 700 N. Pearl St. Open year round, 214/720-8080; [www.americasicegarden.com](http://www.americasicegarden.com). Ice Skating Center at the Galleria (13350 Dallas Pkwy.). Open year round, 972/392-3361; [www.galleriaiceskatingcenter.com](http://www.galleriaiceskatingcenter.com).

**FREDERICKSBURG** Eisbahn Holiday Ice Skating Rink, 100 W. Main St. Open Nov. 23-Jan. 6; [www.eisbahnbfg.com](http://www.eisbahnbfg.com).

**GALVESTON** Moody Gardens, One Hope Blvd. “Sixth Annual Festival of Lights,” Nov. 17-Jan. 5, 800/582-4673; [www.moodygardens.com](http://www.moodygardens.com).

**HOUSTON** Polar Ice Galleria, 5015 Westheimer Rd. Rink open year round; “Cadillac Ice Spectacular,” tree-lighting, and skating-school show in November (Nov. 10, 2007), 713/621-1500; [www.polaricegalleria.com](http://www.polaricegalleria.com).

**McALLEN** RGV Ice Center, 201 N. 26th St. Open year round, 956/618-9944; [www.rgvicenter.com](http://www.rgvicenter.com).

**SAN ANTONIO** Ice Center at Northwoods, 17530 Henderson Pass. Open year round, 210/490-9550; [www.northwoodsice.net](http://www.northwoodsice.net).

**SUGAR LAND** Sugar Land Ice & Sports Center, 16225 Lexington Blvd. Open year round, 281/265-7465; [www.sugarlandice.com](http://www.sugarlandice.com).

Former *Texas Highways* intern REGGIE UGWU, a senior in Print Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, looks forward to gliding on the ice this year at Austin's Whole Foods Market.

Staff photographer GRIFF SMITH was not harmed during this slippery assignment. He says he never thought he'd meet an ice-skating tuba player.



LEFT: Another “Wow!” moment at the Ice Center at Northwoods. FACING PAGE: Skaters swirl like snowflakes around the 95-foot-tall Christmas tree at the Ice Skating Center at Dallas' Galleria.





SUPERWAY

Сбербанк







# GALLERIA SHOWDOWN

Have a Cool Yule in Houston and Dallas

## THE MALL AS A HOLIDAY

**DESTINATION?** You bet. Both of the state's indoor Gallerias pull out all the stops come the season, with over-the-top decor and family events. With this in mind, we asked writers in Houston and Dallas to face off on the merits of their respective Gallerias during the holidays.

No matter who you side with, we think you'll agree that the results are illuminating.

BY TERESA BYRNE-DODGE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT MIHOVIL

## HOUSTON THE GALLERIA

**P**ICK your holiday moment, ladies and gentlemen! Do you have a roasted-chestnuts/Rockefeller-Center/It's-a-Wonderful-Life ideal in your heart? Then come to The Galleria in Houston, the biggest (and best!) mall in Texas, with more than 2.4 million square feet of shopping splendor, where you'll see ice skaters spin and glide on the prairie-sized rink around an enormous Christmas tree encrusted with 100,000 twinkling lights and 5,000 ornaments.

Or perhaps you're more of a gadget geek who can't wait to find the latest →

BY JUNE NAYLOR • PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. GRIFFIS SMITH

## DALLAS

### GALLERIA DALLAS

**S**ERIOUSLY? There's really any doubt as to whether Big D has the better Galleria to visit during the holidays? OK, so maybe Houston had its Galleria first, but there's something that feels very special, perhaps somehow superior, at Galleria Dallas during Yuletide. Perhaps it's that the one in Dallas has been renovated more recently; its fourth expansion took place in 2004, expanding the shopping center to 1.9 million square feet. Or maybe it's all the fairy dust that was sprinkled on the shopping experience →

FACING PAGE: Whether you're shopping for presents or posh party dresses, Galleria Dallas has you covered, and offers a slate of festive activities to boot.



high-tech toy Santa has left in your stocking. Be naughty and beat him to it at the Apple Store, where you can play with the latest gadgets at the so-called "Genius Bar."

Maybe your favorite holiday moment is arriving back at The Galleria's valet-parking stand, your feet a bit achy and your arms loaded with shopping bags from the chicest stores in the universe: Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Giorgio Armani, Chanel. Sure, you bought some Christmas gifts for family and friends...and a few for yourself as well. What's wrong with that?

Or maybe holiday moments don't get any better than meeting your best friend once a year at The Oceanaire restaurant for a celebratory flute of champagne and a plate of oysters. Again, The Galleria.

**B**Y ALL RIGHTS, The Galleria, now 37 years old, should be a tired and faded beauty. In fact, the opposite is true. Never has shopping been so glittery, so high-stepping, so excessively wonderful. This is one huge oasis of shiny retail therapy. But be forewarned: You could get light-headed here, especially during the holiday season.

David Anderson, the mall's general manager, notes that The Galleria is the number-one tourist attraction in Houston. It draws more visitors than the Houston Museum of Natural Science or even NASA. Is it any wonder that, although the city has a thriving performing-arts scene as well as a whole slate of professional sports teams, for many visitors a day at The Galleria *is* the entertainment?

One of the nation's first mega-malls, it perfectly epitomizes the bigness, the richness, and the melting pot-ness of Houston. Walk around for 20 minutes, and you're likely to hear more than a dozen languages, though truly some of the foreigners seem dazed at the Texas excess. Today it's practically a city within a city with office buildings, banks, beauty salons, tailors, a currency exchange, a post office, and much more.

This world-class shopping complex showcases the best names in retail, including Neiman Marcus, Cartier, Macy's, Tiffany & Co., The Sharper Image, Ralph Lauren Collection, Yves Saint Laurent, Jimmy Choo, Montblanc, David Yurman, Juicy Couture, Christofle, Burberry, Christian Dior, and Houston's only Nordstrom.

But don't think the mall caters just to the wealthy. You'll also find The Gap, Banana Republic, Zara, AIX Armani Exchange, GUESS, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Hollister & Co. among other more wallet-friendly stores, as well as value-priced restaurants perfect for a burger and soda.

Undoubtedly, though, it's The Galleria's high-end →

RIGHT: Visible to shoppers on three levels, an enormous Christmas tree forms the centerpiece of the holiday scene at The Galleria in Houston.

© ROBERT MIHOVIL



Walk around  
The Galleria in Houston for  
20 minutes, and you're likely  
to hear more than a dozen  
languages.





# DALLAS

during November's 25th-anniversary hullabaloo. The silver jubilee's festive spirit still lingers, adding even more glitter to the burst of sparkling revelry that marks the magnificent holiday celebration.

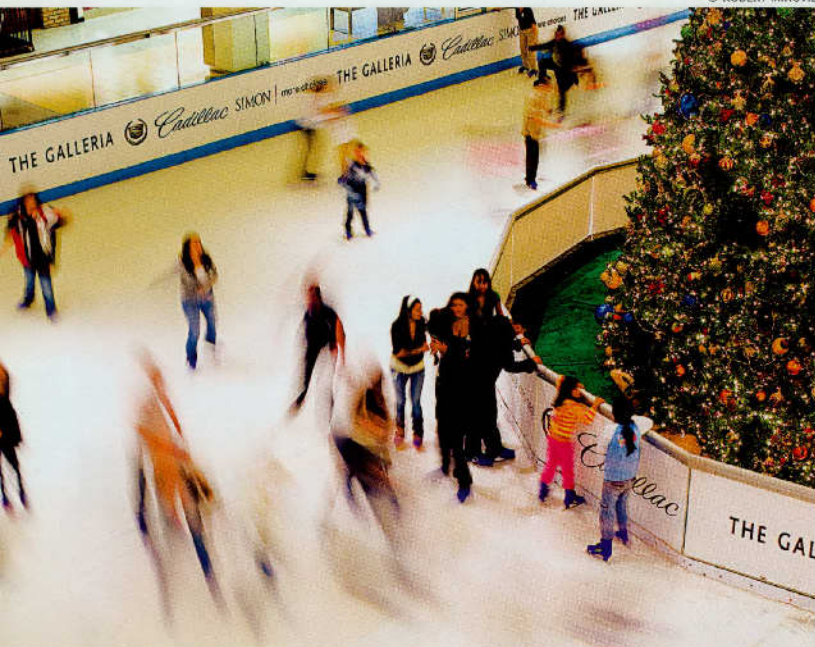
If you're having even the slightest trouble finding your inner elf, haul yourself to North Dallas' monument to shopping bliss. Upon arrival, you'll know the very instant when the season enters your consciousness. Before you know it, you—the former Grinch—are happily humming, "Silver bells, silver bells...." Indeed, Galleria Dallas will provide you (and the other five million people who visit this time of the year) with the ultimate ring-a-ling-ling, dressed-in-holiday-style setting. →



Galleria Dallas offers shoppers plenty of glamour and glitz, like this ruby-encrusted Rolex at Bachendorf's Jewelers.

J. GRIFFIN SHAW





© ROBERT MIHOVIC

Whirling around the mall's 55-foot-tall Christmas tree is a favorite holiday pastime for skaters at The Galleria.

HOUSTON

stores that separate this retail cathedral from other shopping malls. In Saks Fifth Avenue, there is a soothing golden glow over the main level that almost demands reverence. It could make you feel short, wrinkled, and poor. Or, you could just put on your shopping face, grab a latte, and head to Versace.

Or drop by Nordstrom, where men's dress shirts come in 63 sizes—and yes, it features the traditional pianist in the department store's atrium. Or peek in at Build-A-Bear Workshop, where the yellow walls and miscellaneous jumbles of bear parts make the place look like an elves' factory.

Every wing of The Galleria has its own mood. The Nordstrom wing, for example, feels sunny, spacious, and new, while the original wing near Neiman Marcus has corridors lined with old-name Fifth Avenue-style shops. It definitely feels less egalitarian.

Many of the visitors here are conventioners who book their meetings at one of the mall's two hotels, not to mention the dozen or so other hotels that lie within walking distance. So it's not unusual to see clusters →

THE GALLERIA

BY THE NUMBERS

- YEAR OPENED: 1970
- SQUARE FEET: 2.4 million (equal to about 42 football fields)
- PERIMETER OF ALL LEVELS COMBINED: 3.2 miles
- PARKING SPACES: 13,900
- HOTELS: 2
- HAIR SALONS: 11
- ICE RINKS: 1
- SWIMMING POOLS: 2
- STORES AND RESTAURANTS: 375-plus
- NUMBER OF CUISINES: 9 (everything from Cajun to Chinese)
- ANNUAL NUMBER OF VISITORS: 26 million



The Oceanaire restaurant at Galleria Dallas offers an array of fresh seafood in an environment reminiscent of a sleek, 1930s ocean liner.

DALLAS

Already a gorgeous architectural creation, Galleria Dallas is honed for the holidays. Inspired by the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, the glass-domed shopping street in Milan, Italy, Dallas' grande dame of retail pleasures combines the elegance of its soaring skylights and arches, ivory-hued Egyptian limestone, and white-eucalyptus surfaces with the impact of holiday shimmer and music for results that will melt any cold heart.

In fact, your spirits will lift just pulling up to the Galleria, when you see the light-swirled trees fronting the mall along the Dallas North Parkway and the fully decorated, 30-foot-tall tree that greets you at the main entrance. And you'll be impervious to any of the usual parking panic—just keep an eye out for one of the parking directors dressed in Santa hats and red jumpsuits who are there to guide visitors to one of roughly 10,000 parking spaces.

Prepare to have your breath taken away upon entering the mall: Inside, there's the spectacle of a 95-foot-tall Christmas tree, taller than any indoor version anywhere—including Houston. Rising high into the Galleria's four-





J. GRIFFIN SMITH

An employee displays one of the garments for sale at Galleria Dallas' super-chic Karen Millen store, one of a handful of locations in the United States.

story atrium from the centrally located ice rink, the tree comes alive five times a day during the Illumination Celebration, in which 225,000 twinkling lights perform a computer-choreographed dance to recorded symphonic music.

On Saturdays leading up to Christmas, the Grand Tree Lighting ceremonies continue (the first one takes place the Friday after Thanksgiving) with a late-afternoon ice show starring nationally known skaters like 1992 Olympic gold medalist Victor Petrenko, as well as local skaters. And that's just the tip of the icicle. "Missile Toes," the Galleria's skating Santa Claus, whose

Stroll the aisles of Galleria Dallas, and before you know it, you—the former Grinch—are happily humming, “Silver bells, silver bells....”

stunts include acrobatics and pyrotechnics shooting out from his blades, performs next and then helps the crowd count down to the moment of the actual tree-lighting.

You'll swear you can smell roasting chestnuts and hear jingling sleigh bells. So fortified by all this merriment, you can withstand the crowds at the just-opened, first-in-Texas American Girl Boutique and Bistro, where girls can shop for goodies for themselves and their dolls, enjoy a great meal, and treat their dolls to a new “do” at the Doll Hair Salon. Looking for still more exclusivity in gifts? Try retailers such as Thomas Pink, with men's and women's clothing from London's Jermyn Street, and Karen Millen, a fashion-forward boutique for women, both of which chose Galleria Dallas for their sole Texas locations.

You know you can count on party ensembles with seasonal sparkle at Macy's and Versace, and fabulous outfits for New Year's Eve parties will come from BCBG. Need an entirely new look for the holidays? Sign up at Christi Harris Make-over Center. Spas at Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue will re-energize you for your power-shopping binge, and Sephora has everything you might want in the way of make-up and fragrances.

Taking a breather between stores, you can grab a cup of cinnamon-spiced tea at one of several coffee kiosks and mill about the four mall levels, passing strolling carolers spreading good cheer on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. There's comfy seating here and there, among the 44 light-wrapped palms and the dozens of planters bearing red poinsettias, for you to review your →

## GALLERIA DALLAS

### BY THE NUMBERS

- YEAR OPENED: 1982
- SQUARE FEET: 1.9 million (equal to about 33 football fields)
- PERIMETER OF ALL LEVELS COMBINED: 2 miles
- PARKING SPACES: 10,000 (mostly covered)
- HOTELS: 1
- HAIR SALONS: 5
- ICE RINKS: 1
- SWIMMING POOLS: 1
- STORES AND RESTAURANTS: 200-plus
- NUMBER OF CUISINES: 10 (everything from Brazilian to Thai)
- ANNUAL NUMBER OF VISITORS: 19 million







# The Galleria

is Houston's number-one tourist attraction, drawing more visitors than the Houston Museum of Natural Science or even NASA.

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"Missile Toes," Galleria Dallas' very own ice-skating Santa Claus, rocks around the Christmas tree, while performing backflips and other acrobatic feats.

(continued from page 30) of people, wearing nametags on lanyards and carrying notebooks, strolling the corridors.

They finger stacks of rainbow-colored polo shirts at Lacoste and gape at purses and wallets displayed like sculpture at Louis Vuitton. In the Chanel store, mannequins pose on the furniture (customers can stand, thank you very much). And at Betsey Johnson, the chaotic jumble of plaid, pink, and flowers should cure anyone with a case of the holiday blues.

Time for a break? Many of the mall's restaurants are the first locations of their kind in the local market, including Bice, Fox Sports Grill, The Cheesecake Factory, and Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steak House.

The Galleria is intense anytime, but every year, on the first of November, an army of workers arrives with lifts and scaffolds to begin dressing the mall for the holidays. The signature element is the 55-foot-tall Christmas tree on the ice rink, but the explosion of wreaths, swags, glass balls, holly, and reindeer fills every store and public space.

They have to work fast, because the holiday season officially kicks off the second Saturday of November with the Cadillac Ice Spectacular, the official tree-lighting ceremony and Santa's arrival. Santa is available through Christmas Eve.

Although David Anderson can't say how many people do their gift-buying here, he says that The Galleria had 26 million visitors last year (far more than the Galleria Dallas' paltry 19 million), making it *the* shopping destination this holiday season. ★

#### THE GALLERIA IN HOUSTON

is at 5085 Westheimer Rd. at Post Oak Blvd. Hours: 10-9 Mon-Sat, 11-7 Sun. Some extended hours during the holidays. For more information, call 713/622-0663; [www.simon.com](http://www.simon.com).

Holiday festivities at The Galleria begin the 2nd Sat. of Nov. with the Cadillac Ice Spectacular, the official tree-lighting ceremony, which includes an ice-skating show and Santa's arrival—different every year. Santa remains on hand to visit with children daily through Christmas Eve.

During her most recent visit to The Galleria, TERESA BYRNE-DODGE bought a pair of killer boots at Nordstrom's famed shoe department.

Galveston photographer ROBERT MIHOVIL asked his wife and teenage daughter—both regular shoppers at The Galleria—to help him scout locations.

(continued from page 31) shopping list. Kids in tow? Have them whisper their secret wishes to Santa in his village, near Saks Fifth Avenue on Level 2, daily through Christmas Eve. If they still have energy to burn, take them to the Galleria's Play Place, a jungle-themed recreation space for the smallest of guests.

For those impossible-to-shop-for people on your list, it's a matter of finding the most unusual items—stuff you can't find everywhere. One answer might be a Dallas snow globe at Saks, which holds a model of the city's skyline and plays "Deep in the Heart of Texas." Maybe it's a 22-karat-gold medallion from Cathy Waterman's Muse line at Ylang 23, a Galleria Dallas jewelry original. Or, for the bona fide collector, head to The Old World, where a limited-edition Edward Marshall Boehm porcelain titled *The Bronco Buster* can be had for \$20,000.

If too much shopping means you have to eat on the run, Corner Bakery and La Madeleine will oblige. But really, you should treat yourself (and a friend) to an early Christmas celebration at the exquisite new SushiSamba, a favorite of the *Sex and the City* gals, where your choices include hip Japanese fish dishes, Peruvian chicken or beef skewers, a Brazilian stew of seafood and rice with a coconut-infused broth, and martinis. Or perhaps you should celebrate a day of shopping done well over an elegant dinner of filet mignon with Bordelaise sauce at Grill on the Alley, a classic American grill whose original location was in Beverly Hills.

The smartest shopper, however, will check into the luxurious Westin Galleria to take a leisurely approach to the shopping experience over a couple of days. Between bouts of buying, drop by the hotel gym or take a three- or five-mile run or walk in the vicinity (pick up maps in the lobby). At night, sweet dreams of sugarplum fairies are yours, thanks to the hotel's famous Heavenly Bed (billed as "10 layers of pure comfort"), and there's 24-hour room service and a concierge to help plan outings. The hotel provides limousine, taxi, and car-rental service if you're coming from out of town and want to explore North Dallas while you're here.

Just watch—when you're in your car headed home again, you'll fire up that Andy Williams CD, crooning in utter agreement that "it's the most wonderful time of year." Back at the house, you'll have just one thing to say about the holidays: Bring it on, Santa. ★

Dallas/Fort Worth writer JUNE NAYLOR eases into the holidays at Galleria Dallas by seeing the skating Santa and toasting the holidays at SushiSamba.

While shooting this story, staff photographer GRIFF SMITH joined other early-morning mall-walkers in trekking the multilevel perimeter of Galleria Dallas.





With its vaulted-glass ceiling, suspended sculptures, and balcony-hung palm trees, Galleria Dallas is stunning year round; holiday decor adds even more sparkle.

J. GRIFFIS SMITH

**GALLERIA DALLAS** is at 13350 Dallas Pkwy. (Loop 635/LBJ Freeway at Dallas North Tollway). Hours: Mon-Sat 10-9, Sun noon-6. Some extended hours during the holidays. For more information, call 972/702-7100; [www.galleriadallas.com](http://www.galleriadallas.com).

Holiday festivities at Galleria Dallas begin the Friday after Thanksgiving with the first **Grand Tree Lighting ceremony**. The ceremonies continue on Saturdays (Dec. 1, 8, 15, and 22) at 5 p.m. and include an ice-skating show with performances by Olympian Victor Petrenko and other well-known skaters, as well as "Missile Toes," Galleria Dallas' acrobatic Santa Claus. The **Illumination Celebration**, which combines symphonic music and dancing lights, entertains shoppers daily (at noon, 2, 4, 6, and 8 p.m. through Dec. 24). Children can line up to talk to Santa, Mon-Sat 10-9 and Sun noon to 6 through Christmas Eve.



# EL VAQUERO REAL CULTURE AT THE CROSSROADS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN DYER

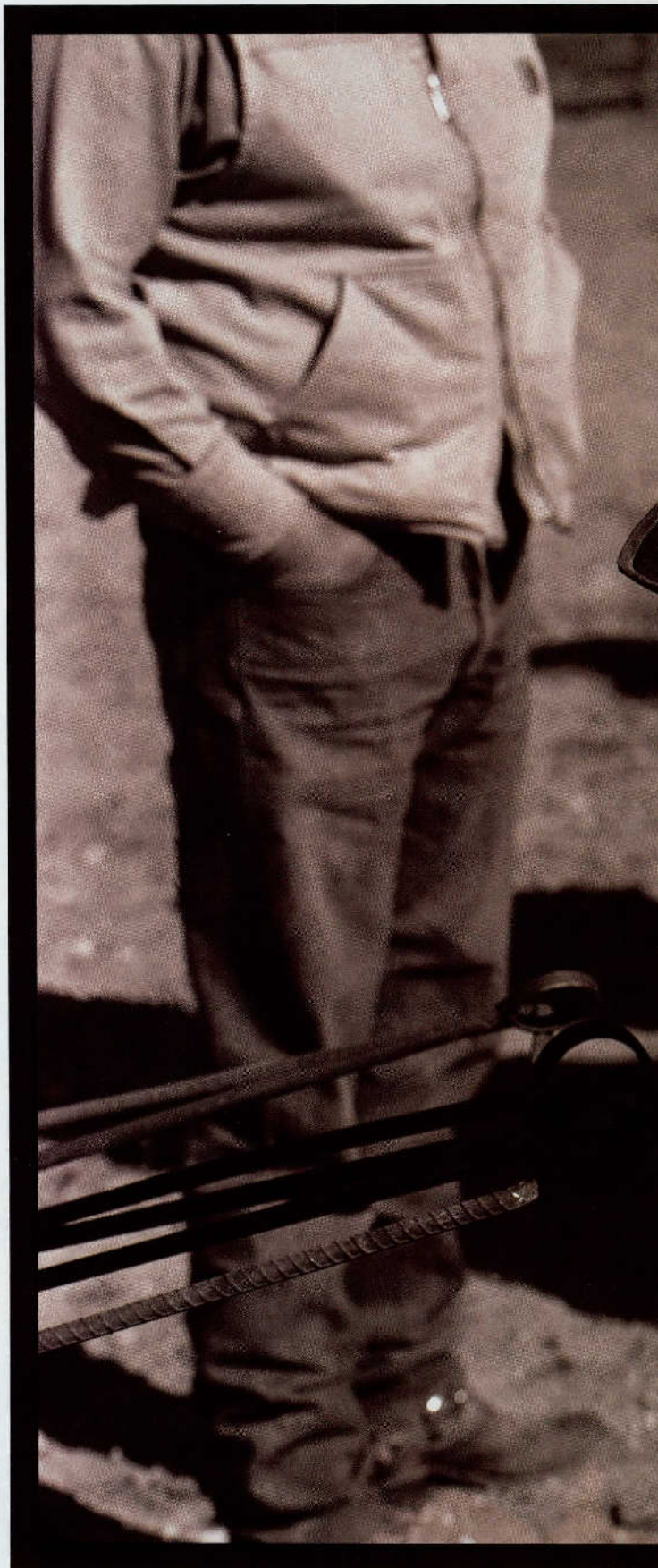
## CONTINUING A RICH LEGACY

**L**ong before the American cowboy appeared, there was the *vaquero*. Even before Columbus, the predecessor of the cowboy was already on horseback, working cattle in Old Spain, developing by plan and by chance the techniques he would carry to the New World. There, after the Spanish conquest, isolation and differing environments resulted in gradual evolution and diversification in the tools, the trappings, even the clothing, of the man on horseback.

The word *vaquero* means “one who works with cattle,” so the term translated easily into the American version, *cowboy*. Many an American cowboy never realized that much of what he knew came indirectly from Mexico.

More than a hundred years ago, some were already declaring that the cowboy was a fading relic. Much the same is said today of the *vaquero*, yet he, like the cowboy, is still around. Granted, there are not nearly as many of either as there used to be. Fences, mechanization, and other changes in the ranching industry have reduced—but not eliminated—the need for men on horseback.

Today's *vaquero*, like today's cowboy, may spend more time in a pickup than on a horse. He may be called upon to be a little of a mechanic, electrician, veterinarian, even a little

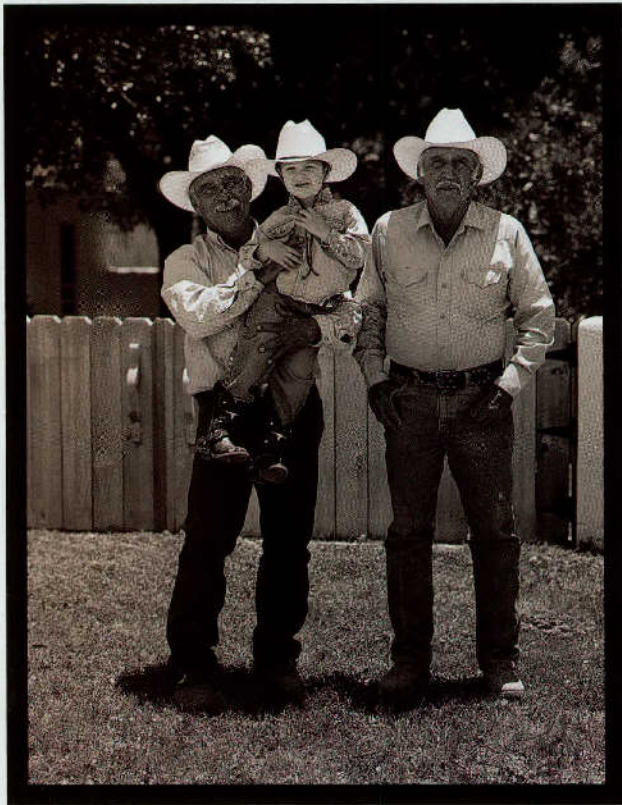






YOUNG VAQUERO, BORACHO PEAK RANCH, CULBERSON COUNTY, SPRING 2007





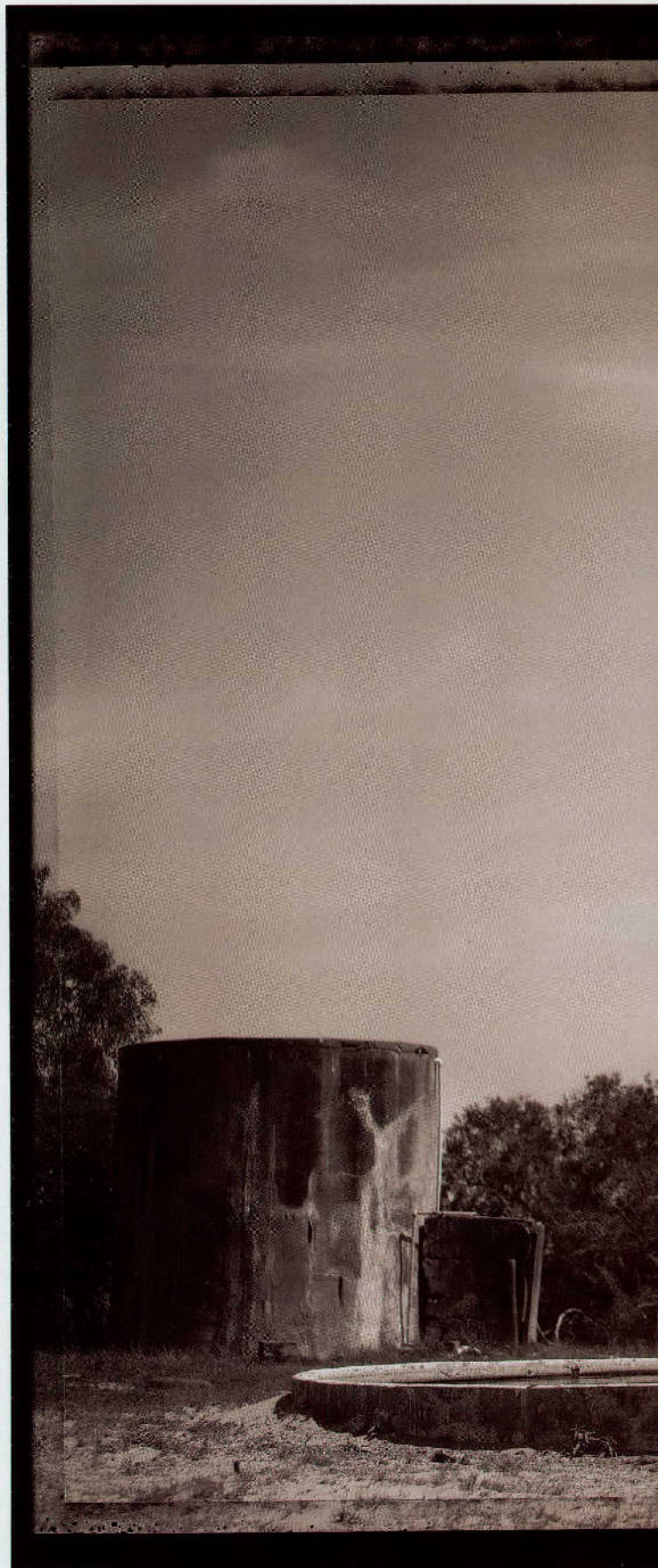
DANIEL BOONE, ANDREW BOONE OLIVER, ROMEO BOONE,  
SAN PEDRO RANCH, DIMMIT COUNTY, FALL 2006

of an animal nutritionist, more than his forebears ever were. Like the cowboy, he adapts to changing times. And, though his numbers gradually decline, he has managed to survive. He is a living reminder of a simpler pastoral time, at least in memory and in our dreams.

—ELMER KELTON

## CONNECTING THE GENERATIONS

**W**hen asked if they consider themselves vaqueros, most [of the younger generation] will say that they are just ranch hands. The term vaquero is a term of respect, and to the vaqueros working today, it refers to their fathers, grandfathers, and great-grandfathers who came before them. Men who really knew how to cowboy. Who knew how to find the hard-headed *vacas* (cattle) hiding among the mesquite trees, chase them down and rope them and bring them





EL VAQUERO REAL  
**CULTURE AT THE  
CROSSROADS**



DANNY RODRIGUEZ WATERS HIS HORSE, KING RANCH, KLEBERG COUNTY, SPRING 2006



in to join the gathering herd. Men who would stay out two weeks sometimes, sleeping on the ground, rounding up the herd and bringing it in for the branding and shipping, the focal point of the ranching year.

The fact is, the vaquero was the first cowboy. Another fact is that the vaquero taught the Anglo cowboy everything he needed to know. And, while most vaqueros are Mexican-American, it is important to remember that there are also Anglo and black vaqueros, men who represent many generations on the great ranches.

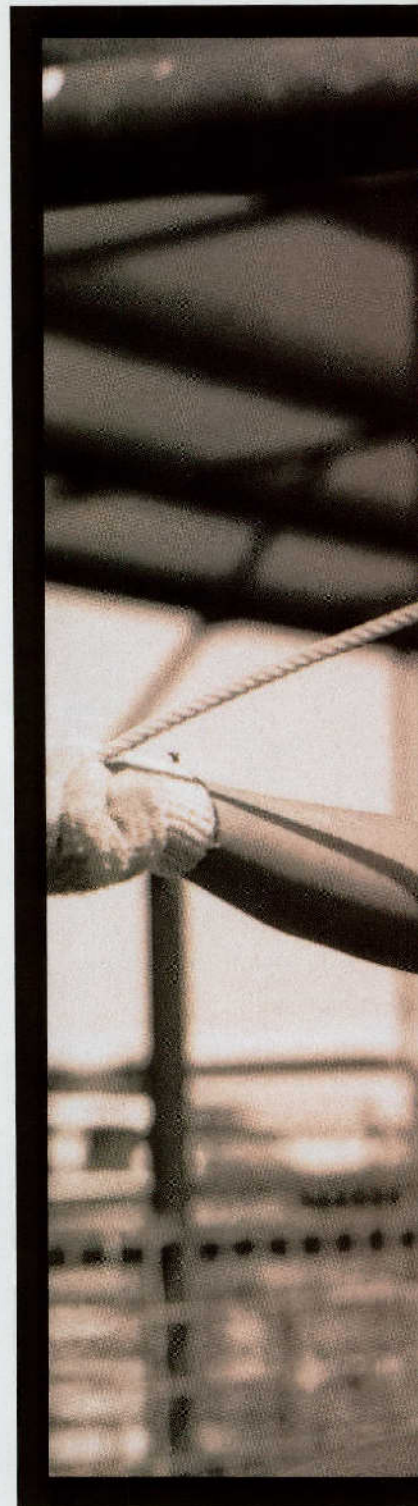
The skills of the vaquero are still celebrated and practiced, both on and off the ranch. Nearly every weekend in ranching country there is a small “ranch rodeo” or roping event where the vaqueros (and now hobbyists, too) get together and pit themselves one-on-one against the clock in “heading and heeling” steers, branding, milking wild cows, and more. In the 21st Century, it’s hard to think of another occupation that depends on 19th-Century skills, largely unchanged, to do the job. —JOHN DYER

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Text and images are excerpted from *El Vaquero Real: The Original American Cowboy*, a new book published by Bright Sky Press, [www.brightskypress.com](http://www.brightskypress.com).

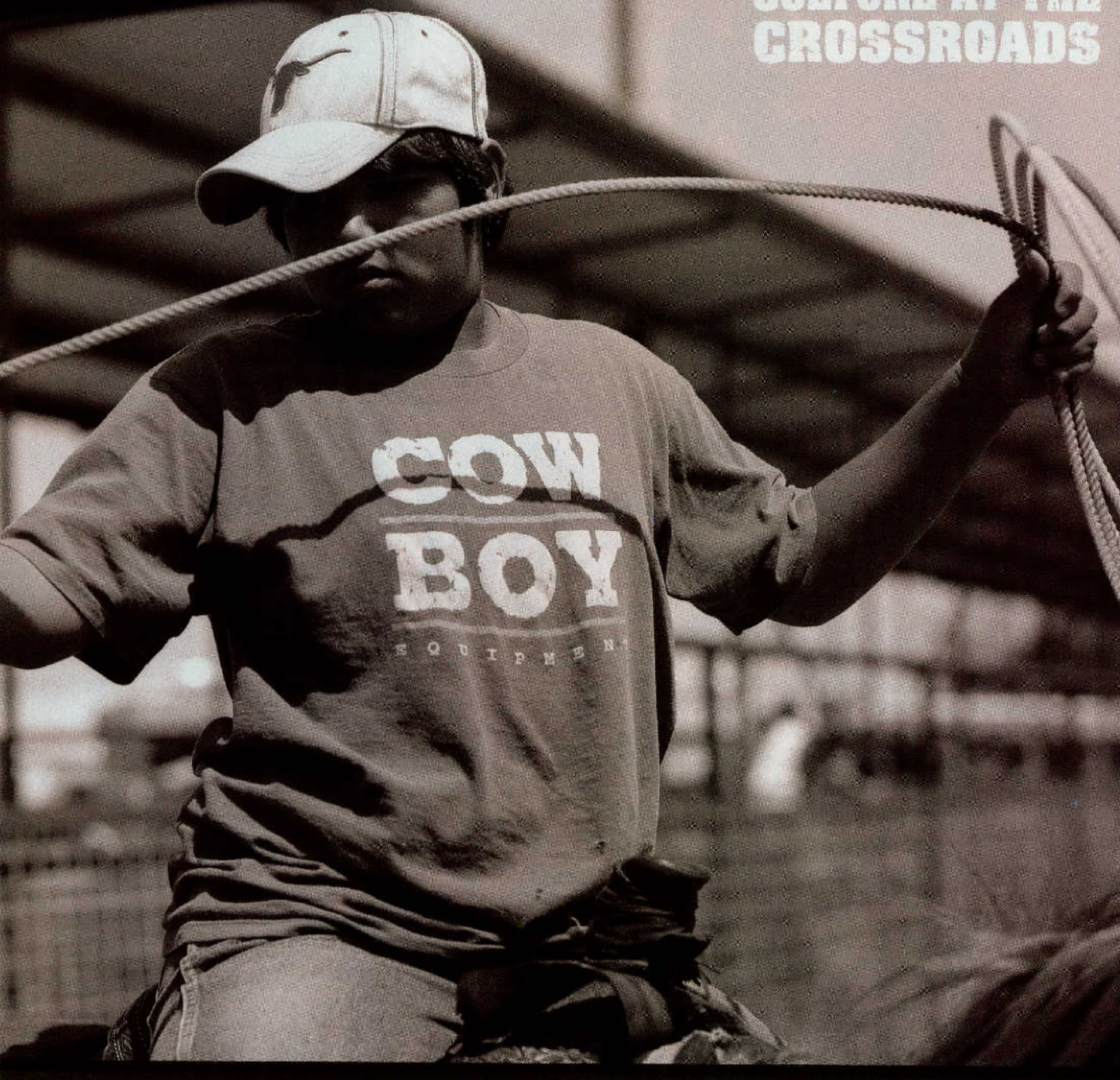


YUCCA, BORACHO PEAK RANCH, CULBERSON COUNTY, SPRING 2007





EL VAQUERO REAL  
CULTURE AT THE  
CROSSROADS



TEAM ROPING COMPETITION, PREMONT, TEXAS, SPRING 2007



# Bright ON THE Border

BY EILEEN MATTEI | PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY DITTO

**T**he Hidalgo Festival of Lights claims to illuminate a bazillion lights during the Christmas season. It's hard to prove them wrong.

A fantasyland of holiday lights envelops Hidalgo, a border town of 7,500, in December. Fairy tales, Christmas symbols, and South Texas icons shine in whimsical, over-the-top displays that elicit smiles and shouts of delight. Mesquite trees glitter with lights that run high up the trunk and onto limbs. Even Hidalgo's famous 10-foot-tall killer bee statue wears a corset of tube lights.

The exuberant month-long Festival of Lights includes two weeks of free evening musical entertainment at City Hall Plaza, tram tours to the town's parks and buildings ablaze with Christmas motifs and storybook characters, and a Tejano music finale televised throughout parts of Latin America.

The festival starts the first Sunday night in December with the Parade of Lights, originating near Hidalgo's busy international bridge, which connects McAllen and Reynosa, Mexico. Mariachis, marching bands, draft horses pulling a white carriage, and kids in penguin costumes herald the festival's official opening. One float commemorates Hidalgo's founding as a mission in 1749, while another promotes the town's BorderFest held in March. Last year's parade was unusual because the temperature had plunged to 50 degrees. Families watched while huddled under blankets and bundled in jackets and hats. Folkloric groups, flag drill teams, and dancers doing the "Jingle Bell Rock" warmed up the audience.

The plaza complex shimmers with imaginative light sculptures of cactus, candy canes, and Cinderella's pumpkin coach, along with fierce nutcrackers, an oil well, and a miniature carousel. Towering above the 20-foot-tall Christmas tree, glowing







The plaza complex shimmers with imaginative light sculptures of cactus, candy canes, and Cinderella's pumpkin coach, along with nutcrackers, an oil well, and a miniature carousel.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Brooks Ditto and daughter Carly view Cinderella's pumpkin carriage at the Hidalgo Festival of Lights. In December 2006, the festival honored the space shuttle Columbia and heroic McAllen astronaut Mike Fossum. On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me, two turtle doves. This little drummer boy lights up the night.



minarets mark the entrance to the wonderland. Across from the plaza, the roof of four-time-Grammy-award-winner Ramon Ayala's house is blanketed in lights. Between the lit palms edging the driveway, large figurines of wise men on camels approach the elevated Nativity scene, which is ringed by a crowd of visitors, who are murmuring quietly in respect for the religious portrayal.

**T**he elves working behind the scenes to create Hidalgo's light sculptures turn out to be city employees and volunteers, a group that for 17 years has designed, welded, and assembled all the displays from scratch. Before the night's entertainment starts, Freddy Sanchez is straightening a lighted, pony-size reindeer. Sanchez, who comes to the festival most evenings with his four-year-old daughter, works for the Hidalgo Parks Department. In November, he and his compadres begin assembling the lights and creating new ones from sketches and photos. "My daughter begs me to put lights on our house, too," he says, but he sidetracks her pleas by taking her back to the festival.

Last year's additions to the extravaganza included a "12 Days of Christmas" set, which encircled a pocket park with 10-foot-tall scenes like the partridge in the pear tree and the 12 lords-a-leaping, and a display called "Christmas Around the World."

"In the beginning, we couldn't afford to buy ready-made decorations," says city manager Joe Vera, who welcomed coaching by Marshall's Christmas lights experts. "Now we use our creative resources and manpower. Parks workers become artists while creating larger-than-life decorations from photos." The Hidalgo festival started with lights adorning the public safety building and has expanded to the point that new city buildings must include enough outside plugs to light holiday trees and displays. "The light bill is not as bad as you'd think," he insists. "And the 'ooohs' and 'wows' are so encouraging."

Hanging city lights early prompts homeowners to hang their lights early as well, Vera notes. And, for a project that was launched to bring visitors to Hidalgo, the



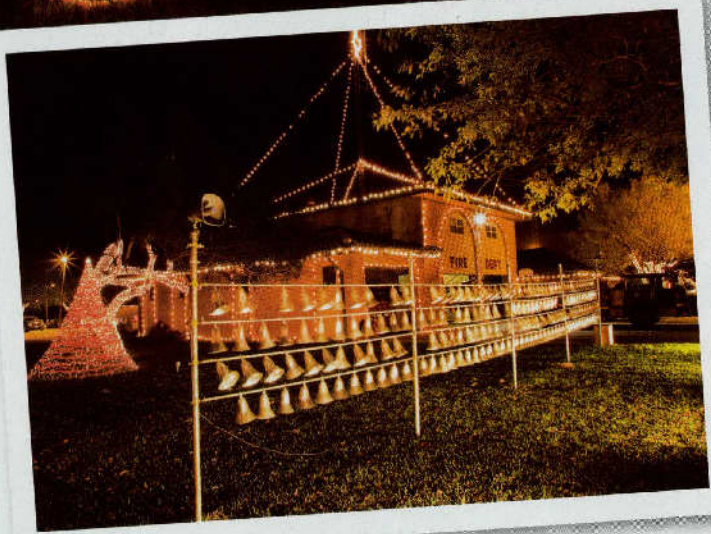
The glow in the sky of combined residential and commercial lights creates enough illumination to read the festival's self-guided tour map.

festival has given residents a source of pride. The glow in the sky of combined residential and commercial lights creates enough illumination to read the festival's self-guided tour map.

If you like, you can leave the driving to the Beeline trolley. Trolley tours run past the decorated old jail, teacherage, courthouse, and city parks. Volunteer

trolley guide Mary Bernuski, a winter Texan, provokes laughter from passengers as she points out the giant frogs leaping into a pond at the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse, not far from a light sculpture of a stern paddlewheel riverboat within yards of the Rio Grande, a nod to the 1800s, when Hidalgo was a bustling riverboat stop.





**B**efore the entertainment begins each night, local non-profits serve an outdoor supper on the plaza. A package of dinner, trolley tour, and a reserved folding chair for the music sets you back all of \$7. School and community choirs, *folklórico* music, and marimbas enliven each evening, but the most popular group comes from San Luis Potosí, Mexico. The Estudiantina Guadalupana, 21 preteen and teenage boys, charms everyone with their 1600s-themed costumes: navy and royal blue velvet tunics with neck ruffs, balloon

with its version of "Silver Bells." Mel Garza has chauffeured her daughter, a member of the choir, the 40 miles from Rio Grande City for her first visit to the Festival of Lights, but probably not her last. "You don't just come to the Festival of Lights one time. You come every year to see the new lights," says Joe Vera, hinting that skateboarding elves are on the drawing board for future festivals.

A huge *posada* with Tejano bands playing on a big stage wraps up the festival's entertainment. That night, too, the Hermes Music Foundation begins the process of giving toys like tricycles

sleeves, tights, and capes. Singing contemporary and traditional Christmas carols and accompanied by tambourines, guitars, and accordion, the Estudiantina voices find a perfect cathedral for their music under the night sky. Encouraged, the crowd sings "Silent Night" and "Joy to the World," in a mix of Spanish and English. The language doesn't matter. *Feliz Navidad.*

The all-girl Cantaré community choir, clad in short red and green plaid skirts with white shirts, takes the stage one balmy evening and wins hearts

and soccer balls to 1,000 children. Of course, Christmas festivals require holiday food. On the evening of the *posada*, booths on the plaza draw crowds eager to sample homemade tamales, the cinnamon-sugar cookies known as *pan de polvo*, cups of corn kernels topped with mayonnaise and lime juice, posole and menudo, cucumber sticks with chile powder, burgers, and hot chocolate. Kids jump at the chance to decorate gingerbread men, squeezing tubes of icing to make eyes and mouths before biting off the frosted heads.

People leave the Festival of Lights in a merry mood, while the lights of Christmas twinkle through the night, on earth and in the heavens. ★

EILEEN MATTEL's first story for *Texas Highways* (November 2003) was on the Old Hidalgo Pumphouse.

LARRY DITTO says that when the lights came on the first night he photographed Hidalgo's Festival of Lights, he thought, "Wow, I've got to tell people about this."

### THE LIGHTS OF HIDALGO

HIDALGO is on the Rio Grande, south of McAllen, on US 281.

For a **Festival of Lights** schedule, visit [www.hidalgotexas.com](http://www.hidalgotexas.com), or call 956/843-2286.

**Hidalgo Pumphouse Heritage and Discovery Center**, 902 S. 2nd St; 956/843-8686. The nation's only remaining steam pumps were powered by burning mesquite and distributed water that made the Valley bloom. Hours: Tue-Fri 11-6; Sun 2-6.

**Al's Restaurant**, 105 E. Texano; 956/843-9905. A neighborhood café that features *cabrito* (goat) and rib-eye fajitas. Hours: Daily 7-3:30 p.m.

**Mi Sombrero**, 1910 N. International Blvd.; 956/843-9498. A restaurant famous for chicken tacos. Hours: Mon-Sat 8-5.



FACING PAGE: An impressive Christmas tree lights up the square in front of Hidalgo City Hall. FROM TOP: Light rider. A girl in lights rides a bicycle past the historic Pumphouse, while a display of bells (below) rings in the season during Hidalgo's Festival of Lights.





© JIMMY KATZ



# 2007 Looking Back...

BY CHARLES LOHRMANN

**E**ver wonder why year's end is the popular choice for sentimental reminiscing? Don't assume the real answer is automatic, because even a quick excursion into calendric history explains that decisions about when to celebrate time's passage are far from consistent. Even though the movements of sun, moon, and stars are unquestioned, the way to add meaning to those astronomical events is up for grabs. So, instead of arguing about whether we like the winter solstice better than we like December 31, let's take a look at Texas-related events from this past Gregorian year and make some resolutions for a memorable 2008.

## and Going Forth.

**2007** brought Fort-Worth-born jazzman **Ornette Coleman** a Pulitzer Prize for *Sound Grammar*. It's cool to note that Coleman's composition was not included in the original list of nominees. Rather, the judges decided to purchase Coleman's CD and awarded the prize based on their own nomination.

In his notes, Coleman explains, "Sound Grammar is to music what letters are to language. Music is a language of sounds that transforms all human languages."

### FOR 2008: Jazz up your life!

- Wynton Marsalis himself suggests Austin's **Elephant Room** (315 Congress, [www.elephantroom.com](http://www.elephantroom.com)) in a 2007 interview with *USA Today*.
- **Denton Arts and Jazz Festival**, April 25-27, 2008, [www.dentonjazzfest.com](http://www.dentonjazzfest.com).
- More jazz suggestions online at [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com).

And 2007 also delivered Coleman kudos in the *Downbeat* Critics Poll, where he was named Jazz Artist of the Year and Alto Saxophonist of the Year as *Sound Grammar* was proclaimed Jazz Album of the Year.

*The New York Times* describes him as "one of the last of the truly imposing figures from a generation of jazz players that was full of them." His 1959 recording, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, established Coleman on the map of jazz geography and he's been a landmark on the terrain ever since.





**What** appears to be a setting for a science-fiction film actually is a **200-yard-long communal spider web** that engulfed entire trees along a trail through **Lake Tawakoni State Park**, in Hunt County east of Dallas. TPWD park employee Freddie Gowin first discovered the massive web on August 6. Within a couple of weeks, photographs made by Park Superintendent Donna Garde caught the attention of entomologists and invertebrate biologists who started researching the spiders creating the web. By Labor Day, 3,000 visitors had come to see the natural spectacle. The huge web is literally a stack of webs built by hundreds of spiders working on thousands of individual webs.

And what's that strange humming? It's the thousands of mosquitoes and midges trapped in the sticky silk.

**FOR 2008:  
Visit your Mother (Earth)!**

- If the spiders are still there: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/lake\\_tawakoni](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/lake_tawakoni).
- Or choose another one of more than **100 destinations** in the Texas state park system: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest).
- **National Park Service destinations** in Texas, <http://home.nps.gov/applications/parksearch/state.cfm?st=tx>.





© ALISON V. SMITH

**Another** award-winning group, the **Dixie Chicks**, brought five Grammys back to Texas in 2007. The Chicks long ago proved their ability to pull in crowds and win over the critics with their musical prowess and performing strength. This year's Grammy run was further acknowledgement of their creative depth. Wouldn't it be great to find another group just getting started that will achieve success in their own way?

**FOR 2008:  
Catch a Rising Star!**

- **Kerrville Folk Festival**, May 22-June 8, 2008, [www.kerrvillefolkfestival.com](http://www.kerrvillefolkfestival.com).
- **Austin City Limits Festival**, Sept. 26-28, 2008, [www.acifestival.com](http://www.acifestival.com).
- **The International Festival Institute at Round Top**, [www.festivalhill.org](http://www.festivalhill.org).

**Willie Nelson's** name shows up in a lot of lists—always in a list of favorite and best-known Texas musicians—but this year he added his own name to a rather short list: Those acknowledged by a **Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavor**.

2007 saw Willie join music world legends Phish and Jerry Garcia when the Vermont-based ice cream company released Willie Nelson's Country Peach Cobbler ice cream. The folks from B&J even came to Austin to announce the frozen peachy concoction at the same SXSW event at which Willie announced his new Lost Highway label. In an odd twist, the announcement was cut short by word that some batches of the ice cream included "undeclared wheat."

How'd that happen?

While the flavor was in development in the B&J ice cream factory, the plan was to call it something like Peach Swirl—no crust involved. Then the flavor testers decided that the cobbler addition would be a good idea, so pieces of shortbread crust were included in the final version of the ice cream.

But—Oops!—someone forgot to pass the word along to the packaging designers. But the story ends well because the new flavor is one of Ben & Jerry's top 10 new flavors as this magazine goes to press.

And don't worry about excessive demand on the Hill Country peach crop because the peaches in the ice cream come from California and Washington state. However, the peach swirl, a sort of peachy syrup that's not quite a candy, comes from a Dallas company.

Ben and Jerry's had some loose ties with Willie in the past, printing a "Support Fam Aid" message on 8,000,000 ice cream cartons in 1990.

**FOR 2008:  
Think global. Eat local.**  
Try a pint of Willie Nelson's Country Peach Cobbler ice cream, but then get your hands on some local peaches and do B&J one better by making your own ice cream. Try Lady Bird Johnson's recipe on page 221 of *Cooking with Texas Highways* (or find it at [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com)).



KEVIN VANDIVIER





© ARTHUR MEYERSON





## South Padre Island,

included in a 2007 list published by *Condé Nast Traveler* of the world's best islands, enchants newcomers and old-timers alike from sunrise to sunset.

### FOR 2008:

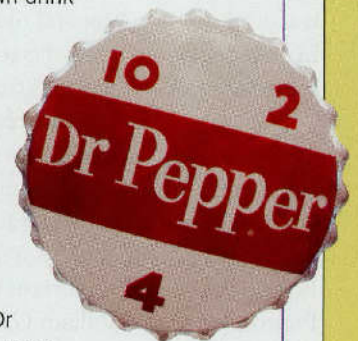
Discover another spot on the Texas coast and plan a visit—and try a new saltwater adventure: maybe kayaking, birding, wade-fishing, or a combination of all three.

Of course, we all have our favorite South Padre stories, but who needs an excuse to plan a trip there?

**While** you're in the tasting mood, it's time to revisit a Texas favorite: Dr Pepper. Why now? To celebrate that **Waco's Dr Pepper Museum** anointed its 1,000,000th visitor—which was actually three members of the Murray family of Cedar Park. What would Charles Alderton, the Waco pharmacist who blended 23 mystery flavors to create the drink in the 1880s, think if he could see how his own drink is cherished?

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

Or, if you want an even more true-roots Dr Pepper experience, drop in on the oldest Dr Pepper bottling plant in the world—the one where they kept the true original formula alive in the lean years. That plant is in Dublin. That's Dublin, Texas, of course. [www.dublindrpepper.com](http://www.dublindrpepper.com).



**And** in one last wacky acknowledgement of Texas as mega-culture—*The New York Times Style Magazine* named **Moscow**—yes, THE Moscow, the one in Russia,—as “**The New Dallas.**”

We're thinking a Mobil Pegasus will soon be seen atop one of the Kremlin's minarets. What would Stanley Marcus say about that? ★



BY LORI GROSSMAN

## The Million-Dollar Tree

IT JUST isn't Christmas without observing that time-honored custom—driving around to look at the lights. You say the bigger the display, the better? Well, I have a “must-see” tree for you.

Truly Texas-sized, a majestic pecan tree in Highland Park (near Dallas) stands over 70 feet tall, with a trunk diameter of four feet, seven inches, and a crown spread of around 80 feet. Every Christmas, this historic landmark—it's more than 140 years old—is decked out in finery that attracts admirers young and old. They gaze in wonder at what has been called “the world's greatest Christmas tree.”

Our story (or rather, the tree's story) begins with the arrival, from Virginia, of Dr. John Cole, his wife, Polly, and their nine children in 1843. Dr. Cole had obtained a land grant of 640 acres as a settler in the Peters Colony. An important trail, named Preston Road for William G. Preston (see *Speaking of Texas*, April 2006), a captain in the Army of the Republic of Texas, cut across the newcomers' land. This roadway would lead many immigrants south



© PETE WATERS

The “million dollar” moniker for this Highland Park pecan tree originated in the early 1900s, when, according to legend, the plot of land where it stands attracted an offer of \$1 million.

to new homes, as well as herds of Texas Longhorns north to market.

The first physician/pharmacist in the future Dallas County, Dr. Cole built a log house for his large brood, planted an orchard and herbs for making medicines, and farmed the land across Preston Road. This area, which years

later would come to be known as Highland Park West, was, back then, an open expanse of treeless prairie.

Joseph Larkin Cole, Dr. Cole's seventh son, was 18 months old when the family came to Texas. His was a busy boyhood, spent helping his father farm, run stock, and raise Morgan horses. He was

only nine when his father died in 1851.

When the Civil War broke out, Joe joined Company C, Sixth Texas Cavalry, mounted one of his family's fine horses, and rode off to join the fray. He saw action in several battles, had three horses shot out from under him, and sustained a wound. Lucky to have survived, he returned home in the spring of 1865, dressed in a tattered uniform and riding on a mule.

When Joe approached the house, Uncle Jim, one of the family's former slaves, was outside splitting wood. When he looked up and saw Joe, he almost didn't recognize the scarecrow-like figure.

Joe recovered and soon returned to farming. It was during either plowing or the fall corn harvesting (sources disagree on this) that a wagon wheel accidentally flattened a small pecan sapling. In a 1951 interview with the *Park Cities News*, Joe's oldest child, Mary Brower, explained what happened next: “My father saw it, stopped, dug a hole, and put the tree back in the ground. There was a rail fence nearby, and he got a broken rail to stake it with so it wouldn't get knocked over again.”

From that time on, the small pecan tree received special attention. Joe trimmed and pruned its lower branches so that as

**HIGHLAND PARK** encompasses 2.26 square miles and lies about 3 miles north of downtown Dallas. The legendary pecan tree is at 4200 Armstrong Pkwy. Call 214/521-4161; [www.hptx.org](http://www.hptx.org).



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A stately pecan tree that dates to the Civil War era forms the centerpiece of a Highland Park holiday tradition. With its more than 5,000 lights, you would even say it glows.

it grew, it would provide welcome shade during the hot Texas summers. As the little pecan flourished, so did Joe. He married and, by the time his daughter Mary was a few years old, the tree was big enough to shelter her first playhouse. When Joe sold his land in 1888—for \$120 an acre—he requested that future owners allow the tree to grow undisturbed. Contrary to local legend, this wasn't included in the deed, but his wish has been respected ever since.

The property changed hands several times before major development took place in the area. In 1906, John Armstrong bought a portion of the land that bordered on Turtle Creek. In partnership with Thomas Marsalis, Armstrong was already an experienced city developer. In 1884, the pair had bought 2,000 acres of Dallas County land and sold lots in what became the community of Oak

Cliff. Now, Armstrong conceived plans for an upscale neighborhood with exclusive homes and plenty of green space. He named the development Highland Park.

Armstrong and his two sons-in-law, Edgar Flippen and Hugh Prather, got down to work. They hired California landscape architect Wilbur David Cook—who had designed Beverly Hills—to plan the layout. Development began in 1907 east of Preston Road, and was almost complete by the time Highland Park West (west of Preston Road) began development in 1924. Flippen and Prather took charge after John Armstrong's death in 1908. They chose George Kessler—re-

sponsible for the so-called Kessler Plan of 1909, which designed and improved most of downtown Dallas—to plan this last section of Highland Park.

The lot containing the pecan tree was, so to speak, the toughest nut to crack. Flippen and Prather debated over the best way of preserving the tree. The lot attracted many offers, one of which, it was rumored, was a million dollars. Finally, the tree was given its own landscaped thoroughfare, Armstrong Parkway, named in honor of John Armstrong.

With interest in the "Million-Dollar Pecan Tree" steadily increasing, the Prather family began illuminating it for Christmas in 1927. When Highland Park West was incorporated into Highland Park proper in 1928, the town took over the decorating duties. Since then, the tradition has continued every holiday season, except during World War II and the 1973 energy crisis.

Before 1978, the Highland Park Police Department took charge of switching the tree lights on and off. The official lighting ceremony began that year, and it continues today.

On the first Thursday evening in December, Highland Park's mayor welcomes the crowd, usually 300 to 400 people. Then, the mayor tells the pecan tree's story and explains how the lighting tradition got started. Next, the Highland Park High School choir (called the "Lads & Lassies") sings traditional Christmas carols. At that point, a special guest usually joins the festivities.

"In past years, we've been very fortunate to have Santa Claus show up riding on a fire truck," says Ronnie Brown, director of

**THE ANNUAL TREE-LIGHTING CEREMONY** takes place at 7 p.m. the first Thu. in Dec. (Dec. 6, 2007). To reach the historic pecan tree from downtown Dallas, take US 75 (Central Expwy.) North, exit at Mockingbird Lane, and turn left (west) onto Mockingbird Lane. Continue on Mockingbird, and turn left onto Preston Rd. Drive about 1 mile to Armstrong Pkwy. Turn right; the tree is directly ahead in the middle of the parkway. Admission: Free. Activities include a sing-along with Highland Park High School's choir (the Lads & Lassies) and the arrival of Santa in a fire truck.

Passersby can see the lighted tree anytime after Dec. 6 through New Year's Day. The lights are on daily from dusk-1 a.m.

**Highland Park Village** (designated a Natl. Historic Landmark for its status as the oldest outdoor shopping center in the nation) is 1 mile north of the pecan tree, on Preston Rd. (corner of Preston Rd. and Mockingbird Lane). From Nov. 23 through New Year's Day, the center features a large lighted tree, lighting throughout, and carriage rides.

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## Just PASSING Through

the town's Parks, Recreation, and Sanitation Department. "It's exciting every year to see the kids respond to Santa." Still, the biggest attraction is the tree itself. Ronnie says that drive-by traffic can be almost bumper-to-bumper during the holiday season.

If putting up your own lights stresses you out, be grateful you don't have to trim the Highland Park pecan tree. Parks foreman Jimmy Contreras supervises this complicated operation.

"Last year, we used over 3,000 lights on the tree itself," says Jimmy. "In addition, we used 2,400 mini-lights wrapped around the trunk of the tree. We rent a 60-foot aerial bucket truck to trim the taller part. It takes eight people about two-and-a-half days to hang the lights."

Because of its age, the beloved tree receives lots of tender loving care all year long. Ronnie explains that a consulting



Highland Park's tree-lighting ceremony on the first Thursday of December rings in the holidays with a recitation of the tree's history, a sing-along, and Santa's arrival.

arborist regularly checks for disease, fertilizes the root system, and prunes any dead wood. The tree was struck by lightning in 1982, but, luckily, the damage was manageable. To minimize the possibility of another strike, a braided copper lightning rod was added.

In 1951, another pecan tree was planted behind the original. Grown from one of the big tree's pecans, this tree will eventually replace the original, which was honored in 1986 with a bronze plaque designating it a Park Cities Historical Landmark. (Since the average lifespan of pecan trees in an urban setting is about 75 years, this one, at 142 years, is quite old.)

This beautiful Yuletide sight has inspired others to try to re-create some Christmas magic of their own. Usually, they're advised to contact Ronnie Brown (aka "the pecan tree expert"). "About 10 years ago, folks at SMU asked about decorating the avenue of live oak trees that leads up to Dallas Hall," Ronnie recalls. "And a resident of Alamo Heights contacted me about the tradition last year."

No one really knows how the pecan tree turned up in Joe Cole's cornfield. The theory is that a bird picked up a pecan in a grove along Turtle Creek, then dropped it while in flight. The tree has survived being run over by a wagon wheel and being struck by lightning to amaze and delight us for many a Christmas.

In a 1948 *Dallas Morning News* article, writer Kenneth Foree said the tree "is probably the greatest Christmas tree in the world." When you see it, I think you'll agree.

Dallas writer LORI GROSSMAN is a confessed Christmas-lights aficionada.

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only does it give you the lowdown on why and how to register your vehicle, it gives you photo and music contests to enter, games to play, and interviews to read. As well, it's brought to you by the same people who love Texas highways as much as you — your Texas Department of Transportation.

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Put  
Texas in  
your  
corner.™





# TOP Tables

(continued from page 13)

casual luxury. Old Hickory's menu has a distinct Lone Star touch, as do those of the other dining venues, thanks to a team of talented chefs who've been lured from top kitchens in nearby Dallas.

Executive chef Joanne Bondy, who made



Yep. He's real. Old Hickory's executive chef Joanne Bondy poses with the "Golden Cowboy" (Larry Russell), one of the resort's stirring entertainers. If you touch him, he just might wink at you.

a national name for herself at Mexico City-inspired Ciudad in Dallas, commands the steakhouse kitchen, adding a culinarian's flair with specialties such as sautéed lemon-scented Atlantic scallops; an artisanal cheese plate; and sorrel potatoes au gratin.

Service here proves nothing short of excellent. When it comes to wine, let the steward give you some suggestions; you'll find a wide range of prices. Old Hickory

## OTHER Gaylord dining options include

**Texan Station**, a sports bar with burgers and barbecue (and a 52-foot big-screen TV), as well as **Riverwalk Café**, situated near a façade of the Alamo in a setting that recalls San Antonio's meandering river. The latter serves a variety of regional Texas dishes such as chicken tortilla soup, tequila rotisserie chicken, shrimp jambalaya, fajitas, and bread pudding. Riverwalk Café also hosts a Sunday brunch.

For more information (including hours), or to make reservations at any of the five **Gaylord Texan** restaurants, call 817/778-1000; [www.gaylordhotels.com](http://www.gaylordhotels.com).

■ For more photos of the Gaylord Texan's restaurants, check out the slide show at [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com).



has vintages from California and other West Coast wine-making areas, a great selection from Texas' growing wine industry, as well as a venerable collection of French and Old World wines.

Or splurge on a bottle of M. Chapoutier La Bernadine Chateaneuf du Pape 2004 (\$98) for a velvety mouthful of berries and cocoa with a tight finish. Chef Bondy recommends her Niman Ranch-raised natural Angus sirloin strip au poivre.

The pepper-seasoned meat pairs delightfully with the rich red wine.

A hint of lemon comes through in the sorrel-laced potatoes au gratin. The leafy sorrel conveys just a touch of citrus to cut through the backdrop of cream and butter that gives the dish its characteristic luxury.

Chef Bondy is justly proud of her cheese plate. Servers roll a cart around allowing diners to choose

from among an assortment of artisan cheeses. Have a taste at the start of the meal or take your cheese European style, after the main course and before—or instead of—dessert. What a fabulous way to finish off the last sip of a big red wine.

Don't miss classics like soufflés made with Grand Marnier or chocolate, light and airy, but requiring some time to make. Remember to order in advance or be prepared to give the kitchen the 20 minutes required. Yes, that's another chance to finish that bottle of cabernet sauvignon or sip some Cognac. If you can't wait, check out the dense, chocolaty Guinness Stout cake instead.

But remember, you've still got one stop.

## Glass Cactus Awaits

THE RESORT'S nightclub has become a studio for executive resort chef Ty Thoren. There's live music Tuesday through Saturday nights, and Chef Thoren's menu features delightful "club cuisine" for sharing either as appetizers early in the evening or as a late-night snack to keep the party alive.

The lake views from the nightclub's multi-tiered outdoor decks are intoxicating, but there's plenty of spirit here in the



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form of signature cocktails or any of the 125 premium tequilas (touted as the largest selection in Texas). In the kitchen, the culinary team produces dazzling appetizers such as flatbread with melted gorgonzola and asiago cheeses, and miniature Kobe-beef burgers.

Chef Thoren is also the barbecue master at the Gaylord Texan, where his new outdoor grill at the Glass Cactus overlooks Lake Grapevine.

If you're thinking this sounds like a lot of wining and dining for one evening, consider making a room reservation at the same time you make your restaurant reservations. Then it's a weekend getaway to the mini-gourmet state known as the Gaylord Texan.

---

Food writer DOTTY GRIFFITH frequently freelances for *Texas Highways* and other publications. She's looking forward to her next Gaylord gourmet excursion.

## A TEXAS HIGHWAYS MOMENT WITH RON WHITE

*(continued from page 17)*

life struggles. I just happened to be a comedian—the insanity of trying to work it out with the universe, where was I going to live, what woman might be a good partner for me, those were the things I was living with.

**DALE: Isn't it great being able to make a living by making the tough times into the funny stuff?**

**RON:** I think it is. Without those struggles, my act would be short a few minutes. We could go home a little early.

**DALE: I remember you calling me once, bragging that you were on a private plane. Tonight you flew here to Fort Hood on your very own jet. Some change, huh?**

**RON:** Today, I woke up in Oklahoma City; I flew to Grove, Oklahoma, and got to spend the day on a lake with my cousin and his family. We flew here, and I get to visit with you and then do a show for the troops. Before the day is over, I'll fly to Houston and pick up my childhood buddies Steve Cook and Joe Payne, who I've known since I was six. I'm flying them to the NASCAR race at Atlanta Motor Speed-

way. It is unbelievable and wonderful.

**DALE: During this incredible ride for you, you've met a lot of people. Has there been a "pinch me" moment where you were in the room with someone and you could not believe it was happening?**

**RON:** Robin Williams. I had lunch with Robin Williams and Bob Goldthwaite, who I've known for a long time. We were at the Beverly Hills Hotel and I was struggling with a new bit for my act. We were all laughing, and in the middle of it, it hit me that Robin Williams was 'punching up' a joke for me.

**DALE: At this point, what do you consider your hometown?**

**RON:** You know, it would have to be Austin. When I was a kid, I lived in Fritch, and as a teenager, it was Deer Park, but I haven't gone back. The place I keep coming back to and back to is Austin. That's where my friends live, and that is where I feel at home.

**DALE: That's where your kind gathers?**

**RON:** (Laughs) So true! Like-minded people gather together, that is true.

**DALE: There are several thousand troops out there. You won't say it, but I've been told by some of these folks that you are doing this show for free. True?**

**RON:** Well, I've made a few visits to Walter Reed Hospital when I'm in the D.C. area, and I have done some shows for the USO. The Fort Hood people approached me to do a paid show. Gathered in that crowd are hundreds of men and women who have come back from Iraq and Afghanistan. The second-largest deployment of troops comes out of Fort Hood, Texas. The little effort it takes for me to fly here and do a show pales in comparison to what these folks have done. I will gladly do this for free. Anyone that would come here and charge to do a show is a spineless hack! ★

---

Austin on-air personality DALE DUDLEY continues to enjoy a successful 28-year run on Texas radio. His highly-rated *Dudley & Bob* morning show can be heard weekday mornings from 6-10 on 93.7 KLBJ-FM in Austin.

# TEXAS HIGHWAYS

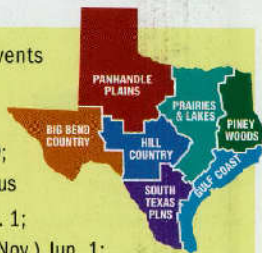
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# December



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**1**

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San Jacinto Plaza  
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915/533-3311

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www.marathontexas.net

**1-25**

**ODESSA**

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432/335-4682

**3**

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**7**

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**PECOS**

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**8**

**EL PASO**

Broadway on Ice  
915/544-8444  
or 534-4229

**VAN HORN**

Lighted Christmas Parade  
432/283-2682

**8-9**

**MIDLAND**

*The Nutcracker*  
432/682-2653  
www.midlandfestivalballet.org

**14-16, 21-22**

**ODESSA**

Miracle on 34th Street  
432/580-3177

**15**

**MIDLAND**

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432/563-0921  
www.mosc.org

**16**

**ODESSA**

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www.mosc.org

**21-22**

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Tournament  
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**21-23**

**EL PASO**

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**31**

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361/592-8516  
www.kingsvilletexas.com

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281/652-1673  
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**PORT NECHES**

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www.portnecheschamber.com

**ROCKPORT**

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**ROSENBERG**

Christmas in Rosenberg  
832/595-3525  
www.visitrosenberg.com

**VICTORIA**

Lighted Christmas Parade  
361/485-3200  
www.victoriabx.org

**1-2**

**GALVESTON**

Dickens on the Strand  
409/765-7834  
www.dickensonthestrand.org

**LEAGUE CITY**

Holiday in the Park  
Festival & Parade  
www.holidayinthepark.org

**6**

**EL CAMPO**

Christmas Parade  
979/543-2713

**TEXAS CITY**

Christmas Parade  
409/643-5990  
www.texas-city-bx.org

**7**

**BAYTOWN**

Christmas Parade  
281/420-6597  
www.baytown.org

**7-8**

**ROCKPORT-FULTON**

Christmas Historic Homes Tour  
361/729-6445  
www.rockport-fulton.org

**7-8, 14-15, 21-22**

**RICHMOND**

Campfire Christmas  
281/343-0218  
www.georgeranch.org

**8**

**CLEAR LAKE AREA**

Christmas Lane Boat Parade  
281/488-7676

**CRYSTAL BEACH**

Christmas Parade  
409/684-5940  
www.bolivarchamber.org

**8**

**MISSOURI CITY**

Snowfest Parade & Festival  
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www.ci.mocity.tx.us

**PORT ARANSAS**

Carolers Afloat/Boat Parade  
800/452-6278  
www.portaransas.org

**8-9**

**GALVESTON**

*The Nutcracker*  
800/821-1894  
www.thegrand.com

**8-9, 15-16**

**HOUSTON**

The Christmas Revels  
713/668-3303  
www.revelshouston.org

**11-16**

**GALVESTON**

*A Tuna Christmas*  
409/765-1894  
www.thegrand.com

**28**

**HOUSTON**

Texas Bowl  
832/667-2002  
www.texasbowl.org

**31**

**BEAUMONT**

Crockett Street  
New Year's Eve Celebration  
409/832-2944  
www.crockettstreet.com

WELCOME TO THIS MONTH'S sampling of events from throughout the Lone Star State.

SEND FUTURE EVENT INFORMATION TO: *Texas*

*Events Calendar*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009;

fax: 512/486-5879; e-mail: trv-tec@dot.state.tx.us

LISTING DEADLINES: Spring (Mar., Apr., May) Dec. 1;

Summer (Jun., Jul., Aug.) Mar. 1; Fall (Sep., Oct., Nov.) Jun. 1;

Winter (Dec., Jan., Feb.) Sep. 1

BECAUSE OF SPACE LIMITATIONS, we can't list every event we receive. Please

note that dates sometimes change after we go to press. You may want to con-

firm a particular event by calling the number listed with the festivity or by con-

tacting the local chamber of commerce or convention and visitors bureau.

FOR INFORMATION ON ANY DESTINATION IN TEXAS: Call 800/452-9292

toll-free from anywhere in the U.S. or Canada, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Central Time. A professional travel counselor at one of the Texas Department

of Transportation's Travel Information Centers will answer your Texas travel

questions, provide routing assistance, send brochures

(including the official *Texas State Travel Guide* and map),

and advise you of any emergency road conditions.



BECAUSE OF SPACE LIMITATIONS, we can't list every event we receive. Please note that dates sometimes change after we go to press. You may want to confirm a particular event by calling the number listed with the festivity or by contacting the local chamber of commerce or convention and visitors bureau.

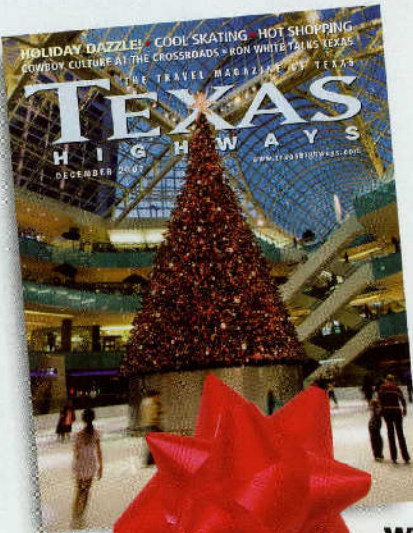
FOR A QUARTERLY, MORE DETAILED SCHEDULE OF events, write for a free copy of the *Texas Events Calendar*, Box 149249, Austin 78714-9249. For an online listing of events, go to [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com).

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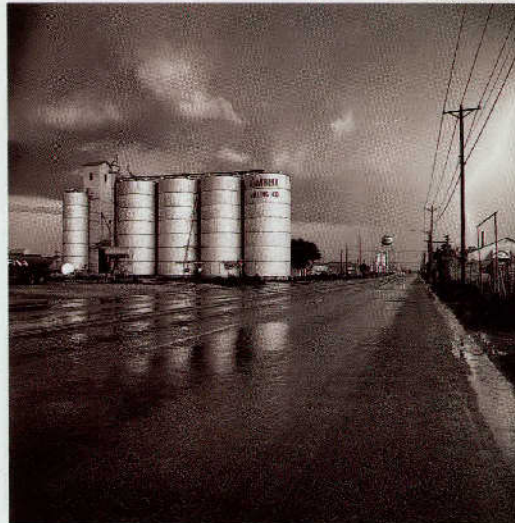
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X5L72





Grain Elevator and Lightning Flash, Lamesa, Texas, is one of many works by photographer Frank Gohlke on exhibit at Fort Worth's Amon Carter Museum through January 6.

**31**  
**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND**  
 Fireworks  
 on the Bay  
 800/767-2373

**HILL COUNTRY**

**1**  
**AUSTIN**  
 Thomas Vlloteau  
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[www.austinclassicalguitar.org](http://www.austinclassicalguitar.org)

**CASTROVILLE**  
 Old-Fashioned Christmas  
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[www.castroville.com](http://www.castroville.com)

**GEORGETOWN**  
 Christmas Stroll  
 512/868-8675  
[www.downtowngeorgetownassociation.org](http://www.downtowngeorgetownassociation.org)

**1-2**  
**BUDA**  
 Budafest  
 512/694-3413  
[www.budafest.org](http://www.budafest.org)

**1-16**  
**INGRAM**  
 A Christmas Carol  
 830/367-5121  
[www.hcaf.com](http://www.hcaf.com)

**2-31**  
**AUSTIN**  
 Zilker Park  
 Trail of Lights  
 512/974-6700  
[www.ci.austin.tx.us/tol](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/tol)

**6-8**  
**SAN MARCOS**  
 Sights & Sounds of Christmas  
 512/393-8400  
[www.sights-n-sounds.org](http://www.sights-n-sounds.org)

**6-11**  
**AUSTIN**  
 Christmas at the Carillon  
 512/476-5775  
[www.conspire.org](http://www.conspire.org)

**6-8, 13-15**  
**CANYON LAKE**  
 North Pole Village  
 830/964-2324  
[www.crrccofcanyonlake.org](http://www.crrccofcanyonlake.org)

**7-9, 14-16**  
**BURNET**  
 Main Street Bethlehem  
 512/756-6033  
[www.fbcburnet.org](http://www.fbcburnet.org)

**8**  
**BURNET**  
 Old Burnet Square  
 Christmas Festival  
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[www.burnetchamber.org](http://www.burnetchamber.org)

**FREDERICKSBURG**  
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 830/997-2835  
[www.pioneermuseum.com](http://www.pioneermuseum.com)

**KERRVILLE**  
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 830/895-3710

**16**  
**STONEWALL**  
 Annual Tree Lighting  
 830/644-2252

**16**  
**STONEWALL**  
 Christmas Lights  
 at the LBJ Ranch  
 830/868-7128  
[www.nps.gov/lyjo](http://www.nps.gov/lyjo)

**22-23**  
**BOERNE**  
 Cowboy Christmas at  
 Enchanted Springs Ranch  
 830/249-8222  
[www.enchantedspringsranch.com](http://www.enchantedspringsranch.com)

**31**  
**AUSTIN**  
 First Night Austin  
 512/476-5577  
[www.firstnightaustin.org](http://www.firstnightaustin.org)

**GRUENE**  
 New Year's Eve  
 at Gruene Hall  
 830/629-5077  
[www.gruenehall.com](http://www.gruenehall.com)

**PANHANDLE PLAINS**

**1**  
**BIG SPRING**  
 Big Spring Herald  
 Christmas Parade  
 432/263-7331  
[www.bigspringherald.com](http://www.bigspringherald.com)

**QUANAH**  
 Christmas Parade & Festival  
 940/663-2222

**SAN ANGELO**  
 San Angelo Symphony  
 Christmas Pops Concert  
 325/658-5877

**1, 7-9, 14-15**  
**POST**  
 (began Nov 30)  
 A Christmas Story  
 806/495-4005

**6-24**  
**ABILENE**  
 Christmas Lane  
 325/795-3547

**7-8**  
**LUBBOCK**  
 Candlelight at the Ranch  
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[www.nrhc.ttu.edu](http://www.nrhc.ttu.edu)

**7-9**  
**AMARILLO**  
 The Nutcracker  
 806/372-2463  
[www.lonestarballerit.org](http://www.lonestarballerit.org)

**7-9**  
**SAN ANGELO**  
 Christmas at Old Fort Concho  
 325/481-2646  
[www.fortconcho.com](http://www.fortconcho.com)

**8**  
**HENRIETTA**  
 Lighted Christmas Parade  
 940/538-5261  
[www.hccchamber.com](http://www.hccchamber.com)

**PAMPA**  
 Christmas Parade  
 806/669-3241

**VERNON**  
 Lighted Christmas Parade  
 940/552-2564  
[www.vernontexas.net](http://www.vernontexas.net)

**8-9**  
**ABILENE**  
 Christmas at the Paramount  
 325/675-8138

**13**  
**ALBANY**  
 Community Holiday Party  
 325/762-2269  
[www.oldjailartcenter.org](http://www.oldjailartcenter.org)

**FLOYDADA**  
 Cowboy Christmas  
 806/983-3434  
[www.floydadachamber.com](http://www.floydadachamber.com)

**SWEETWATER**  
 Municipal Band  
 Holiday Concert  
 325/235-5488  
[www.sweetwatertexas.org](http://www.sweetwatertexas.org)

**14-15**  
**QUANAH**  
 Three Rivers Cowboy Ball  
 940/839-7332  
[www.3rf.org](http://www.3rf.org)

**15**  
**ABILENE**  
 Classical Chorus  
 Christmas Concert  
 325/795-1596

**TUBA CHRISTMAS**  
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[www.tubachristmas.com](http://www.tubachristmas.com)

**BIG SPRING**  
 A Symphonic Christmas  
 432/264-7223  
[www.bigspringsymphony.com](http://www.bigspringsymphony.com)

**15-31**  
**BIG SPRING**  
 Comanche Trail  
 Festival of Lights  
 432/263-8235  
[www.bigspring-cvb.com](http://www.bigspring-cvb.com)

**31**  
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**1-8**  
**NACOGDOCHES**  
 (began Nov 17)  
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**1-31**  
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**7**  
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 Concert  
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7-9

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13-24

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14-15

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15

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16

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17

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23

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1

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LOCKHART

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MADISONVILLE

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WACO

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1-2

**GONZALES**  
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GRANBURY

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www.hgma.com

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(began Nov 30)  
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www.irvingartscenter.com

McKINNEY

Holiday Tour of Homes  
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www.chestnutssquare.org

SALADO

(began Nov 30)  
Christmas Stroll  
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www.salado.com

1-2, 8-9

WAXAHACHIE

Candlelight Christmas  
Homes Tour  
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1-16

FORT WORTH

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www.texasballettheater.org

1-29

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2

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www.dallasbach.org

3

**FORT WORTH**  
Hal Holbrook in  
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www.basshall.com

4

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817/665-6000  
www.fwsymphony.org

6

**COMMERCE**  
Christmas Parade  
903/886-3950  
www.commerce-chamber.com

DENISON

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www.denisontexas.us

7

BONHAM

Christmas Parade  
903/583-4811  
www.bonhamchamber.com

DE LEON

Country Christmas  
254/893-2083  
www.deleontexas.com/chamber

GREENVILLE

Christmas Parade  
903/457-3138

7, 9

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8

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972/291-3900

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979/836-6033  
www.chappellhillmuseum.org

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361/865-3920  
www.flatoniachamber.com

MOUNT VERNON

Christmas Festival  
903/537-4365  
www.visitmtvernon.org

PALESTINE

Christmas Parade of Lights  
903/725-3014  
www.visitpalestine.com

PLANO

Christmas Parade  
972/424-4714  
www.planotchristmas  
parade.com

WASHINGTON

Candlelight Christmas  
936/878-2213  
www.birthplaceoftexas.com

WEATHERFORD

Candlelight Tour of Homes  
817/594-3801  
www.parkercounty  
heritagesociety.com

9

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White Rock Marathon  
214/670-8281  
www.runtherock.com

13-23

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Ride 'em cowboy! The Mesquite Championship Rodeo wrangled in its 50th birthday this year at Resistol Arena in Mesquite.

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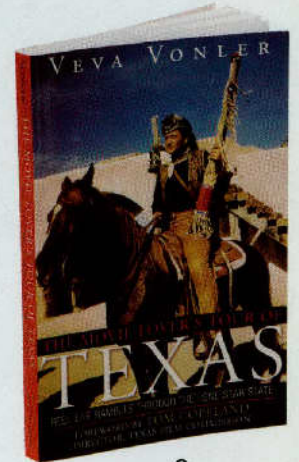
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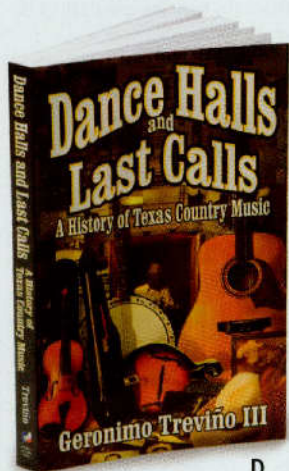


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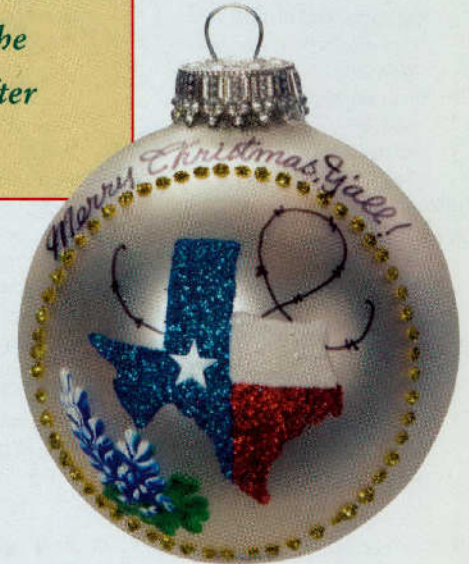
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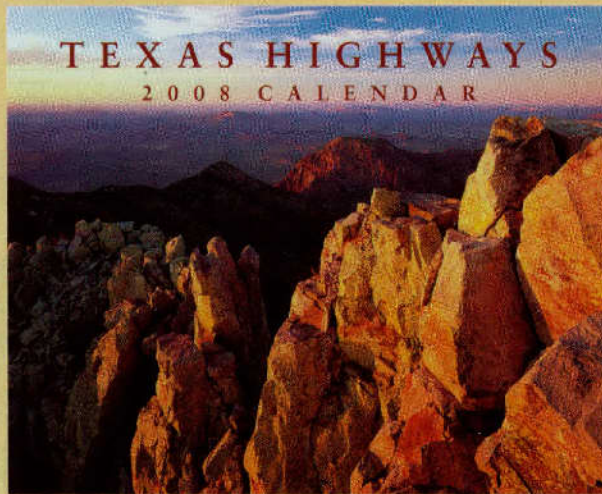
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MARSHA BOYER, *Conroe*

**2 Wee Cottages** is at 108 E. Morse St.; 877/437-7739; [www.2weecottages.com](http://www.2weecottages.com).

IF YOU are near **Stephenville**, a short detour to **Fiddle Creek Steakhouse** is a must. It's a jewel from the past. The service is super, the food is freshly made and excellent, and the decor is among the most unique in Texas. It's truly a Texas treasure.

MIKE EDWARDS, *Salado*

**Fiddle Creek Steakhouse** is at 2004 Swan St.; 254/968-7500; [www.fiddlecreeksteakhouse.com](http://www.fiddlecreeksteakhouse.com).

THERE IS a restaurant in **Frankston** housed in the restored Williams and Bandy lumberyard building called **7-B Ranch Restaurant**. Historic

WHILE driving through **Blanco**, we discovered a classy restaurant on the courtyard square: **Uptown Blanco Restaurant**.

Opened in November 2006, it offers salads, huge sandwiches, gourmet entrées, and desserts at low prices. This great restaurant is located inside an 1800s storefront building, and is only open on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. We were surprised to find this fine restaurant in a small Hill Country town, and have returned often, as it's worth the drive.

KAY AND LEON WHITNEY, *Austin*

**Uptown Blanco Restaurant** is at 317 Main St.; 830/833-1579.



Uptown Blanco Restaurant is part of an entertainment complex that includes a courtyard and a center for the arts.

photographs of the town line the beautiful [knotty yellow] pine walls; the atmosphere and food are wonderful. They serve a home-style buffet, great chicken-fried steak, and hamburgers.

JEAN HUGHES, *Sugar Land*

**7-B Ranch Restaurant** is at 300 E. Pine St.; 903/876-0241.

FOR A touch of nostalgia and the best candies, don't miss **King's Candies and Such** in **Huntsville**. They've been in business since 1981, and the present owner, Steed Smith, continues the tradition of making hand-dipped and handmade candies. (Try the ambrosia or the peanut patties.) They also have an old-fashioned soda fountain that serves wonderful lunches, sand-

wiches, and desserts. The atmosphere is a step back in time. You can watch the employees dipping chocolates and other candies while enjoying your treat.

MARTHA JO WHITT, *Gonzales*

**King's Candies and Such** is at 1112 11th St.; 936/291-6988; [www.kingscandiesandsuch.com](http://www.kingscandiesandsuch.com).

DON'T miss a chance to see **Christmas in the Park** at Cuero Municipal Park in **Cuero**. There's a self-guided drive-through tour open daily through New Year's Day, and approximately 100,000 lights illuminate the park.

VICKI JO COPPEDGE, *Cuero*

**Cuero Municipal Park** is at US 87 South (Broadway St.), across from Cuero High School; 361/275-8178; [www.christmasincuero.com](http://www.christmasincuero.com). **Christmas in the Park** opens the Monday after Thanksgiving. See *For the Road*, page 6.

IF YOU KNOW OF A NOTEWORTHY LONE STAR ATTRACTION, RESTAURANT, EVENT, OR PRODUCT, WRITE OR E-MAIL: Readers Recommend, *Texas Highways*, Box 141009, Austin 78714-1009. E-mail: [letters05@texashighways.com](mailto:letters05@texashighways.com). Space constraints prevent us from publishing every suggestion we receive. We reserve the right to edit items. Because we're unable to check out every item, and because hours vary and details can change, please call ahead for more information.

**Next month...** Stay tuned for stories on **El Camino Real**, **Roma Bluffs World Birding Center**, **Stillwell Ranch**, and **San Ygnacio**, and a photo feature on **Groesbeck**.

## Texas Highways



## TRAVEL

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J. GRIFFIS SMITH

window on  
**TEXAS**

**STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER** Griff Smith light-painted the classic *Cadillac Ranch*, 12 miles west of Amarillo off I-40. Amarillo's Mad Hatter Stanley Marsh 3 created the "mother of all auto art" in 1974; passersby today still like to stop and tag the Caddies with spray paint.

■ To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit [www.texashighwaysprints.com](http://www.texashighwaysprints.com).



