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# TEXAS TRAVEL LOGS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

MARCH 2004

Texas State Documents

**MUSICAL ROAD TRIP** Appreciation of Texas music can now easily be translated into

a reason to hit the road with TxDOT Travel Division's latest publication, *Sites & Sounds: A Texas Music Road Trip*.

### *A Texas Music Road Trip*

Travel Literature/Fulfillment Branch Manager Brent Dollar says the branch's mission is to publish and distribute literature that encourages people to travel throughout the state. Dollar says that mission, paired with the "increased interest in and awareness of Texas music over the past few years," inspired the choice for the publication.

The 48-page guide highlights museums and monuments to Texas' homegrown musicians, such as the Buddy Holly Center, Selena Museum, Texas Country Music Hall of Fame and more. It also allows readers to find the hottest assortment of music events and festivals as well as legendary venues, like Billy Bob's Texas, Floores Country Store and Gruene Hall, which have supported the Texas sound. It is also filled with photos and tidbits on the many genres of and outstanding contributions to Texas music.

The guides will be distributed through the 12 TxDOT-operated Travel Information Centers. To order a free copy, call (800) 452-9292.



## TxDOT

Congratulations to the following **tourism organizations**, which have been awarded **free exhibit space** in the **Texas Travel Information Centers**. From March through August, these areas will be promoting their attractions with displays — including colorful photographs and other promotional materials — in the centers' lobbies. Every six months, use of the display cases rotates to another set of tourism organizations.

- ◆ **Amarillo:** Texas Forest Trail Region
- ◆ **Anthony:** Partnership of Southeast Texas
- ◆ **Denison:** Texas Lakes Trail
- ◆ **Langtry:** Southwest Texas Badlands
- ◆ **Laredo:** Texas Independence Trail Region
- ◆ **Orange:** Central Texas Bluebonnet Travel Council
- ◆ **Texarkana:** I-10 Corridor Association
- ◆ **Valley:** Texas Coastal Bend Regional Tourism Council
- ◆ **Waskom:** Texas Settlement Region

TxDOT will begin accepting applications at 8 a.m. central time on June 1 for the next display period,

(Sept. 2004 – Feb. 2005). Applications will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis until 5 p.m. central time on June 20. For more information, call the Travel Services office at (512) 486-5800 or visit [www.dot.state.tx.us/insdotdot/orgchart/trv/trvticdisplays.htm](http://www.dot.state.tx.us/insdotdot/orgchart/trv/trvticdisplays.htm).

## TRAVEL NEWS

After years in tight quarters at the Convention Center, the **San Angelo Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau** have **moved** into spiffier, more spacious digs. And the staff? Well, they are beside themselves over the improvement.

Marion Szurek, vice president of the San Angelo Convention and Visitors Bureau who has spent 25 years in the cramped space says, "This is a first class visitor center. It's first class offices. It's first class everything." The 25,000 square-foot center's limestone exterior and native mesquite floors blend with the West Texas scenery, just as its wavy copper roof emulates the Concho River nearby. It also features a lot of glass, which creates serene natural lighting and makes it easier to enjoy the river on which it sets. "It truly is awesome," she says. That, along with

shaded patios and a hike trail, translates into a much improved visitor experience, Szurek adds.

Although the center, at 418 W. Avenue B, has been open for business since the end of January, a dedication ceremony is slated for March 4.

For more information, call (325) 655-4136 or visit [www.sanangelo.org](http://www.sanangelo.org).

The **City of Stafford**, about 16 miles southwest of downtown Houston, is joining the big leagues with the addition of its new 90,000 square-foot **Stafford Centre**, a \$25 million **convention center and performing arts theater**. Grand opening ceremonies, featuring the Moscow Ballet, United Nations Choir, Houston Symphony Orchestra, a children's festival and more, are set for March 5-7.

"It's a great addition that will create a significant economic and cultural impact for our city and enhance its image," says Stafford Centre Director Tim Mabe. The jewel of the facility, which has been in the works for more than 3 years, is its 1,100-seat, state-of-the-art theater suited for performing arts and concerts. It also features ballrooms, meeting rooms and four festival fields (one with an amphitheater) ranging from 3.5 to 10 acres.

"We already have 250 event days put on hold — from weddings to ballets and concerts, outdoor festivals ... just a myriad of things. It's more than anyone expected so soon," Mabe says, adding that the center, at 10505 Cash Road, is providing something for local citizens as well as creating ways to bring visitors into town.

"We realize Stafford is not a destination area," Mabe says, "but it's definitely a gateway. We have 1,400 hotel rooms close to the center and it's less than a day's drive to all the Houston area attractions."

For more information, call (888) 321-6546 or visit [www.staffordcentre.com](http://www.staffordcentre.com).

**I**n the past three years, **travel by minority Americans has increased significantly**, according to **Travel Industry Association of America's The Minority Traveler** report.

The report states that Hispanic travel volume increased 20 percent from 2000 to 2002 (from 64.1 million to 77.1 million person-trips). Asian-American travel volume increased 10 percent (from 30 million to 33.1 million person-trips) and African-American travel volume increased four percent (from 72.2 million to 75.2 million person-trips). These increases are considerable when noting the two percent growth in overall U.S. travel over the same period.

"These growth rates show that our industry has been very assertive in its efforts to market to minority travelers," says William S. Norman, president and CEO of the Travel Industry Association of America. "Every sector of our

industry — hotels, theme parks, city visitor bureaus — has begun to reach out to the minority traveler through targeted advertising, minority travel guides and special ethnic promotions and I think we are seeing the results."

**T**ravelers seeking out the **state's abundant natural beauty** have a **valuable resource — Heart of Texas Wildlife Trail maps** — to guide them to outstanding natural and cultural highlights where wildflowers, artesian springs, rivers, bats, birds, caves and butterflies abound.

The just-released Heart of Texas – West map features 12 loops with 115 wildlife-viewing sites and unique cultural heritage locations on public and private lands. The Heart of Texas – East edition, released last fall, includes 14 loops and 124 sites of interest along Interstate 35 and U.S. 183 corridors from Laredo to Brownwood.

The two-branch driving trail encompasses 55 counties, starting at the Rio Grande, crossing Edwards Plateau and ending on the plains near San Angelo and Abilene.

"What makes the Heart of Texas trail especially noteworthy is its diversity," says Linda Campbell, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's nature tourism coordinator. "Even seasoned Hill Country travelers will be surprised to find new 'hidden treasures' along the trail."

Along with natural elements, the guide highlights private ranches, campgrounds, bed and breakfast inns, nature lodges and other nature-oriented businesses.

A limited quantity of the free maps can be picked up at TxDOT's 12 Travel Information Centers, including the Capitol Visitors Center in Austin. The maps also may be purchased for \$3 each through the Texas Cooperative Extension Bookstore

online at [tcebookstore.org](http://tcebookstore.org) (no www) or by calling (888) 900-2577.

## ATTRACTIONS

**V**isitors to **West Texas** have long had a hankering for the genuine Western **experience**, now **Abilene's new Frontier Texas!** is saddled up to meet those needs when it **opens April 3**. As a bonus, Abilene gets an attraction that could give the city tourism identity.

The \$9.7 million, 6.4-acre downtown facility is a combination visitor center and interactive historical experience that recreates a sense of an era — West Texas from 1780 to 1880.

The visitor center offers information on the city, region and the Texas Forts trail. The interactive center is a fee-based facility that uses audio, video and special effects to bring the Old West back to life for visitors. The Frontier

**NEW ATTRACTION IS BORN** The population at the **Natural Bridge Wildlife Ranch** in **San Antonio** keeps on growing and visitors recently witnessed the birth of Rudy, a 130-pound, 5-foot, six-inch-tall giraffe. Soon Rudy will have cousins as his older sisters are expected to give birth within a month or so. And soon after Rudy was born came Zippy, a zebra.

"With such a diverse array of species co-mingling in an open, free environment, visitors witness animal behaviors that are usually only witnessed in the wild," says Trudy Soechting, who has managed Texas' most visited and longest running safari park for all of its 20 years.

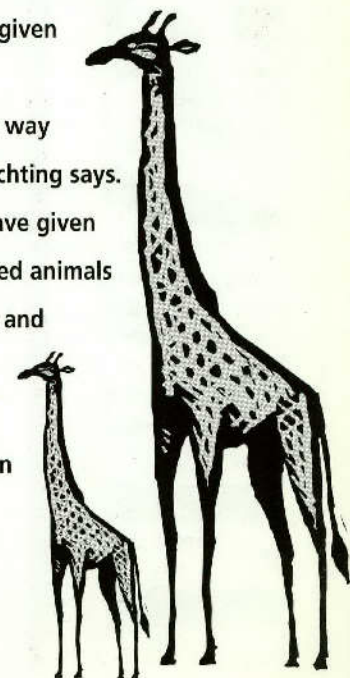
Soechting says the ranch has about 500-plus animals now and in any given month, there are at least 40 to 50 new births.

"In the spring, we have lots of species having babies. It's just nature's way of bringing babies when there's new nutrients the mother can get," Soechting says.

Since the Wildlife Ranch was opened in 1984, more than 50 species have given birth, including zebras, ostrich, emus, buffalo, and such highly endangered animals as the red ruffed lemurs. Soechting says they are still hopeful for Bertha and Goliath, two endangered White Rhinoceroses, to give birth.

Soechting says they've had to introduce a younger male named Rowdy to the mix in hopes that the competition will encourage breeding. Shawn Soechting, species curator at the Wildlife Ranch, says "they just haven't gotten it right yet, but it is not from lack of effort."

For more information, call (830) 438-7400 or visit [www.nbwildliferanchtx.com](http://www.nbwildliferanchtx.com).



## TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

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Experience Theater's surround-visual thrill ride lets guests "experience" a wolf attack, a buffalo stampede and a shootout.

"It comes at you," Assistant Director of Development Elizabeth Grindstaff told the *Abilene Reporter-News*. "It will allow you to have some sense of what it was like. We want you to experience that — so your senses and emotions will be involved. It will be enthralling."

With an estimated 170,000 visitors in its first year and 900,000 over five years, the city (which will operate the facility) expects Frontier Texas! to be self-supporting.

For more information, call (800) 727-7704 or (325) 676-6200, or visit [www.frontier-texas.com](http://www.frontier-texas.com).

**T**he **Moving Wall**, a half-size replica of the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial** wall, is on the road again with **Big Spring** and **Johnson City** among the stops (March 27–April 2 and April 5–11, respectively). It has been 16 years since Big Spring last hosted it, though not for lack of trying. The demand for it is "tremendous," says Vicki Osburn, treasurer for the Big Spring Vietnam Memorial Committee.

Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park's Johnson Settlement in Johnson City has a full slate of commemorative activities scheduled, including an opening ceremony with a keynote address by a local Vietnam veteran. Taps will be played each evening at 8 p.m.

The Moving Wall, which will be accessible 24 hours a day, has been touring the country for almost 20 years.

A complete list of touring cities was unavailable at press time. For additional information, visit [www.virtualwall.org](http://www.virtualwall.org) or [www.themovingwall.org](http://www.themovingwall.org) or the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park at (830)868-7128, Ext. 231 or 244 or [www.nps.gov/lyjo](http://www.nps.gov/lyjo).

**NAMES**

**T**here have been some recent changes and motions among our friends in the Texas travel industry. Welcome to your new positions.

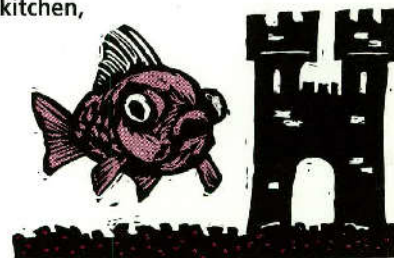
**Sandra Shephard:** Managing

**HOOKED ON AQUARIUMS** The public's interest in aquarium attractions shows no signs of drying up, and the 500,000 estimated annual visitors to the Texas State Aquarium in Corpus Christi are proof that people are hooked.

The aquarium, which focuses on the Gulf of Mexico's habitat, was listed by *USA Today* as one of the top six aquariums in the nation "not resting on their laurels." Despite their success, they continue to feed the visitor frenzy with more offerings, including its state-of-the-art Dolphin Bay. They also have a rare, one-in-5-million blue lobster.

Although **Moody Gardens** in Galveston was not on that list, it is introducing new twists with behind-the-scenes access tours offering guests a chance to spend the day with aquarium biologists as they feed and train penguins and seals, and help penguins create art, which the guest gets to take home. A similar tour includes the IMAX 3D Theater, Enabling Garden and the Learning Place where they meet animals, and the aquarium's South Atlantic kitchen, pump room and Caribbean Wet Deck.

For more details, call the Texas State Aquarium at (800) 477-4853 or visit [www.texasstateaquarium.org](http://www.texasstateaquarium.org), or call Moody Gardens at (800) 582-4673 ext. 4233 or visit [www.moodygardens.com](http://www.moodygardens.com).



Director, Seymour Chamber of Commerce.

**Eileen Reid-Buesing:** Media Relations Manager for Marketing Communications Department, Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau.

**Katie Cook:** Communications Manager, Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau.

**IN THE PRESS**

**E**dinburg's newly expanded **Museum of South Texas History** (formerly Hidalgo County Museum) received raves in a recent **Associated Press** feature that was picked up by news outfits like **CNN**, **ABC** and the **Chicago Sun-Times**. The small county museum, which recently underwent \$5.5 million in renovation and expansion, "has been transformed into a showcase of history for a region that remains a melting pot of old Mexico and new Texas," the article reads.

The museum, housed in the former county jail and flanked by the new annex, is moving toward its goal of becoming the history center for the region and an essential highlight of the Los Caminos del Rio Heritage Corridor (south of

Corpus Christi from Laredo to Brownsville).

"We are so often called and depicted as a very poor, backward region, but we have a wonderfully rich history," says executive director Shan Rankin. "That story needed to be told."

For more information, call (956) 383-6911 or visit [www3.hilinet/~mosthistory/Homepage.html](http://www3.hilinet/~mosthistory/Homepage.html).

**NEW RULES APPLY**

**E**l Paso's **Chamizal National Memorial** announced that **glass containers** are now **banned** from use on the grounds.

Superintendent Isabel Montes says, "The Chamizal National Memorial has seen a steady increase in glass containers, which has resulted in broken glass creating a safety hazard to our visitors. Our visitors have the right to enjoy their National Park in the safest way possible," she says.

Montes added that glass is heavy and more difficult to dispose of and is not recycled in El Paso.

For additional information, call (915) 532-7273 or visit [www.nps.gov/cham/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/cham/index.htm).

**TEXAS TRIVIA**

**How many flowering plants are native to Texas?**

More than 5,000 flowering plants are native to Texas, including the Indian paintbrush, pifox and, of course, the bluebonnet. The *Wildflowers of Texas* brochure, available at TXDOT Travel Information Centers, is a useful resource as spring marches in (on March 20). Also, in honor of its 30th anniversary, *Texas Highways* magazine's April issue will feature a 16-page bonanza of blooms dedicated to the 30 most common wildflowers in the state. The best place to witness at least a sampling of these native blooms is along the Texas Hill Country Wildflower Trail. The trail is a collaborative effort between the towns of Brady, Burnet, Early, Fredericksburg, Goldthwaite, Johnson City, Lampasas, Llano, Mason and San Saba. Each town has many related events scheduled to celebrate the wildflowers blanketing fields and byways.

For event locations and details, contact the individual chambers of commerce or call the Wildflower Trail Headquarters at (866) 839-3378 or visit [www.tex-tcsl.com](http://www.tex-tcsl.com).

**TEXAS TRIVIA**

**STATE SCORES BIG** When it comes to sports, the Lone Star State is definitely a champ — especially this year. The Super Bowl in Houston, which created an estimated \$300 million economic impact for the city, was just the beginning for Texas' winning streak of top sports events.

The Houston Astros will host baseball's All-Star game at Minute Maid Park on July 14. San Antonio's Alamodome will be center court for the NCAA Final Four men's basketball semi-finals and championship game (April 3, 5), and Ballpark at Arlington is the site of the Big 12 Conference baseball tournament on May 26–30. Even the Breeder's Cup World Thoroughbred Championship is, for the first time, moving to Lone Star Park in Grand Prairie on October 30.

Gov. Rick Perry recently told *USA Today*, "We see sports as a major economic catalyst to create jobs and wealth in our state."

<b>NUMBERS</b> as of January 31, 2004				
<b>TRAVEL CENTER</b>	<b>Month Visitors</b>	<b>Percent Variation*</b>	<b>Year-to-Date Visitors</b>	<b>Percent Variation*</b>
AMARILLO	7,069	+11.06	7,069	+11.06
ANTHONY	14,271	+11.80	14,271	+11.80
CAPITOL	5,533	-8.07	5,533	-8.07
DENISON	27,318	+16.51	27,318	+16.51
GAINESVILLE	18,122	-31.67	18,122	-31.67
LANGTRY	6,330	+10.20	6,330	+10.20
LAREDO	10,409	+30.41	10,409	+30.41
ORANGE	44,701	+13.92	44,701	+13.92
TEXARKANA	38,714	+5.64	38,714	+5.64
VALLEY	34,510	+14.94	34,510	+14.94
WASKOM	32,449	-10.73	32,449	-10.73
WICHITA FALLS	11,681	-1.66	11,681	-1.66
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>251,107</b>	<b>+3.34</b>	<b>251,107</b>	<b>+3.34</b>

\*Compared to last year

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[www.traveltex.com](http://www.traveltex.com) • [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com) • [www.dontmesswithtexas.org](http://www.dontmesswithtexas.org)

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