

- ★ Texas gives Hurricane Katrina evacuees their "first serving of hope"
- ★ Travel industry does its part to assist displaced neighbors
- ★ Alamo City hosts NFL's displaced New Orleans Saints
- ★ TPWD game wardens rescue 5,000 from floodwaters



SWAT, a one-of-a-kind thrill ride, will fade out with Six Flags Astroworld.

PARK CLOSING

WHEN its 2005 season comes to an end on Oct. 30, so ends the 37-year run of Six Flags

Astroworld — one of Houston's top attractions. And so goes the Texas Cyclone, one of the largest wooden rollercoasters in the world. Astroworld's corporate headquarters announced it will permanently close the theme park to enhance shareholder value.

Six Flags Chairman and CEO Kieran Burke says the value of the 109-acre property, estimated at \$70 million, exceeds the value of the park. Add to that, a legal battle that the park has been having with the Harris County Sports and Convention Corporation over its parking rights in the Reliant Center lot, which has "constrained" Six Flags in terms of what could be invested.

The closure will result in the loss of 119 permanent jobs and an additional 1,500 seasonal jobs.

Six Flags Astroworld Promotions Coordinator Joyce Ballenger says most of the rides from the adjoining waterpark, Waterworld, will be moved to the Six Flags Splashtown operation across town. It was unknown, at press time, what will become of the amusement park rides.

"We are far from abandoning the Texas market," Burke says. The flagship of Six Flags Over Texas remains in Arlington and Six Flags Fiesta Texas in San Antonio is still thriving.

TxDOT

ON SEPT. 1, Kenneth Fatheree became the new supervisor of Texas Department of Transportation's Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center in Langtry, a position vacated by the now-retired Vernon "Neal" Billings.

Fatheree comes with six years of experience with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and has worked at Seminole Canyon, Fort Lancaster, Possum Kingdom and Lake Arrowhead state parks.

MARISOL Clausen, supervisor for the Texas Travel Information Center in Anthony, will be leaving her post to be a full-time mother. Clausen, and her husband Chris, welcomed their son Noah Christian, born Aug. 4.

Clausen began working at the center in 1994, and has continued to graduate in leadership roles. She will continue to work part-time to help with the transition.

Travel Services Section Director

Brenda Harper says, "I have been extremely proud of the job she has done as supervisor these past two years. I know her staff will agree that she leads by example and has demonstrated leadership, dedication, honesty, trust and compassion."

HIGH FIVES

OFFICE of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism received high-fives — and two "Best Damn Advertising in the United States" awards — during a break out session at the Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO) conference held in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

Each year, Virginia Tourism Corporation Advertising Director Chris Canfield facilitates an advertising section that showcases the best efforts of the industry. It was during this session that EDT took home the awards, specifically for the mapping coordinates theme of the print ads and the use of Web cameras on the www.traveltex.com Web site.

"I share with the group ad campaigns I have seen throughout the year that stand out," Canfield says. "We really like the creative print ads Texas designed this year. They hit on the emotional benefits of what travelers are looking for in a vacation, and still conveyed the big, openness of the state."

"What really impressed us was how well the print and Web site worked together and the pin-point planning of vacation opportunities."

EDT's Travel Research Manager Stan Hodge says, "We're the first state, to date, to use Web cams. No one else has done that yet, and it's getting great response from people. Canfield zeroed in on that." He added that the mapping coordinates, "increase the interaction between the viewer and advertisements, plus it increases the amount of time the viewers spend with the ad, and even more so with the Web site."

HERITAGE REGIONS

THE TEXAS Historical Commission has officially pegged its two new heritage trail regions — Texas Pecos Trail Region and the Texas Hill Country Region — to begin receiving three year's worth of technical, marketing and financial assistance from the state.

THC's award-winning regional tourism initiative helps communities promote tourism, revitalize local economies and foster community leadership through historic preservation.

"Heritage tourism is a tremendous economic development tool," says Janie Headrick, Texas Heritage Trails Program coordinator.

"Through this program our cultural and historical treasures are protected while communities benefit economically and educationally. It is a win-win situation."

SPECIAL EDITION

TOURISM INDUSTRY EMBRACES HURRICANE KATRINA EVACUEES

THE JOB of Texas' travel industry is made easy because we are genuinely proud of what the state has to offer, but when the visitors coming through the state were evacuees from the wrath of Hurricane Katrina, the industry showed grace under pressure and a new reason for Texans to be proud.

This special edition of Texas Travelog serves to showcase the kind of hospitality that is at the core of all we do.



Volunteers at the Texas Travel Information Center in Waskom serve hungry evacuees food and hospitality. At right: A child, fresh off the bus, is examined.



TxDOT'S WELCOME

AFTER Hurricane Katrina slammed onto the Gulf Coast and our Louisiana neighbors fled the devastation, Texas Department of Transportation was poised to assist by using its electronic road signs to direct evacuees to shelter, setting up additional rest stops and, most importantly, by offering that special brand of hospitality at the state's Texas Travel Information Centers in Orange, Waskom and Texarkana. Or, as *The New York Times* says, the centers offered evacuees "a first serving of hope."

In fact, the state's travel information centers were the "first" for a lot of things, including food, clothing, medical attention and respite. Center staff and volunteers were also the first to hear the horrid tales of what life had been like during those past few days.

"Many of the evacuees broke down in tears, telling us their homes would probably be gone or that they were going to lose everything," says Melissa Wilson, who supervises the center in Waskom.

With the huddled masses knocking at their doors, the centers, run by TxDOT's Travel Services Section, kicked into high gear with the 24-hour service needed to greet and care for the evacuees.

Travel counselors worked around the clock to find evacuees a place to stay in motels, B&Bs, cabins, campgrounds and whatever else they could find.

"The travel center [in Orange], with its massive Lone Star sculpture,

is the first stop in Texas for those leaving, or fleeing, Louisiana," *The New York Times* article reads. It adds that the duties of promoting destinations were "set aside for a more immediate form of hospitality."

"We had six times the amount of people come through as normal," says Becky Wilson, supervisor of the center in Orange. "The parking lot was constantly covered with people — even when some left, more came," she said. "People were laying all over the lobby floor with their families because they had been on the road 11 to 12 hours and just had to sleep. Then many would stay

NUMBERS FROM AUG. 27-SEPT. 8

TEXAS Department of Transportation assisted thousands upon thousands of Hurricane Katrina evacuees at Texas Travel Information Centers and two rest areas that were set up especially for the influx.

Orange: 48,037 (12,850 on 257 buses)

Waskom: 66,649 (13,915 on 278 buses)

Texarkana: 24,045

Canton Rest Area: 3,400 (2,800 on 46 buses)

Columbus Rest Area: 1,870

in the lobby watching storm news on the television."

Initially, it was reported on the TV news that "New Orleans dodged the bullet." Melissa says, "Little did they know what was to come."

After the levees broke, the travel information center traffic soared again, with visitors now looking for more long-term accommodations, and busloads of evacuees, who had

experience ... the stories they told us."

"They were starving when they arrived at our office, since they didn't get any food while in New Orleans. Many families were separated. They had no way of knowing where their families had been taken, or where they, themselves, were going. They were just glad to get out of New Orleans and the hell they had been in for days," says Melissa.

Some came into the centers to plug in their cell phones — the only thing that some had with them and their only connection to the outside world where they might begin their search for loved ones. Those without phones were given access to center phone lines.

"The hours were long, the stress level was high and still my staff continued to do whatever was necessary, and the evacuees were very appreciative. They were overwhelmed with our hospitality," Melissa says.

"I think we took turns crying so that we all wouldn't be crying at the same time," said Waskom travel counselor Alicia Gowanlock.

Dan Perrine, a travel counselor at the center in Orange, says that week was one that he will never forget. "Seeing so many people who have lost practically everything, except their lives, is a sobering experience," he said. "One of the truly good things to come out of the awful situation is seeing how many people are willing to step up and try to lend a hand to a neighbor when there is a catastrophe. Dozens of TxDOT employees from the Beaumont District and dozens more from the Orange community have volunteered."

TxDOT employees from the Yoakum and Tyler districts also helped by staging two additional rest stops — near Columbus and in Canton — that were operated around the clock until all evacuee bus traffic ended.

Melissa reflected to say, "In my 30-plus years at this office, I've never experienced anything that came close to this before. The level of human suffering that we witnessed was unbelievable. None of us will ever be able to forget it, but we are comforted by the knowledge that we were able to do a little something to make their lives better."

been seeking shelter in the now less-than-stellar Superdome, on their way to Texas.

The local volunteer fire department returned to the center, as did the Harrison Co. Sheriff's Department, EMS units that set up a medical triage area, and many volunteers.

An influx of donated water, snacks food, toiletries, diapers, baby bottles, toys, shoes and more were distributed in TxDOT's "Don't Mess With Texas" litterbags. When the Waskom center was running low on the bags, TxDOT employees Abel Davila and Steve Riley from the General Services Division volunteered to drive more bags, overnight, from Austin to Waskom. "I don't know how we would have made it without them," says Melissa, whose center ended up distributing about 15,000 bags.

"There is no way I can adequately describe the shape that the people on the buses were in. Their feet were split open, due to being in water and God knows what else for long periods of time. The triage unit had to transport about 15 evacuees to local hospitals because they were in such physical distress. And the smell! You cannot imagine! Babies were wearing diapers they had on since Sunday. A lot of people just walked around in a daze and in shock," Melissa says. "It was truly a heart-breaking

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

THE TEXAS Travel Information Center responses toward **hurricane evacuees** were laudable, but **efforts had to continue** beyond those points — that's where other **tourism industry partners stepped in** to make a difference.

Texas Travel Industry Association President Paul Serff says, "Many of our neighbors in Mississippi and Louisiana have lost their homes, possessions or worse and are escaping to Texas for refuge. Right now, they have little or nothing to return to and are simply in need of basic services and compassion."

The industry's abundance of hospitality shone through as chambers of commerce became actively involved in finding and reporting locations of available shelter or accommodations; and hotels, motels, B&B's and campgrounds offered discounts to evacuees.

Some hotels, like the Quality Inn in Denton, have not only offered a place to stay and free hot meals, but they also set up grief counselors, chaplains, volunteers to assist with registering children for school and tutors, among other services. They also offered school supplies, clothing, shoes, toys and first aid supplies to evacuees staying there and those just passing through.

State Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn announced the hotel tax would be waived for Katrina victims.

"Countless hoteliers from all over

Texas have gone out of their way to assist in the unprecedented relief efforts for the many evacuees," says Scott K. Joslove, president and CEO of the Texas Hotel & Lodging Association.

Rhonda Ellisor, chairman of the Huntsville Convention and Visitors Bureau, says the local chamber and CVB manned a 24-hour phone bank for the County Emergency Operation Center where the phones rang non-stop with calls from those donating cash, goods, housing and time.

Many others pitched in, too. Coach USA, the National Tour Association and the American Bus Association all mobilized to help move evacuees. Already-scheduled events, like the Country Roots Music Festival at Traders Village in Houston, turned into fund-raisers, and events like the East Texas Auto Expo, slated to be held at the Maude Cobb Activity and Conference Center in Longview, were canceled so as not to displace evacuees being sheltered at that facility.

Houston Zoo personnel picked up and are temporarily housing five sea lions and 18 birds from New Orleans' Audubon Nature Institute. The zoo also donated \$10,000 worth of supplies for ANI's animals and keepers.

Howard Rosser, executive director of the East Texas Tourism Association says, "The response for aid to the Katrina Tragedy has been awesome. All Texans can be proud of the way Houston stepped up to the plate. They have made

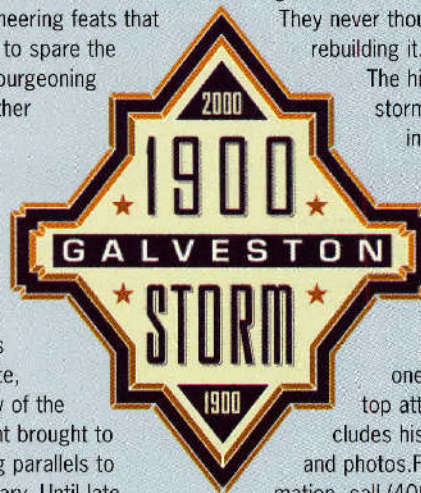
HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

HURRICANE Katrina is certainly the great storm of the new century, possibly breaking records that will **surpass the greatest storm of the 20th century** — the unnamed hurricane that dealt a devastating blow to **Galveston 105 years ago** on Sept. 8, 1900. That storm's destruction — and about 8,000 associated deaths — was the impetus behind the island's seawall and other engineering feats that were designed to spare the once wealthy, burgeoning island city another such disaster.

As Katrina relief efforts continued in neighboring states and evacuees huddled in shelters across the state, the anniversary of the Galveston event brought to light interesting parallels to the contemporary. Until late August, Galveston's storm — considered the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history — had known no equal.

Heber Taylor, Managing Editor of *The Galveston County Daily News* says, "People in Galveston experienced everything that people in New Orleans are experiencing now. There was looting and crime. There was unbelievable courage and generosity. Many people left. But a group stayed and vowed to rebuild. They changed to meet the new challenges because they loved the city. They never thought of not rebuilding it."

The history of that storm is showcased in a documentary, "The Great Storm," showing at the Pier 21 Theater on Harborside Drive. The film, one of the island's top attractions, includes historic accounts and photos. For more information, call (409) 765-7834 or (713) 280-3907 or visit www.galvestonhistory.org or www.1900storm.com.



SAINTS GO MARCHING IN

SPORTS tourism in Texas might have an added angle — the **New Orleans Saints**, booted from its hurricane-ravaged home at the Superdome, has made **San Antonio its home training headquarters**. And **three** of the team's eight "home" **games have been slated** for the **Alamodome** — Oct. 2 (Buffalo Bills), Oct. 16 (Atlanta Falcons) and Dec. 24 (Detroit Lions). The team's remaining home games will be played at Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge, La.

San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger feels the community can truly deliver the Saints a "home-field advantage."

San Antonio fans have already flocked, in droves, to get tickets for the Saints games. "The initial returns from ticket sales have been unbelievable and a testament to the passion of the area's NFL fans," Hardberger told the *San Antonio Express-News*. "The level of interest has exceeded all expectations."

Texas look good to the world."

"It makes us all proud to have such fine people in Texas who unconditionally are helping people in need," says Emil Raschle of Cherholt Brazosport Hotel & Conference Center in Lake Jackson. Rosser says, "When this is over, it must and will be said that we as the hospitality industry did all we could to help our Louisiana and Gulf Coast neighbors."

TPWD TO THE RESCUE

THE DAY after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** immediately **found ways** that it could **assist** — from offering displaced evacuees free camping to sending game wardens, trained and experienced in flood rescue and water safety, on rescue missions.

At least 500 of the evacuees took TPWD up on the offer to waive camping fees. They set up shelter in as many as 27 of the state parks. Many visitors who had reservations for that Labor Day Weekend, voluntarily

gave up their space for evacuees.

TPWD's game wardens were also quickly in place for the department's first disaster relief mission conducted outside of the state.

TPWD rescued more than 5,000 Louisianans who had been trapped by increasingly toxic flood waters.

"We had people in wheelchairs, we had to physically carry some people, and we moved them all by boat to buses," says Maj. Butch Shoop, game warden regional director, who was in charge of TPWD's the ground rescue operations.

Shoop says obstacles like sniper fire from looters brought temporary standstills in the convoy, but they eventually reached their destination — east New Orleans, which included low-income neighborhoods, hospitals and apartment complexes accessible only by boat or airboat.

"Our game wardens have seen the best side of human nature, and the worst, and they've risen to the challenge," says Col. Pete Flores, TPWD law enforcement director. "It's been one of the most difficult assignments we've ever undertaken, but we are making a difference."

TEXAS TRIVIA

Texas is home to one of the largest (and shortest) oak forests in the nation. Where would you find it?

Although it's hard to see, Monahans Sandhills State Park is home to one of the largest oak forests in the nation, which stretches across 40,000 acres of arid land. The Harvard oaks, which rarely tower more than three feet high, are deceptive-ly small. Their roots reach as deep as 90 feet. Besides the large oak forest, the park features wind-sculpted sand dunes that are perfect for sand surfing, a modern museum, and picnic and camping facilities. For more information, call (800) 792-1112 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdsce/ffindades/parks/monahans_sandhills.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of August 31, 2005

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	10,807	+1.71	71,244	-16.21
ANTHONY	11,821	+8.24	109,481	+5.65
CAPITOL	6,996	-2.66	63,628	-2.39
DENISON	39,498	-1.15	313,065	+3.13
GAINESVILLE	32,599	+26.12	256,839	+37.25
LANGTRY	3,740	-13.29	49,384	-5.71
LAREDO	10,395	-12.51	91,034	-13.42
ORANGE	65,813	+17.04	449,648	+7.49
TEXARKANA	46,396	+0.18	364,673	+1.93
VALLEY	10,322	+7.81	155,009	+4.64
WASKOM	65,250	+43.03	378,880	-2.24
WICHITA FALLS	15,687	-0.39	129,894	+1.16
CENTER TOTALS	319,324	+12.35	2,432,779	+3.86

*Compared to last year

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

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