

TEXAS

## TRAVEL LOG

## INSIDE:

- ★ Panhandle Plains museum introduces cell phone tours
- ★ Castroville, Georgetown and Mount Vernon first recipients of new Texas Treasure Award
- ★ State's sports event planners recognized for great service

## TRAVEL NEWS

**A**BILENE Convention and Visitors Bureau Executive Director Nanci Liles received the prestigious Tall in Texas award given by the Texas Travel Industry Association.

The Tall in Texas Award is given annually to an individual who has changed the face of the travel industry on a local, regional or statewide level "through the sheer force of his or her commitment to and influence upon travel and tourism."

"Nanci is completely deserving of this award, the highest honor in the Texas tourism industry," says Susan King, State Legislator from District 71. "She is dedicated to Abilene with every fiber of her being, and she is Abilene's stealth mechanism for economic growth and success. I am proud to be her colleague and friend."

**N**EARLY a year after its initial re-opening to the public in March 2008, the gates of the serene **Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center** in Orange are, once again, open to the public beginning March 7. Shangri La suspended operations six months ago as a result of damages sustained during Hurricane Ike.

The 252-acre gardens, which originally opened more than 60 years ago by H.J. Lucher Stark, received minimal structural damage during the hurricane, but experienced considerable flooding throughout the gardens, nature center, and outpost and bayou areas, as well as to its administration buildings, garden store, café, volunteer center and nature classrooms.

"Hurricanes rarely have a silver lining but, in the case of Shangri La, our staff has used the time in which we have been closed to plant thousands of new plants in the gardens, and nature has renewed itself in the nature center. Visitors will experi-



Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center in Orange re-opens after Hurricane Ike clean up and repairs.

ence a Shangri La that is more beautiful than ever," says Managing Director Michael Hoke.

During the period of post-hurricane closure, the Shangri La team worked to restore the gardens by replacing many damaged or destroyed plants and adding thousands of new plants. In addition, the thousands of birds known for nesting in Shangri La's Ruby Lake have returned in great numbers.

A new free parking area will be open and available to Shangri La visitors.

For more information, call (409) 670-9113 or visit [www.shangrila.com](http://www.shangrila.com).

**T**HE AMARILLO Convention & Visitor Council has shifted its **Web site** into high gear with a **new look** and a new dedication to online marketing for 2009. The site, [www.visitamarillotx.com](http://www.visitamarillotx.com), mimics the sense of Amarillo with its Western feel and modern approach. The site comes complete with a new accommodations booking engine, easier navigation and bigger images.

"We face greater and greater competition from cities and towns throughout the world for visitors and tourism dollars. A top-notch Web site is a great way to put Amarillo in the public eye," Jerry Holt, VP of the Amarillo CVC, says.

"This is a great step for Amarillo. Two of the city's major marketing organizations — the Amarillo Cham-

ber of Commerce and the Amarillo Convention & Visitor Council — have launched new Web sites within months of each other. It puts greater polish and professionalism into the marketing of Amarillo," says Kelvin Betzen, division vice president with Atmos Energy and Chairman of the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

## TEXAS ON DISPLAY

**O**N A SIX-MONTH rotating basis, **TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers** offer **free exhibit space** to all **CVBs, chambers of commerce, and rural and regional tourism organizations** that promote travel to a specific area. Applications are accepted in June and December. Interested organizations should call the Travel Services office at (512) 486-5800 or visit [www.txdot.gov/travel/tourism\\_industry/display\\_cases.htm](http://www.txdot.gov/travel/tourism_industry/display_cases.htm).

Groups recently awarded display space for March 1 to Aug. 31 are:

- **Amarillo:** Central Texas Bluebonnet Travel Council
- **Anthony:** I-10 Corridor Association
- **Denison:** Texas Settlement Region
- **Gainesville:** Texas Forest Trail Region
- **Orange:** Round Rock, Taylor, Elgin, Georgetown
- **Texarkana:** Arlington, Grand Prairie, Mansfield
- **Valley:** Brazoria County Tourism Council
- **Waskom:** Frisco, Plano, McKinney

Along with the site's new design will be an enhanced effort for online marketing of Amarillo.

"Visitamarillotx.com currently receives more than 134,000 unique visits and 988,000 page views a year and with the aggressive marketing being implemented, we expect that visits and page views will increase in 2009," Holt says.

**S**AN ANTONIO Convention and Visitors Bureau's new "San Antonio. Deep. In the Heart" campaign earned **recognition and two awards** at a recent Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International's Adrian Awards ceremony.

The awards — silvers for "New Brand Image Campaign" and "New Brand Advertising Sales" — were presented at a New York City ceremony in January. The Adrian Awards honor the top companies and individuals in hospitality, travel and tourism advertising, public relations and Web marketing.

**D**ENTON is using its home-grown resources — local musicians — and a world of talent to beef up its music tourism efforts by introducing its **new music "conferette,"** North by 35 (Interstate 35, that is) or **NX35.**

The four-night event — March 12–15 — will consist of more than 130 bands from Denton and around the world playing on 10 stages, all within walking distance of Denton's historic courthouse square. Day programming consists of music industry lectures, panel discussions and workshops.

There also will be a Rock and Roll Flea Market at the Denton Civic Center with more than 30 vendors displaying and selling music-related products including vinyl records, CD's, show posters, instruments, electronics, vintage clothes and art.

"The organizers behind NX35 hope to bring the Denton bands, north in the spring, to perform at home, along with national and international indie bands," says Kim Phillips, Vice President of the Denton Convention & Visitor Bureau. She adds that the "conferette" resulted from Denton's music industry reaching new heights and building more interest in Denton bands over the past several years both nationally and internationally.

For more information, visit [www.nx35.com](http://www.nx35.com).

COURTESY OF THE AMARILLO CONVENTION AND VISITORS COUNCIL



The World Championship Ranch Rodeo, which remains a key Western tourism event, continues its run in Amarillo.

**T**HE WORKING Ranch Cowboy Association has announced that it will keep the **World Championship Ranch Rodeo** in the **Amarillo Civic Center** through November 2012.

"The World Championship Ranch Rodeo started in Amarillo in 1995 and has become one of our city's premier events. We are delighted that the WRCA Board of Directors has agreed to a new three-year contract," Amarillo Mayor Debra McCartt says.

This event is one of Amarillo's biggest single pieces of Western tourism business, according to Jerry Holt, Vice President of the Amarillo Convention & Visitor Council. The nearly \$2.5 million economic impact of the World Championship Ranch Rodeo is felt across the entire Amarillo economy, he says.

"Visitors will be able to see and enjoy more than 150 of the cowboys' horses, as well as the Budweiser Clydesdales, at the Amarillo Civic Center each day," Mandy Morton, WRCA Association Manager, says.

The 2009 World Championship Ranch Rodeo will be dedicated to the Women of Ranching.

"This dedication will give us the opportunity to recognize the women who have contributed so much to the ranching industry and ranching families," says Randall Whipple, presi-

dent of the WRCA Board of Directors. "Our organization has grown to the point where we are making a difference in many people's lives, and we can now thank those who have done so much."

Whipple says the WRCA is working to create a Retirement Ranch for cowboys who have worked on a ranch all their lives. "It will be their chance to live out life on a working ranch, instead of having to sell their horses and move to town," Whipple says.

Tickets go on sale June 1 through Panhandle Tickets.

#### ON EXHIBIT

**G**EN. ULYSSES S. Grant's presentation sword has been added to the permanent exhibit of the **Texas Civil War Museum** in **Fort Worth.**

Museum president and curator Ray Richey says, "Its value is more than just Civil War history." Grant became the 18th president of the United States and kept only a handful of swords in his estate. The Grant family first sold the sword during the Civil War Centennial in the 1960s. More than 40 years later, it was purchased by the Texas Civil War Museum, which became its third home. Museum director of communication and education Cynthia Harriman says, "The sword represents the fin-

est in American silver craftsmanship and attention to detail."

Grant received the sword as a gift from friends in Kentucky after President Abraham Lincoln promoted him in 1864. The year was a major turning point in the war as Grant was elevated to the same level of command as only George Washington before him. Within a year, the war was over. It was reported by newspapers at the time to be "one of the most beautiful and costly swords yet manufactured in the country."

#### PHONE IN YOUR TOUR

**T**HE PANHANDLE Plains Historic Museum's current exhibit, **It's Been Good to Know Yuh: Woody Guthrie in Pampa, 1929–1936,** can be experienced in a new way — via **cell phone audio tours.**

In lieu of headphones or a sound wand, visitors now have access to an enhanced version of museum exhibits by using their cell phone and dialing (806) 318-9056. Signs along the exhibit indicate the cell phone audio stops, and visitors can access in-depth information that is not found in the exhibit, including stories, quotes and songs by simply selecting the designated stop number.

Also, via their cell phones, visitors can leave feedback or subscribe to museum updates.

While the cell phone audio tour is free at the museum, standard cell phone rate charges apply.

The Panhandle Plains Historic Museum also is on top of the game with its podcast offerings, where anyone can download audio tours of current exhibitions. These podcasts can be transferred and played on a computer, MP3 player or iPod. With an Internet connection, visitors may also access museum media via universal Museum Media Widget with their cell phone or iPhone.

Call (806) 651-2249 or visit [www.panhandleplains.org](http://www.panhandleplains.org).

#### GROWING FOR BUSINESS

**G**REAT WOLF Lodge in **Grapevine** has expanded into the meeting and convention business with the opening of its **full-service convention center.**

The 52-acre resort, which opened a year ago, now features more than 600 all-suite rooms. The property expansion added 203 additional suites, 80 of

which are business suites, plus 20,000 square feet of meeting and event space. That includes a 7,000-square-foot ballroom, seven breakout rooms and an executive boardroom.

"We're well ahead in bookings than we thought we'd be," says Ken Broom, director of sales and marketing.

Many of the conferences being booked are from Dallas-Fort Worth businesses, organizations and associations that are choosing to meet closer to home in 2009, says Broom.

"This is an all new market for local groups," Broom says. "Because of the current economic downturn many companies and organizations are not traveling out of state to Florida or Las Vegas or Phoenix for their meetings and conferences. It's a perfect fit for us."

**T**HE HYATT Regency Hill Country Resort and Spa in San Antonio will unveil an additional 10,000 square feet of meeting space, bringing the total square footage of meeting space to 43,000. The property now includes the Rogers-Wiseman Pavilion, a semi-permanent venue that can accommodate up to 700 people for a sit-down dinner and 1,000 for a reception.

**LADIES, FIRST**

**C**ASTROVILLE, Georgetown and Mount Vernon are the first communities to receive the **First Lady's Texas Treasures Award**, an honor that recognizes the communities' preservation efforts through participation in several of the **Texas Historical Commission's** and other state agency community enhancement programs.

Texas' First Lady Anita Perry, in conjunction with the Texas Historical Commission, presented this award at the Texas State Capitol in Austin.

These communities' efforts and accomplishments resulted in treasures saved and heritage experiences created for the historical enhancement of visitors and citizens of Texas.

Each year, up to five Texas communities will be presented with this award, which is based on nominations received.

**B**ELTON was honored as one of the nation's **newest Preserve America Communities**, a proclamation made by former **First Lady Laura Bush**, honorary chair of the Preserve America initiative.

"Preserve America Communities demonstrate that they are committed to preserving America's heritage while ensuring a future filled with opportunities for learning and enjoyment," Bush says. "This community designation program, combined with the Preserve America Grant Program, Preserve America Presidential Awards, and other federal support, provides strong incentives for continued preservation of our cultural and natural heritage resources."

The designation comes with benefits that include eligibility for Preserve America grants, of which nearly \$17 million has been awarded since 2006 to support community efforts to demonstrate sustainable uses of their historic and cultural sites.

"Sustainable historic preservation is a wise investment in the future, not a cost for maintaining the past. Communities and the nation receive significant economic, educational and cultural benefits, including heritage tourism, in return for their preservation efforts," says John L. Nau, III, chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, which administers Preserve America programs for the White House.

For more information, visit [www.preserveamerica.gov](http://www.preserveamerica.gov).

**SPORTS TOURISM**

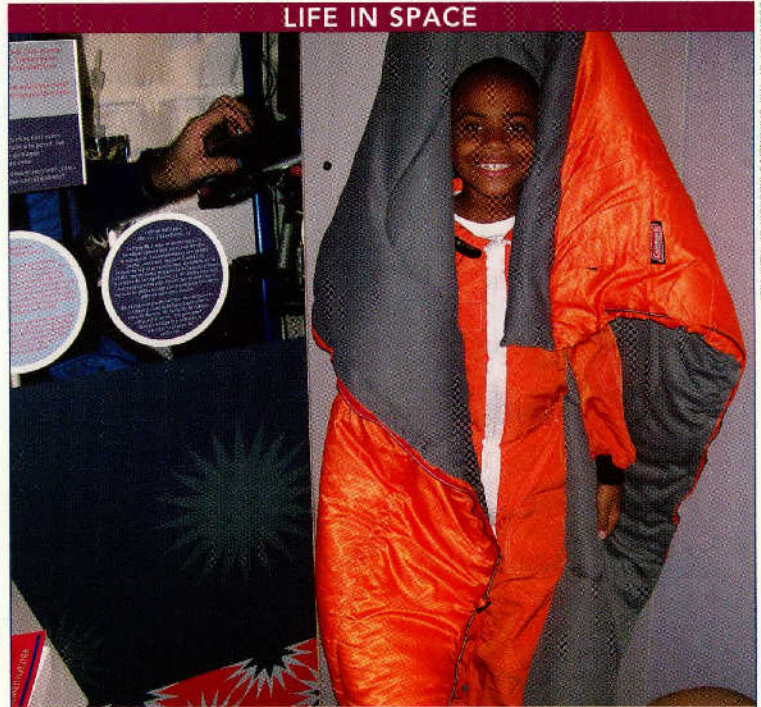
**A**FEW TEXAS convention and visitors bureaus and agencies were honored by **SportsEvents Magazine's Readers Choice Awards** as one of the **50+ Places and Planners to Watch in 2009** for "exceeding the high demands of sports event organizers today — in both physical attributes and commitment to hospitality and service," the magazine states.

The readers of *SportsEvents Magazine* honored the Bryan-College Station, Denton, Frisco and San Antonio CVBs, as well as the San Antonio Sports Foundation, for professionalism, creativity and excellence.

"Recognition of this type is extremely important to the CVB since it comes from individuals most important to our line of work," says Denise Stokes, PR and Communications manager for the Frisco CVB.

"Frisco has been very strategic in its pursuit of first-class sports venues and has been successful in forming partnerships with sports teams to bring these venues here," says Frisco CVB Executive Director Marla Roe.

**LIFE IN SPACE**



COURTESY OF THE CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF MEMPHIS

A young visitor gets ready for bed onboard the International Space Station as part of the *Living in Space* exhibit.

**T**HE FORT WORTH Museum of Science and History explores the experience of *Living in Space* through an **interactive exhibit** about living, working and playing in space. The exhibit, inspired by the International Space Station and created in collaboration with NASA, is on view through May 10. Because of Museum construction, the exhibition is on view in the lower-level galleries of the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame.

ISS, the single largest international aerospace project ever undertaken by humankind, represents a partnership of 16 countries that has opened up new frontiers of international cooperation, as well as the peaceful and productive pursuit of new worlds.

"Through the *Living in Space* exhibit, children and adults will dis-

cover how crewmembers live, work and play in the extreme environment of outer space," says Fort Worth Museum of Science and History Vice President of Education Kit Goolsby. "This is a great opportunity for families and school groups to actively learn together in an innovative and unique environment."

The exhibit is divided into three distinct parts: *Living in Space* shows how different it is to live there, including food, sleep and hygiene; *Working in Space* concentrates on crewmembers' work such as building and maintaining the ISS and docking with the Space Shuttle; and *Playing in Space* shows what astronauts do when they need a break from their busy schedules.

For more information, call (817) 255-9300 or visit [www.fortworthmuseum.org](http://www.fortworthmuseum.org).

**INDUSTRY INSIDERS**

**JOHN JOHNSTON** has been named the **Coates-Cowden Curator of Asian Art at the San Antonio Museum of Art**. Johnson, who comes from the Honolulu Academy of the Arts, is a specialist in Buddhist art and has spent the last several years organizing an exhibition titled *The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*. That exhibit will travel to Paris, Zurich and Cologne next year. "The Asian art collection here en-

joys an international reputation for its excellence and depth," says Johnston. "I look forward to contributing to the growth of the collection."

**TIMOTHY J. GETTE** was selected to serve as the new **executive director for UTSA's Institute of Texan Cultures**. Gette, who was most recently the executive director at the Virginia Museum of Natural History, succeeds the Institute's recently retired John L. Davis. Gette began his new duties on Feb. 9.

TEXAS TRIVIA

Where in Texas can you get an inspirational, though sobering, education about the Holocaust and its survivors?

The Holocaust Museum Houston, Dallas Holocaust Museum, El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, and the Holocaust Memorial of San Antonio all aim to educate the public about the Holocaust, and to showcase this dark era in history as a prime example of the dangers of hatred and prejudice. Through films, photos, artifacts, text panels and more, visitors will discover the history of a people from before Nazism to the point of extermination. The facilities' mission is to combat intolerance. For more information, visit [www.lmh.org](http://www.lmh.org), [www.dallasholocaustmuseum.org](http://www.dallasholocaustmuseum.org), [www.elpasoholocaustmuseum.org](http://www.elpasoholocaustmuseum.org) and [www.sanantoniomuseum.org](http://www.sanantoniomuseum.org).

TEXAS TRIVIA

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of January 31, 2009

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	5,152	-9.90	5,152	-9.90
ANTHONY	8,653	-23.51	8,653	-23.51
CAPITOL	5,259	+1.37	5,259	+1.37
DENISON	20,627	-26.80	20,627	-26.80
GAINESVILLE	20,539	-56.39	20,539	-56.39
LANGTRY	4,184	+3.03	4,184	+3.03
LAREDO	10,586	-9.93	10,586	-9.93
ORANGE	34,941	-16.82	34,941	-16.82
TEXARKANA	17,873	+5.45	17,873	+5.45
VALLEY	33,895	+32.09	33,895	+32.09
WASKOM	25,551	-15.77	25,551	-15.77
WICHITA FALLS	10,799	-13.99	10,799	-13.99
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>198,059</b>	<b>-17.75</b>	<b>198,059</b>	<b>-17.75</b>

\* Compared to last year

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