

Small Towns We Love

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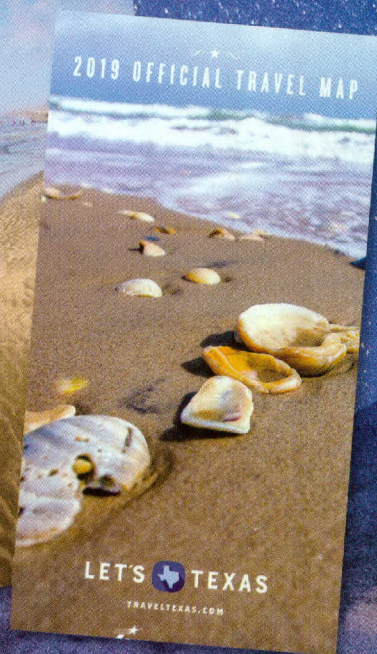
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AUGUST 2019
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EDITOR'S
NOTE



Hotel Limpia embodies the West Texas atmosphere of Fort Davis, one of 15 small towns we recommend visiting this year.

Small-Town Spotlight

We started discussing our list for this month's cover feature on "Small Towns To Visit Now" more than a year ago. Even so, we were

still debating final picks up until a few weeks before press time. With more than 3,000 cities and towns to choose from, we tapped writers across the state to help us curate a list that would represent the best of small-town Texas in all its charm and diversity.

Our aim was not to present a definitive ranking of best small towns (that would take us years to agree on) but a collection of under-the-radar places that are forging new identities through revitalization, reinvention, or recovery from big setbacks. We wanted our list to inspire discovery, so we skipped the small towns that already have well-established claims to fame—Lockhart for barbecue, Round Top for antiques, Fredericksburg for wine and peaches, Bandera for cowboy culture. For the purposes of

this story (starting on Page 30), we defined small towns as those with populations under 20,000—big enough to offer plenty of diversions for travelers but small enough to provide the quiet and serenity

that make small town retreats so appealing.

As with any list of this sort, part of the fun is debating it. We welcome your thoughts on your favorite small towns that didn't make our compilation. Let us know about the small towns you

love the most at letters@texashighways.com, and we may feature your letter in an upcoming issue. Then pull out a map and discover a new Texas small town to fall in love with.

What's your favorite small town to visit?

Email us your pick at letters@texashighways.com

Emily R Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

America's pastime supports healthcare for at-risk youth

YOUTH AND THEIR MENTORS AT BOYS Ranch, a Texas Panhandle residential organization that cares for at-risk youth from across the United States, are hoping for home runs this year, as a pair of organizations have generously come together to support the youths' healthcare needs in a special campaign, appropriately titled Homeruns for Healthy Kids.

The Fairly Group, an Amarillo, Texas,-based insurance and risk-management firm has committed to donate \$800 for every homerun hit — at home and away — by the local AA baseball team, the Amarillo Sod Poodles, during their inaugural season. These much-needed funds will help cover medical expenses that aren't covered by the children's medical insurance.

Boys Ranch currently spends about \$1.3 million each year to provide its children with high-quality healthcare.

A dedicated healthcare account was funded two years ago at Boys Ranch with funding from The Fairly Group and others to help cover needed medical services for boys and girls. To date, the fund has helped more than a dozen children with diagnostics, surgeries and therapies.

"Many of the kids who come to Cal Farley's Boys Ranch do not have adequate insurance, particularly when covering expensive medical procedures," explained Dan Adams, Boys Ranch president and CEO. "This campaign will help raise awareness and generate much-needed support for the ongoing medical needs of our kids."

The Sod Poodles are expected to hit between 100 and 130 homeruns this season, and The Fairly Group has committed to a minimum donation of \$80,000 during the 2019 baseball season.

"We are extremely proud to team with The Fairly Group and Boys Ranch, using the game of baseball to benefit youth in our community," said Sod Poodles President and General Manager Tony Ensor. "Our players and coaching staff love the idea that their efforts on the field while playing America's Pastime will be used in such a positive way."

A website, homerunsforhealthykids.com, is available for fans and supporters to track homeruns and donate themselves to the cause of making sure every child at Boys Ranch receives the medical care he or she needs. The site's homerun tracker is updated weekly.

Best of all, baseball fans and Boys Ranch supporters can join the effort. Smartphone users can text HOMERUNS to 44321 (carrier message and data rates apply) to add their donation to The Fairly Group's generous support of our youth.

"For eight decades, Cal Farley's Boys Ranch has provided so much help to kids. We thought it would be a fun way to celebrate with them — and Sod Poodles fans — by hosting a campaign where fans can join us," said Alex Fairly, CEO of The Fairly Group. "We hope Sod Poodles fans will engage with our cause and donate to help support Cal Farley's kids."



HOME RUNS
FOR HEALTHY KIDS

For more info please go to
<https://www.calfarley.org/home-runs-for-healthy-kids/>

VOLUME 66 . NUMBER 8

AUGUST

30

Small Towns to Visit Now

Take a break from city life and head to these 15 small towns brimming with quaint charm and new offerings.

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Tour the World in Texas

You can visit Palestine, Egypt, and Florence all without leaving Texas—find out more about these internationally influenced burgs.

By Michael Corcoran



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MEET OUR MAKERS

Son of a Sailor

AS PARTNERS IN MARRIAGE AND MERCHANDISING, WILLIAM AND JESSICA KNOPP founded Son of a Sailor in Austin in 2011. Their combined skills and interests manifest in a variety of handmade jewelry, personal accessories, and home goods, including beaded necklaces and earrings, key fobs, bottle openers, and leather wallets and bracelets. Their products all share a similar aesthetic: clean lines and bold geometric shapes, sometimes with a splash of color. "We love introducing bright geometry, patterned texture, and design-forward options to our goods, which are rooted in classic and functional construction," Jessica says. It wasn't hard for the pair to become business partners. "William and I have always been creative together," she says. "We've designed entire collections around road trips we've taken and places we've explored." **Shop more Son of a Sailor products at shop.texashighways.com**



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AUGUST

DEPARTMENTS

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Mayor Elaine Kocian shares what she loves best about Schulenburg

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The enduring appeal of the big dance in Big Spring

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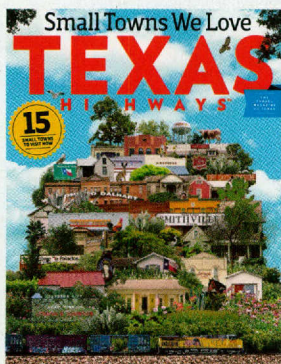
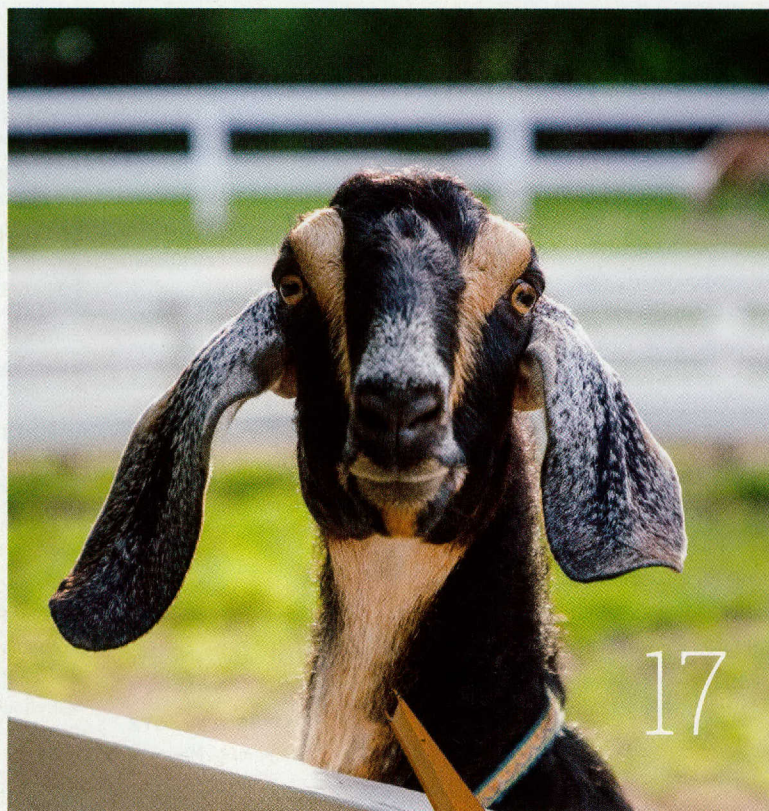
Speaking of Texas

Fort Worth-based artist Sedrick Huckaby on community and teaching a former president to paint

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Vintage

A mining town band in Bastrop County



ON THE COVER

Digital collage by Judy Paul

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Behind the Story



Artist Judy Paul created the digital collage on the cover and opening spread of “Small Towns to Visit Now” (Page 30). The image, created in Adobe Photoshop, contains hundreds of layers of elements of photographs. While the buildings stand out, there are also surprises throughout for those who look closely

enough—palm trees, a rooster, a horse, and an armadillo. “It’s the places that you recognize, but kind of reimagined,” Paul says. “It represents the vitality, fun, and excitement about living in a small town, put together in a rich, dense way.” Paul was raised in Orange but moved to Austin in 1984 to pursue a career in graphic design. She’s been a full-time painter since 2000 and moved to Smithville three years ago, opening her studio and gallery space in a historic building from 1895. “I like to walk to Honey’s Pizza—it happens to be my favorite because it has an outdoor area, and I can bring my dog,” Paul says about living in Smithville, which is included in the feature story. “People who walk by will know me and come join me.” Paul’s studio, located at 223 NE First St., is open on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Featured Contributors



Mary Helen Specht

Writer Mary Helen Specht went dancing at The Stampede in Big Spring for the piece “Let’s Waltz, Boys!” (Page 12). “It was a pleasure and challenge to focus a reportorial eye on a place that meant so much to me growing up,” she says. Specht is the author of the novel *Migratory Animals* and an associate professor of creative writing at St. Edward’s University in Austin.



Asher Elbein

Journalist and short fiction writer Asher Elbein visited San Antonio’s botanicas to write “Spirited Away” (Page 22). “They’re great places for anyone fascinated by folk magic and mixtures of different religious beliefs,” he says. Elbein writes about folklore and natural history for *The Texas Observer*, *New York Times*, and *Audubon*, and is the author of the short story collection *Ghost Days* (Campanian Press, 2019).

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A Familiar Face

The Vintage photograph [“Spinach Salad Days,” May] is of my father, Domingo L. Palomo, a farm worker. He was born in 1904 in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, and moved with his family to Zavala County in 1920, crossing at Piedras Negras. The family initially settled in the Loma Vista area, south of Batesville, working for the Holdsworth family, but later moved to Crystal City. It was there that my father met my mother, Martina Lopéz. They married in May 1928 and had nine children (I am the youngest). He died in 1984. Growing up, we used to see this photo whenever we rifled through my mother’s picture box. I always wondered who had taken the photo, given that no one owned cameras in those times. Domingo never owned a truck like this. In fact, his first vehicle was a car he bought jointly with a neighbor in Wisconsin the first summer they joined the migrant stream. More than likely, this truck belonged to a contractor for whom my father was working at the time [the late 1920s]. Here is a photo [far left] of my father with, I believe, his younger brother, Adrian, from about the same time.

Juan R. Palomo, Houston



Predator or Prey?

Asher Elbein’s article about mountain lions in your May issue failed to mention one shameful fact. Texas is the only state in the nation with a hopefully viable population of cougars that fails to protect that population. In Texas, cougars can be killed regardless of season, number killed, sex, or age of the animal. Killed animals are not even required to be reported to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. University wildlife studies are nice, but until this magnificent animal is protected under the law there is little hope for its survival.

Kent C. Anschutz, Austin

Looking East

Thank you to Wes Ferguson for the article on the Sabine River [“Ghosts of Pine Island,” July]. I pick up my *Texas Highways*

every month actually hoping for something written about East Texas, and not only was this one of the subjects, but it was informative and fun to read. My husband and I are from Shelby County—yes, about as east as you can get and still be in Texas. I’ve always thought that this true East Texas is chock-full of interesting stories and characters, and full of the beauty of rolling pine-covered hills. I’ve been told that the terrain reminds people of Tennessee. Hmm, or maybe it is the other way around.

Lee Lunsford, Klein

What Moon Landing?

I always chuckle when I see stories about the moon landing during the summer of 1969 [“Remembering the Moonshot,” July]. I was a first lieutenant flying helicopters with A Troop, 3/17 Air Cavalry in

sunny southeast Asia (aka Vietnam) that year and never heard of the moon landing due to being occupied with the pesky North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong. I returned home in 1970 and moved to Dallas in 1971. About 1973 or 1974, I was watching a program on television, and lo and behold, it included the moon landing. I asked my wife if that was true, and she informed me that it did occur.

Bill McCalister, San Antonio

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Star-Struck

In a state where the stars at night are known for being big and bright, summer is the optimal time for viewing the Milky Way, when it is high in the southern sky and viewable through much of the night. State parks—such as Pedernales Falls State Park near Johnson City, where the night sky reflects in the still waters of the Pedernales River—are often far enough from light pollution for decent observation. Some of the best state parks for nighttime viewing are Big Bend Ranch, Enchanted Rock, Copper Breaks, and South Llano River, which are all designated International Dark Sky Parks by the International Dark Sky Association.





Schulenburg

With its rolling hills and relaxed pace, Schulenburg will put a little oompah in your step

By Lauren Jones



MAYOR ELAINE KOCIAN on Schulenburg's Main Street.



Located at the intersection of Interstate 10 and US 77, Schulenburg may be best known as a reliable stop for a kolache fix. But with its roots in German and Czech settlement, this little town offers outsized cultural attractions, including spectacular painted churches, the Texas Polka Music Museum, and the Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum. Schulenburg was incorporated as a railroad town in 1875, and the arrival of a Carnation Milk condensing plant put the town on the map in 1929. The plant still operates, now part of Dairy Farmers of America, and employs more than 200 people making dips and salsas. Mayor Elaine Kocian was raised 8 miles down the road in Weimar and moved to Schulenburg when she married in 1966. Along with her mayoral duties, Kocian relishes evening walks with her neighbors, attending church picnic reunions, and helping organize local events, such as Schulenburg Festival, an August tradition. From her office on historic Main Street, Kocian reflects on life in her hometown.

High School Sweethearts

“I attended Bishop Forest High School in Schulenburg, and my freshman year I met my husband of 51 years, Otto Kocian. When Otto passed in March of 2018, he was mayor, and the City Council unanimously recommended me to fill his term. I feel that people who can serve should serve, so I accepted the appointment and quickly realized I loved the work. Each day presents a new opportunity to make a positive difference in the community.”

Halfway to Everywhere

“We are proud to say we have the rolling hills and the beautiful bluebonnets and Indian paintbrushes in the spring. We are not the Hill Country, and we aren’t the lakes, but we are nestled in between the hills. We aren’t far from Austin, Corpus, Victoria, Waco, or Dallas either. We like to say we’re halfway to everywhere.”

Quick to Help


“Schulenburg life is less complicated and less stressful. It’s a community where people know and really care for each other. When someone is sick, the community is quick to help. When someone dies, the community comes to the aid of

the grieving family. When someone new moves to the town, they are greeted with a welcoming atmosphere. We are like one big family here in Schulenburg.”

Locally Owned

“We have a lot of locally owned businesses throughout our community that set us apart. You can start your day off with a delicious kolache and pig-in-a-blanket at The Original Kountry Bakery. Then, learn about our heritage and culture by visiting the Schulenburg Historical Museum and Texas Polka Music Museum on Main Street. When you’ve worked up an appetite and you’re wanting good home cooking, I suggest the buffet at Oakridge Smokehouse Restaurant. Finally, you can finish your day off socializing with family and friends over an ice-cold beverage at Senglemann Hall.”

Small-Town Values

“Small-town living may not be for everyone, but for those of us who have lived here their entire life, there’s no better place. We’re a quiet, friendly little town where everybody knows everybody. The people who call Schulenburg home are here because they prefer small-town living and small-town values.” 

TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

2,852



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

4



YEAR FOUNDED:

1873



NEAREST CITY:

Houston, 95 miles east



MARQUEE EVENTS:

Schulenburg Festival, Aug. 2-4, 2019;
Schulenburg Sausagefest, first Saturday of April.



MAP IT:

Stanzel Model Aircraft Museum, 311 Baumgarten St.

SUNDAY BEST

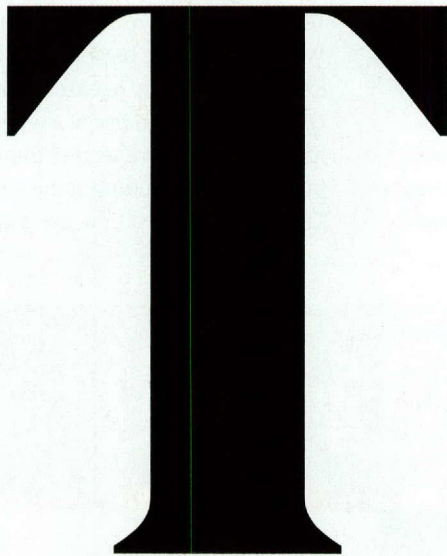
Calling itself the “Official Home of the Painted Churches,” Schulenburg is a prime starting point for regional tours of the elaborately decorated churches built by Czech immigrants at the opening of the 20th century. The churches, such as the 1906 St. Mary Catholic Church in High Hill, keep their doors open to visitors during the day, and the Schulenburg Chamber of Commerce offers tours. 866-504-5294; schulenburgchamber.org



Let's Waltz, Boys!

A night at the big dance in Big Spring

By Mary Helen Specht



The fog is so thick that when I drive directly over the roadkill—the wheels of my Honda Civic eliciting a terrible crunch—my only solace comes from knowing it was already dead. This weather makes everything seem mystical, as though I were driving into County Cork, Ireland, and not West Texas. State Highway 71 from Horseshoe Bay to Brady winds leisurely, dotted with historic courthouses and Dollar Generals. The cows in the field plod along, steam rising from their backs. Extremely tall fences signal game reserves, and I imagine African kudu lurking in the cottonwoods.

My big city compatriots spend almost no time on roads like these. Most people I know shuttle between Dallas and Houston and San Antonio on crowded, stressful interstates. To a woman raised in Abilene, that's not real driving.

Today, I'm headed to Big Spring, a town located less than two hours west of where I grew up. Both Abilene and Big Spring are West Texas, but not the Far West Texas where New Yorkers make land art and buy property with views of the Davis Mountains. My West Texas is flat, dotted with scrub brush and mesquite trees barely taller than I am (5 feet, 0 inches on my tiptoes). Having left my husband and 18-month-old daughter back in Austin, I'm on my way to meet my parents to go boot-scooting

to Western swing at an old dance hall called The Stampedede. Though it's been a few years for me, my parents are regulars. We're a music family—an entire room of my parents' house is filled with so many records there's no longer space for a chair to sit on.

I turn westbound onto US 87, close in on San Angelo, and then to Big Spring, passing the telltale signs of pump jacks and wind turbines, scraggly white cotton scattered along the highway ditches like snow. As I drive into the city itself, I marvel at the fruit trees planted in front of banks and churches, popping their fist-sized white blossoms like fireworks.

Downtown is situated between the railroad and what used to be the Bankhead Highway. There's no need to use a map or app to find my hotel because the historic brick building rises far above the rest of the city, its sign the defining feature of the skyline: Hotel Settles in red neon lights. Walking into the lobby, coated in rich carpets and mahogany paneling and polished brass, is like walking into a different era, one where I wouldn't be surprised to find Will Rogers reading a newspaper beneath the chandelier. I slink to the front desk, feeling fantastically out of place in a wrinkled sweatshirt, carrying my suitcase, which is actually a laundry basket (don't judge).

I imagine contemporary travelers walking into Hotel Settles and thinking: "What in the world is a place like this doing all the way out here?" It's hard to picture now, but this gritty town actually has a glittering history. Early 20th century Big Spring had a lot going for it—cattle, sure, and the Texas & Pacific railroad. Then, the oil boom made more people rich, and Cosden Petroleum Corporation and its refinery set up shop here, as did Webb Air Force Base. Between these industries, Big Spring's population swelled to around 30,000 and included a significant upper crust.

Hotel Settles, designed by famed West Texas architect David Castle, opened its doors in 1930 and by the '50s was hosting big-band orchestras in its ballroom every night to crowds dressed in gowns and tuxes. Bryan Mealer wrote a fascinating article on the history of the hotel for *Texas Monthly* in 2013 (and later published a book *The Kings of Big Spring*) that tells about

professional acrobats Benny and Betty Fox dancing the Charleston on a “platform extended from the hotel’s fourteenth floor for a touring act called ‘The Dance of Death.’”

From there, it’s a story of decline that mirrors the stories of so many smaller Texas towns—Interstate 20 replaced the Bankhead Highway and bypassed downtown, the Air Force base closed, and the oil company relocated its executives to Dallas. The population dipped. Along with much of downtown, Hotel Settles fell into disrepair (and disrepute—it was a flophouse and brothel in its later years). Eventually, in 1980, it closed.

Decades passed, and the city considered tearing the whole thing down. But in the early aughts, hometown boy G. Brint Ryan, having grown extremely rich running a corporate tax consulting firm in Dallas, bought the hotel and spent years and truckloads of cash restoring

it to its previous glamour (according to Mealer’s article, \$1 million was spent on “the original yellow-pine window sashes” alone). Ryan thought the hotel would do for Big Spring what Donald Judd did for Marfa, but critics just thought he was flushing money down the toilet.

When it reopened in 2013, Hotel Settles was hailed by some as the beginning of Big Spring’s revitalization. And while the hotel seems to be doing well as a historical attraction and wedding venue, the downtown renaissance hasn’t yet materialized. Other than a few scattered antiques shops and restaurants, most buildings still look abandoned.

The town of Big Spring is growing in other ways—the success of fracking in the Permian Basin means black gold is flowing once again. Money from the refinery (now owned by Alon) and the influx of roughnecks drilling the wells that dot the countryside seems to be supporting

the strip malls and the Walmart, the oldest Harley-Davidson dealership in Texas, and RV parks that have cropped up anywhere there’s an empty lot.

My parents, who have driven in from Abilene, meet me at the hotel. We have some time to kill before the dance and decide to drive around the outskirts of town. Drawn by the promise of a film exhibit, we stop at the Heritage Museum, situated in a lovely stone building on the edge of downtown. In addition to the permanent holdings, which detail cowboy and local history, there’s a temporary display—since closed—exploring movies set or filmed in West Texas, including *Paris, Texas*, and *There Will Be Blood*. The reason behind the exhibit is the newly released film *The Iron Orchard*, about the rise of a wildcatter, parts of which were set and filmed in Big Spring, including at the Settles. This wasn’t the first time the landmark

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October 5 - 6: Lions Club Arts & Crafts Show

November 16: Candy Cane Lane

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appeared on the big screen—you can see the hotel's bright sign as Jon Voight drives out of town in the opening scene of *Midnight Cowboy*.

The exhibit starts me thinking about the actual rural Texas towns people live in today, with Starbucks and Dairy Queens, and the small town West Texas of Hollywood and myth, with dramatic landscapes and grand hotels like the Settles. I think of my daughter, who will likely grow up in Austin, and wonder if she will also carry with her this simplified, romanticized version of the region where I was raised, which is neither here nor there but somewhere in between. I begin to think about how hard it is to pass on a sense of place in a country where few people will die in the same town where they were born.

MY FIRST EVER VISIT TO BIG SPRING was when I was 3 years old so my

parents could introduce me to Oscar Glickman. In those days, in addition to dancing at The Stampede, Big Spring had another draw for my music-obsessed father: The Record Shop, a purveyor of new wax. Apparently, when Elvis was in town to play the Municipal Auditorium in 1955, he stopped at The Record Shop to sell some of his new 78s. Oscar, the owner, bought the records and took Elvis to lunch. He told him, "If you think you are going to go somewhere with your music, you had better change your style."

Oscar's place was special for two reasons: First, he never sent a record back to the distributor, which was a rarity, and second, he always sold at list price, no matter how popular an artist became (\$3.98 for mono, \$4.98 for stereo albums). So, when rockabilly resurged in popularity, for example, his basement was still full of the stuff. Collectors showed up, as did celebrities—Ernest

Tubb, George Jones, and many more came to Big Spring to hunt for the rare and out-of-print.

My father started going to The Record Shop regularly when my parents moved from Denton to Lubbock in 1973 as newlyweds. My mother worked the weekend shift at the public library, and every Saturday my father would surreptitiously make the nearly two-hour drive (each way) to Big Spring so she wouldn't realize how much money he was spending on his music habit.

In 1977, writer Joe Nick Patoski observed an exchange at The Record Shop between Oscar and two "collectors from Abilene and Lubbock" (my Dad, who had moved with my mom to Abilene by that time, and his friend Jimmy): "What are you kids always spending your money, buying so many records for?" he asked. They said they were afraid Oscar might die and continued on Page 78

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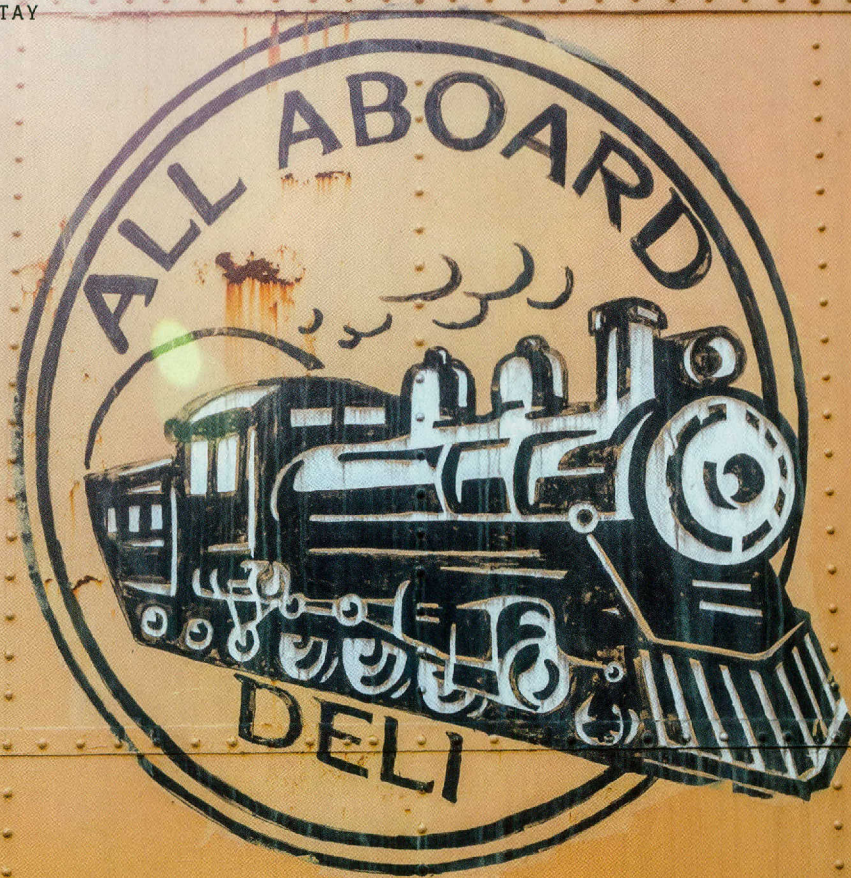
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San Antonio.

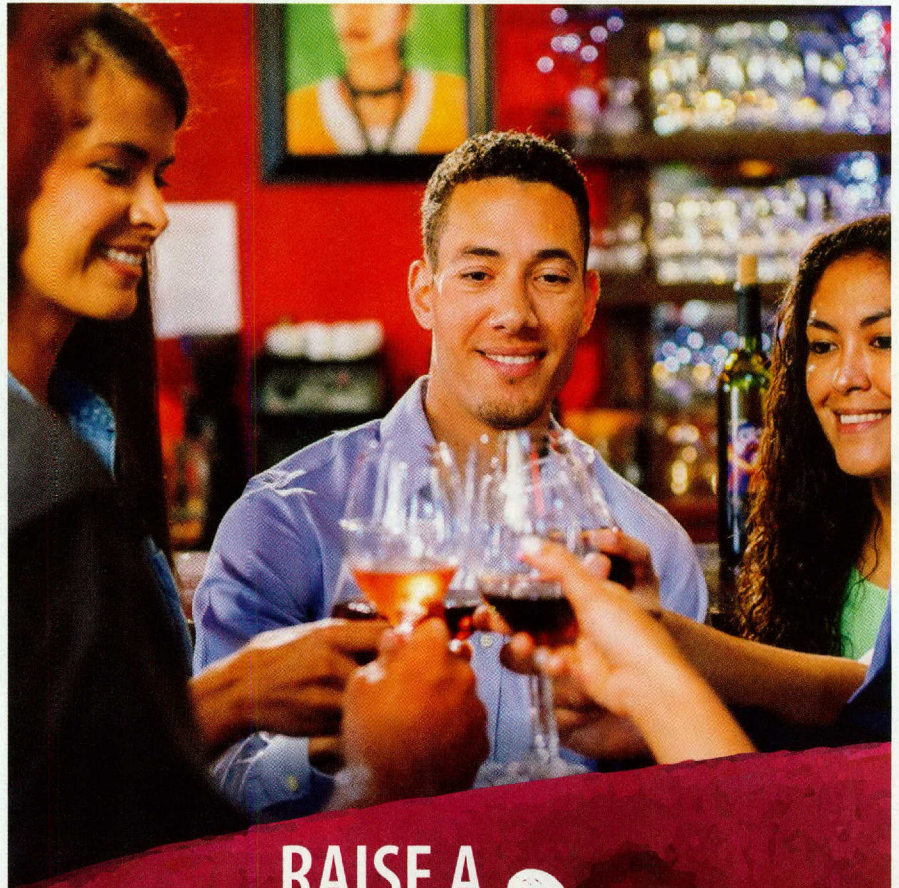
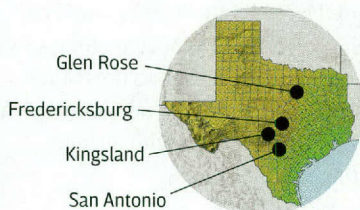
While the glamour of overnight train travel hasn't quite been the same since its heyday in the early 20th century, you can still get a taste of the experience. A handful of hosts across the state offer vintage rail-car lodgings outfitted with modern amenities that range from quiet countryside retreats to quirky city digs—but all offer a window into the history of the state's railways.

Santa Fe Rail Car, Glen Rose

One of a dozen lodging options at the Country Woods Inn in Glen Rose, the Santa Fe Rail Car features bunk beds, a full kitchen, sitting area, back patio, and bathroom complete with a claw-foot tub. Its décor recalls American railroad history—model trains line the walls, memorabilia sit atop every shelf, and an impressive collection of train books caters to readers of all ages.

Situated near the main lodge and the inn's collection of cabins and vintage RVs, the rail car is a favorite among visiting families, owner Helen Kerwin says. When she saw a classified ad for a free boxcar in 2001, she jumped at the chance. There was only one condition: The seller would not help her move it. "When I called to say I would move it ASAP, he laughed and said it would take a man to handle this project," she recalls. She gave him her number and told him to call if he changed his mind. Two weeks later, her phone rang.

Kerwin hired a crane operator to move it from the man's property, where it had been used to store feed for cattle. She spent a year renovating the car, removing rotten wood, cleaning off the many years of oats and hay stuck to the walls, and then adding the foundation, plumbing, and electricity. Kerwin says her initial



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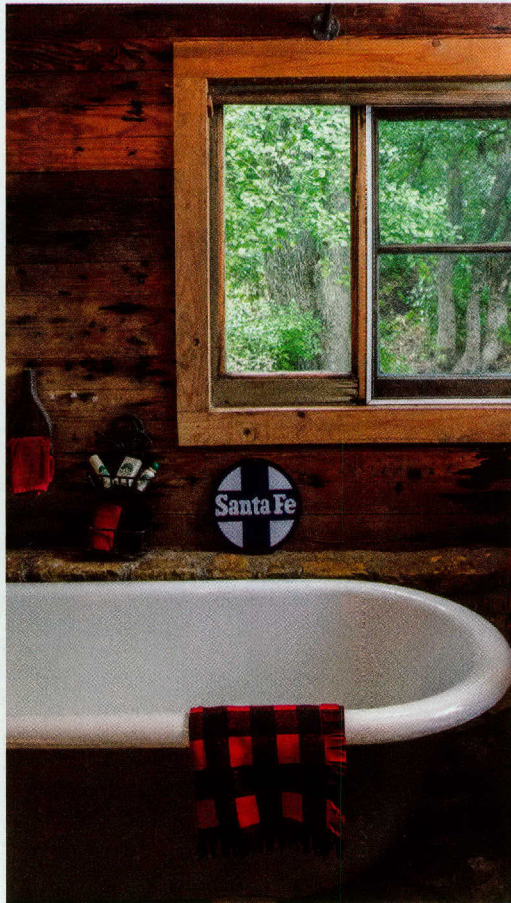
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DRIVE | STAY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The renovated boxcar at County Woods Inn in Glen Rose features bunk beds and a bathtub; the vintage Pullman Palace Car in Fredericksburg is modern and stylish on the inside.



“Trains are expensive, and I wanted to give people who liked trains the opportunity to stay somewhere different.”

inspiration for the cabin came from her grandchildren, who loved the children’s book series *The Boxcar Children*. In 2008, she started renting it out to others.

Today, the renovated rail car is a great base for enjoying all that Glen Rose has to offer. Country Woods’ on-site farm is home to horses, pigs, donkeys, goats, and sheep. Kids love brushing and feeding the animals and trying to catch the bunnies in the petting area. In the summer, families can cool off in the Paluxy

River, which flows alongside the property. Nearby attractions like the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center and Dinosaur Valley State Park make great daytime excursions. Starting rate: \$200/night.

817-279-3002; countrywoodsinn.com

All Aboard Suite, San Antonio

This converted boxcar, located in the Olmos Park area of San Antonio, provides an opportunity to experience train lodging in an urban setting. The suite sleeps up to four guests, and families are welcome.

“I love trains,” owner Sylvia Toscano says. “I’ve always lived close to a train station.” Toscano previously operated a deli out of the same rail car, but by 2017 she was ready for a new adventure. A lifelong train aficionado, Toscano drew inspiration from a train journey she once took from California back home to Texas. “Trains are expensive,” she explains, “and I wanted to give people who liked trains the opportunity to stay somewhere different.”

Toscano opened All Aboard Suite in 2018 after several months of renovating and decorating with memorabilia inspired by old train movies. The final touch? The boxcar is located along a rail line, so guests can listen to the trains pass by in the night. “It’s not your typical Airbnb,” Toscano says with a laugh.

Starting rate: \$80/night.

vrbo.com/7197314ha

1894 Private Pullman Palace Car, Fredericksburg

The Pullman Palace Car offers a slice of railroad history in central Fredericksburg perfect for couples or solo travelers. While it includes modern amenities, the car maintains the feel of old-time luxury and romance. It also brings a touch of history and is rumored to have been used on President Theodore Roosevelt's famed wolf-hunting trip in Oklahoma. Today, the train's décor features many Roosevelt-themed items and antiques.

Fischer & Wieser Specialty Foods, a local retailer of gourmet jellies and sauces, has operated the Pullman car as an alternative bed and breakfast for about 15 years. In lieu of breakfast, the shop gives its guests vouchers for its nearby store.

"Most guests really enjoy experiencing what it might have been like to ride on a private car," company founder Mark Wieser says.

Starting rate: \$225/night.

800-369-9257; fredericksburg-lodging.com/1894-private-pullman-palace-car.htm

The Antlers Inn, Kingsland

The Antlers Hotel opened in 1901 to serve visitors arriving by rail, and it has retained its railroad feel with a café decorated with train photos and a depot that has been converted into a cabin. While the suites in the historical hotel building are for ages 16 and up only, children and families are welcome to stay in the train cars and cabin.

These three cabooses and a single wooden rail car were all working railroad cars but have been renovated and outfitted with families in mind. Each caboose has its original cupola, giving visitors a taste of the real conductor experience. The cabooses sleep two adults and two children, and the coach can accommodate four adults and two kids, making these spacious, memorable, and fun options for the whole family.

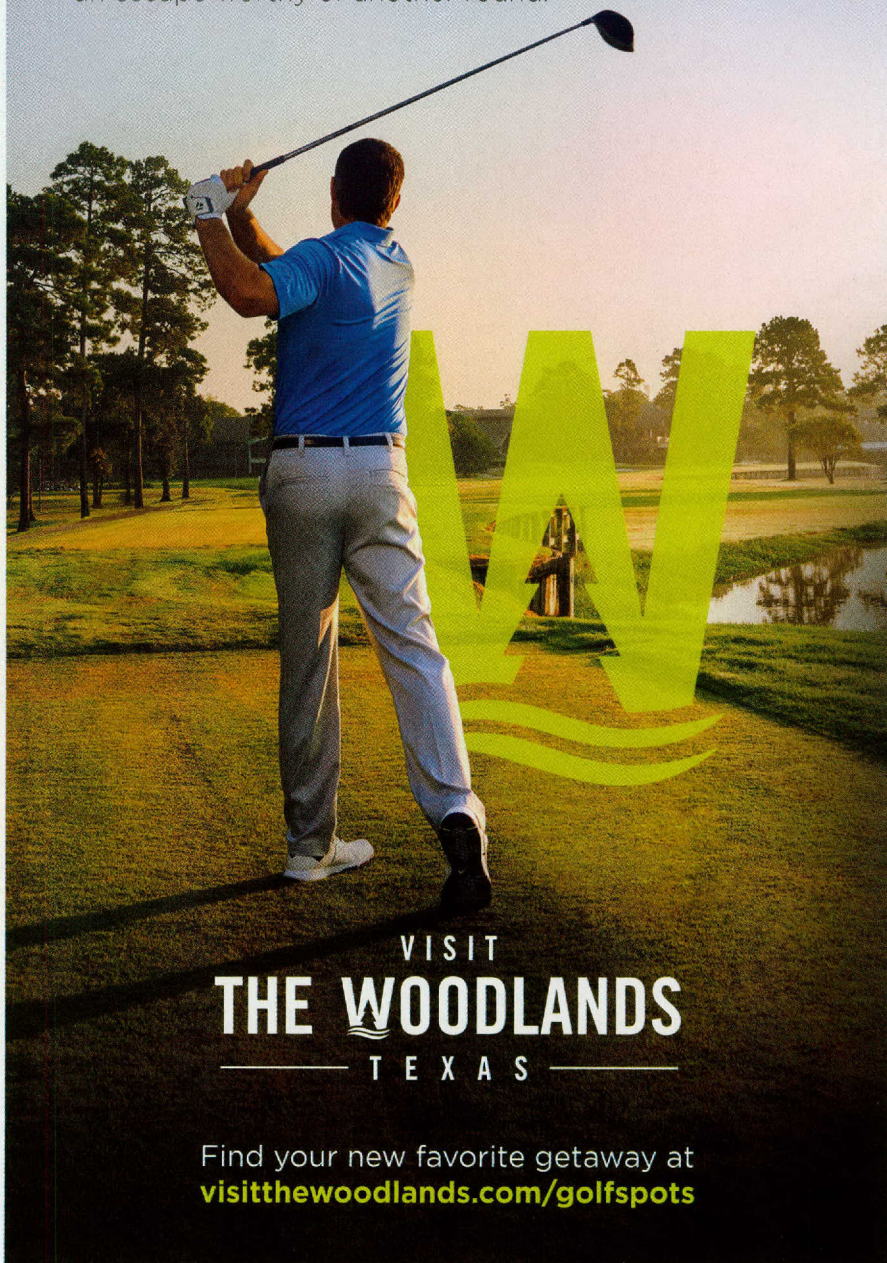
Starting rate: \$130/night.

325-388-4411; theantlers.com

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Spirited Away

Calling on all manner of higher powers, this San Antonio shop has just the thing for your earthly problems

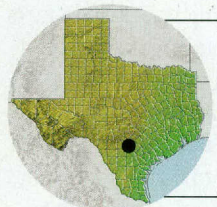
By Asher Elbein

In the spirit room of Botanica La Caridad, a retail store in San Antonio, wooden statues of West African deities are crammed up against a bucket of sticks and machetes, garlanded with chicken's feet and anchored by a cross. In the opposite corner stands a masked mannequin with rolled-up cash tucked discreetly beneath its long red dress and unopened bottles of wine.

David Herrera, owner and operator of the store, nods proudly as he points to the bottles lined up around the altars. "There are two spirits living in here," he says. "We get people who bring in photos or scraps of clothing, and they seal them up in these jars. They're from people asking for favors."

Favors from on high are what the botanica is all about. Botanicas—sometimes called *hierberías*—are stores that specialize in spiritual concerns. Their shelves stock items for faiths from Roman Catholicism to Santería, part of a fusion of practices produced by the great American melting pot. They are a fixture of Hispanic neighborhoods in Texas cities: Killeen, Seguin, and Sherman, to name a few examples. San Antonio and Houston both have nearly 20 botanicas operating within their city limits, and despite catering to a primarily Spanish-speaking populace, they're attracting an increasingly diverse clientele. The curious need only step inside.

Botanica La Caridad occupies a neat, white storefront amid a residential neighborhood in North Central San Antonio. The main room is a collage of bright colors; incense hangs in tidy assortments, while votive candles are stacked alongside glass cases filled with tarot cards and statues of saints. In a dark side room, rows of glass bottles



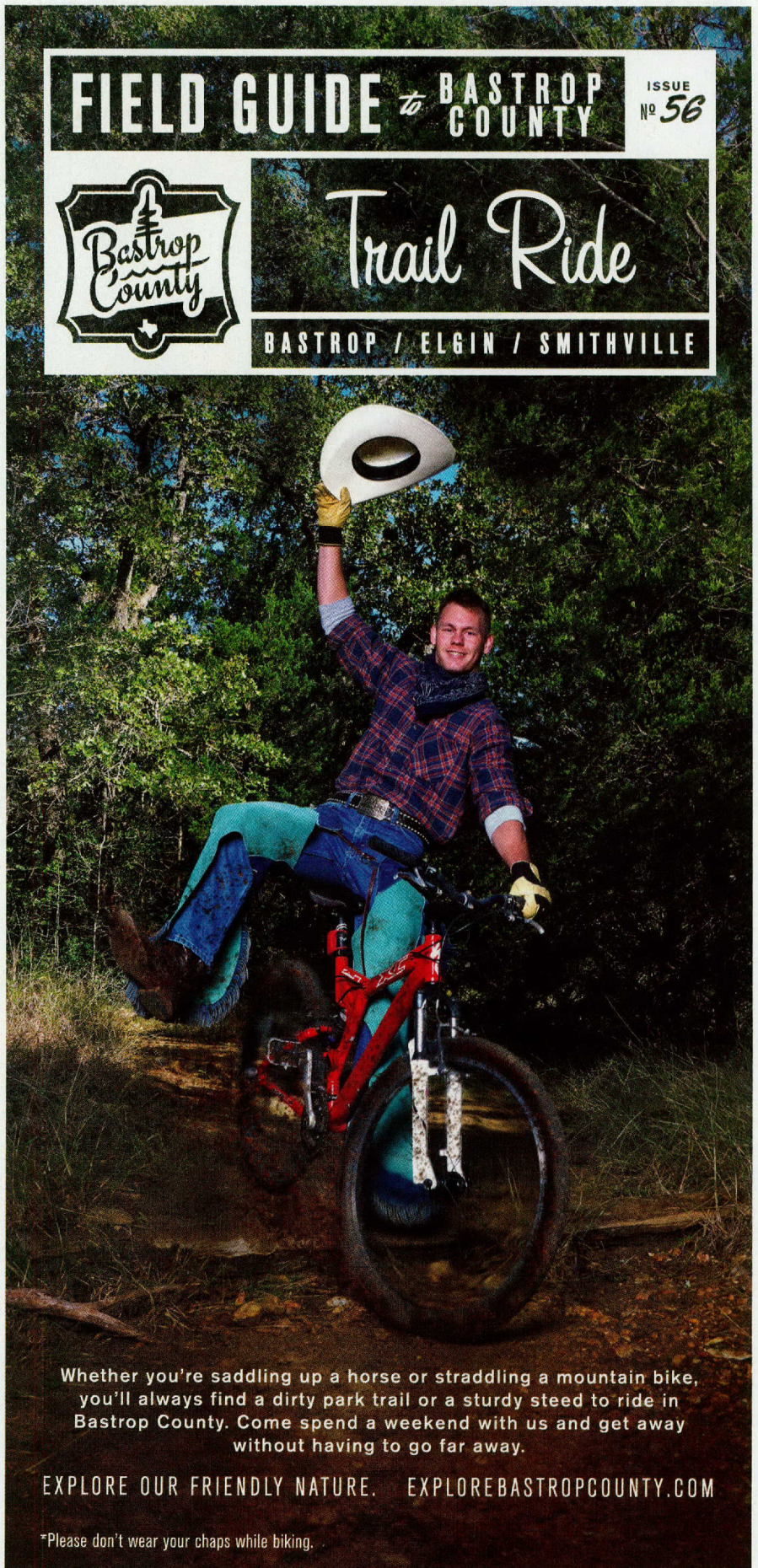
**BOTANICA
LA CARIDAD,**
1815 Blanco Road,
San Antonio,
210-737-7500;
botanicalacaridadsa.net

FIELD GUIDE *to* **BASTROP COUNTY** ISSUE No. 56

Bastrop County

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containing dried herbs sit 5 feet above the floor.

Herrera's back office contains a large desk and set of cabinets piled high with African statuary, saint statues, and bits of spiritual bric-a-brac. In 1992, when he was 26, Herrera was initiated into Santería, a religion that mixes the pantheism of West Africa with the veneration of Catholic saints.

As a *santero*, or priest, Herrera uses rituals to help his clients intercede with the *orishas*, the human aspect of spirits



OPENING PAGE: Offerings made to a statue of St. Jude. **THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Botanica la Caridad owner David Herrera; a selection of candles; cash is one of the many offerings customers leave.



or saints. At first, he did readings and cleansings out of his apartment. Then in the late 1990s, he opened the first incarnation of Botanica La Caridad on the West Side of San Antonio. (The store moved to the Beacon Hill neighborhood last year.) He named it after the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, who is the Patroness of Cuba, the Queen of Rivers, and the Saint of Mercy.

Monica Vidaurri, the store manager and Herrera's sister, says the botanica is now attracting an economically diverse clientele, including doctors, lawyers, and politicians seeking its services: tarot card readings, spiritual cleansings, and guidance for dealing with the saints. People invoke St. Benedict, the saint of exorcisms, for aid in dealing with legal issues or for charms to keep them from getting pulled over. Real estate agents

Favors from on high are what the botanica is all about. Botanicas—sometimes called hierberías—are stores that specialize in spiritual concerns.

come in looking for St. Joseph statues, which they'll bury in a corner of a front yard to help them sell a house.

"I sell a lot of sage, I sell a lot of stuff for cleansings, I sell a lot of candles," Vidaurri says. "People will light a candle for all kinds of reasons. If a family member's sick, if they're sick, they'll come and look for a candle to see what might make them feel better. There's a love candle to bring [people] together. We do breakup candles, too. ... There's something for every kind of situation."

Some elements of the botanica can worry the uninitiated. Vidaurri's office holds statuary for more specialized practices, including several figures of Santa Muerte, the macabre-looking skeleton saint, who protects those who work at night. Vidaurri has a shrine to Santa Muerte tucked between her desk and the wall, where it's easy to overlook, with offerings of wine, candy, and flowers below the lowering skull. It's there for protection, Vidaurri says. The botanica business can be surprisingly cutthroat, and it's always good to have a higher power looking out for your interests.

That desire for a bit of help is what draws people in to peruse La Caridad's shelves, to sit on the wooden pews in the waiting room, and to go with Herrera into the room where the spirits live. In the botanica, Vidaurri says, it doesn't matter what you believe in, so long as you believe in something. "Everybody has some kind of faith in something, and that's where we come along and help guide them to where they're at a better place." 🐾



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The Hot Spot

Falling for Wichita Falls in triple-digit heat

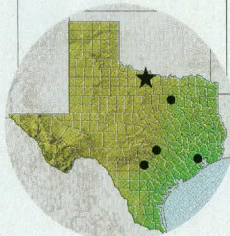
By Alex Temblador

Dallas
2.25 hours

Austin
4.75 hours

Houston
5.5 hours

San Antonio
5.75 hours



A Texas legend tells the story of a Comanche woman who was testing the depths of the Red River and called to her companions on the bank, “Wee-Chi-Tah!” meaning “waist deep.” With time, her assessment was adopted into the name of a town that grew nearby—Wichita Falls. Located a 30-minute drive from the Red River border with Oklahoma, Wichita Falls is a close-knit community of approximately 104,000 people accustomed to traveling around Texas—not Texas traveling to them.

Growing up in Wichita Falls, I noticed my hometown didn’t attract many visitors. Downtown was full of empty aging buildings. Restaurants opened and closed every other year, and stores in the mall changed constantly—none offering the fashionable choices found in bigger cities like Dallas. Locals were content with driving more than two hours to Dallas for entertainment or one hour north to Oklahoma to

hike the Wichita Mountains and stop at the Comanche Red River Hotel Casino on the way home.

But there were a few events that brought tourists to the city, like Falls Fest, an outdoor festival that showcased musical acts including Stevie Ray Vaughn, Tracy Lawrence, and the punk-pop band Bowling for Soup (which originally formed in Wichita Falls in 1994). Falls Fest held its 30th and final festival in 2015, but the city still hosts three annual favorites in the hottest months of the year: the Texas-Oklahoma Fair, an annual tradition dating back to the 1920s; the Texas Ranch Roundup, North America's first ranch rodeo (events featuring working ranchhands rather than rodeo cowboys); and the Hotter'N Hell Hundred, one of the oldest, largest, and sweatiest cycling events in the nation that welcomes 13,000 visitors every August.

In the past five years, I've witnessed the atmosphere changing in Wichita Falls. People are excited. My parents have events to go to every day of the week. There are new restaurants popping up around town—and they aren't shutting down within a year. Shops, boutiques, festivals, markets, live music venues, a brewery, and events have sprung up, too—like the After Hours Artwalk, a monthly celebration on the first Thursday evening of April through October where visitors can explore downtown's art studios, galleries, restaurants, and shops to meet local artists.

Now, it seems Wichita Falls has everything a larger city offers, but with the added appeal of small-town charm and comfort. Here's how to make the weekend count.



STAY



EAT & DRINK



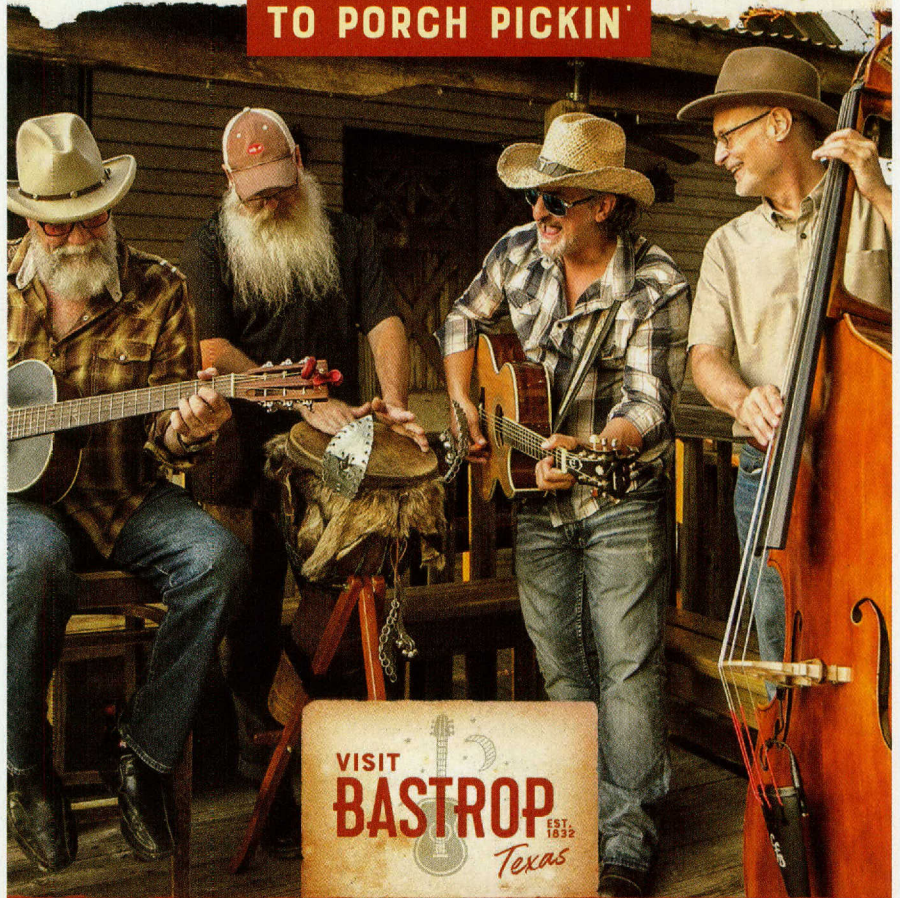
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Friday

1 P.M.
On Brand

Begin a trip to Wichita Falls with North Texas barbecue at The Branding Iron, a 43-year institution with a rustic vibe and cafeteria line. Then, head downtown to visit the city's noteworthy and quirky attractions. At the Museum of North Texas History, you'll learn about the Wichita Falls Motor Company—created in 1911—which built heavy duty “Wichita” trucks and was Texas' most successful motor vehicle manufacturer until it shuttered in 1932. Explore Heritage Hall, a Western exhibit with a 500-hat collection, including one signed by race car driver Lloyd Ruby. Take pictures of the World's Littlest Skyscraper, a 40-foot-tall building built as a scam during the oil boom. Then grab a snack at The Yard food truck park before going to “Big Blue,” a blue building that's home to the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum.

6 P.M.
Decisions, Decisions

After dark, downtown comes alive with eateries, bars, and entertainment. Find a Texas-size steak dinner at McBride's Land & Cattle Co., an old-time restaurant with a Western theme, then catch a theatrical performance at the Backdoor Theatre. If you time your trip just right, concerts, comedy shows, or rodeos at the Wichita Falls Multi-Purpose Event Center or Kay Yeager Coliseum are great late-night fun—especially chased with a beer and a band at the Iron Horse Pub, or a craft cocktail and pub snacks at the Highlander Public House.

Saturday

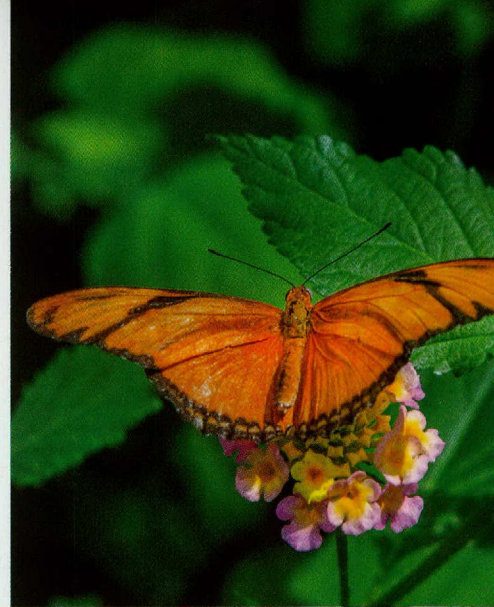
10 A.M.
Off to Market

After coffee at 8th Street Coffee House, explore downtown Wichita Falls, home to a Saturday morning farmers market and boutiques such as Ramble & Company, which sells trendy Wichita Falls-themed souvenirs, and Alley Cat Vintage Mercantile. Art lovers should head to 9th Street Studios or the Wichita Falls Arts Association Gallery. The Kell House Museum is a terrific place to learn about the history of Wichita Falls and the family of Frank Kell, an entrepreneur who played an integral part in the development of the city in the early 20th century.

NOON
A Walk in the Park

When hunger hits, make your way to P2-The Deuce, a drive-in bar where waitresses serve food and drinks straight to your car. The Red Draw—tomato juice and ice-cold beer—is the unofficial beverage of Wichita Falls.

Then make your way to see the city's picturesque namesake falls in the 178-acre Lucy Park. The original falls washed away in a flood in the 1880s, but in 1987, the city constructed a 54-foot-tall multilevel cascade on the Wichita River. A scenic walk along the trail leads to a wonderful photo op, as well as picnic tables, an 18-hole disc golf course, sand volleyball, playgrounds, and a swinging bridge across the river. Don't miss the River Bend Nature Center, a 15-acre family-friendly education center inside Lucy Park featuring forest tours and a butterfly conservatory housed in a stunning 7,000-square-foot glass structure.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The River Bend Nature Center; Sevi's Burritos; The World's Tiniest Skyscraper; the Museum of North Texas History explores the city's Native American culture; Bloom Bar sells fresh-cut flowers during the After Hours Artwalk. **OPENING SPREAD:** Lucy Park is home to Wichita Falls' reconstructed falls.





6 P.M. **Grill Power**

The west side of Wichita Falls, dominated by the mall and restaurants, makes a good evening destination. Samurai of Tokyo lures locals willing to wait more than an hour to sit at a communal table and watch chefs cook up their hibachi-style dinner. Fill up on yakitori skewers or chicken karaage, a Japanese spin on fried chicken. Afterward, end the night Texas-style with drinks at Whiskeyta Club and two-stepping at Lonestar Bar.



8 A.M. **Full Circle**



On your last day in town, rise early for a cycling adventure on the 18-mile Circle Trail. The trail, which wends along the Wichita River and Holliday Creek to Lake Wichita, will eventually encircle the city on a continuous 25-mile loop once construction is completed in the next few years. At Lake Wichita, SUPWF rents kayaks, bikes, and paddleboards. A hike to the Dirt Hill at Lake Wichita Park offers stunning lake views, or you can watch people fly radio-controlled planes on the only model airplane landing strip in the Texas park system. For those looking for more of a challenge, the Wee-Chi-Tah 13-mile mountain biking trail includes twists, steep ramps, hills, and swinging bridges.

For your last stop, refuel at Sevi's Burritos, a favorite hole-in-the-wall restaurant. Its nearly footlong burritos made with handmade, hand-rolled tortillas wrap up a fine weekend in a small Texas city worth falling for. **L**

Upcoming Events

Texas Ranch Roundup

The original ranch rodeo celebrates 39 years of showcasing historic ranches, the hard work of true cowboys, and every facet of ranch life with a tradeshow. Ranches compete in chuckwagon cooking, cowboy art, and real ranch events.

Aug. 16-18, Multi-Purpose Event Center, 1000 Fifth St. texasranchroundup.com

Hotter'N Hell Hundred

This bicycle ride grew out of efforts to find a novel way for Wichita Falls to celebrate its 1982 centennial—100 miles in 100-degree heat to celebrate 100 years. *Aug. 22-25, various locations. hh100.org*

Texas-Oklahoma Fair

This annual two-state fair features a midway with rides and games, traditional fair foods, livestock shows, exhibits, an exotic animal petting zoo, live music, and other performances.

Sept. 17-21, Multi-Purpose Event Center, 1000 Fifth St. founderlionsclub.com

CAMP OUT

Lake Arrowhead State Park, about 15 miles from downtown Wichita Falls, offers tent camping and RV sites on a reservoir with 106 miles of shoreline on the Little Wichita River. Park activities include fishing, swimming, water skiing, and horseback riding, plus a pavilion for large groups. 229 Park Road 63. 940-528-2211; tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/lake-arrowhead



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ILLUSTRATION BY JUDY PAUL

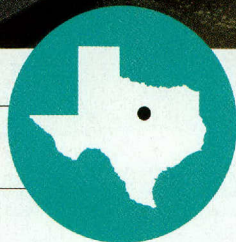
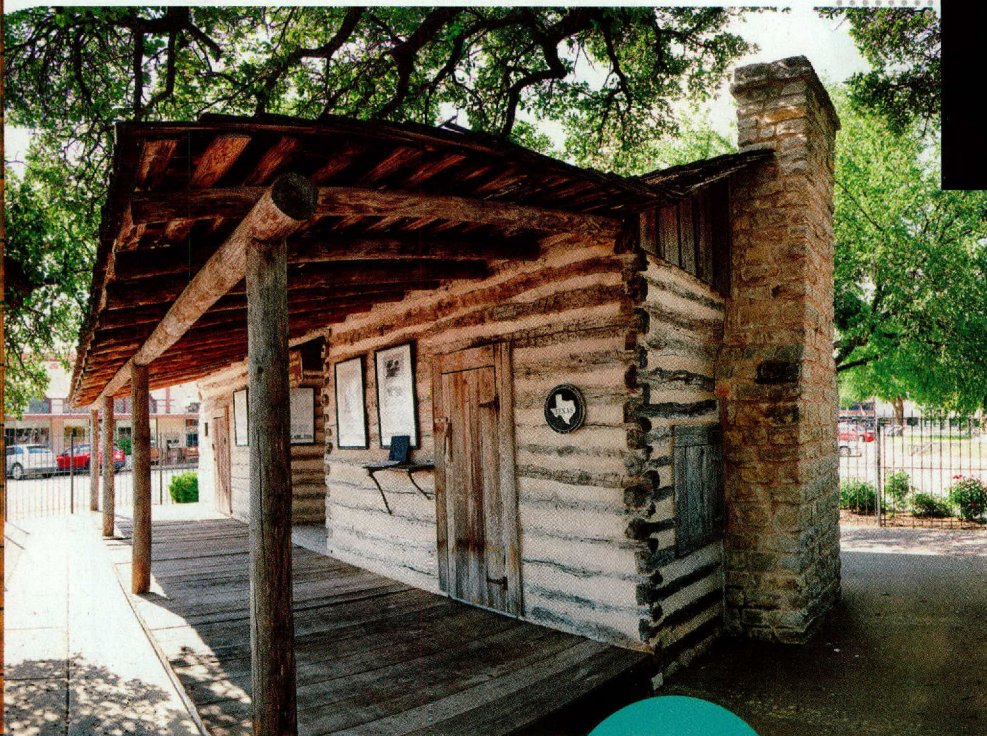
T

There was a time when most Texans lived over yonder. But over the past century, the percentage of Texans living in rural areas versus urban areas flipped: Today, 85 percent of us live in cities, while only 15 percent live in the country, according to the Texas Demographic Center. It's an understandable trend. With booming job markets, diverse cultural offerings, and fast-paced living, Texas' major cities project an undeniable metropolitan magnetism—catalysts for ever-expanding urbanization. But the more we congregate in big cities, the more we cast our longing eyes outward. Beyond the subdivisions and traffic jams, our state's small towns beckon travelers with the simple promise of room to breathe. Here we chronicle 15 such towns (no greater than 20,000 population) that are thriving with reinvention, revitalization, or recovery—places to visit now for both escape and discovery.



▲
In Comanche,
wet your
whistle at the
Stone Eagle
Beer Garden.

LEFT: Old Cora, the only remaining log courthouse in the state. BELOW: Unique Antiques & Collectibles.



Comanche

POP. 4,170

Comanche takes care of its history. Nearly every storefront around its tidy main square features a plaque from the Comanche County Historical Society. Aside from housing the only remaining log courthouse in the state, “Old Cora,” the town is known as the place where gunslinger John Wesley Hardin killed a Brown County deputy sheriff in a saloon in 1874. At the Comanche County Historical Museum, visitors can see a diorama of the scene.

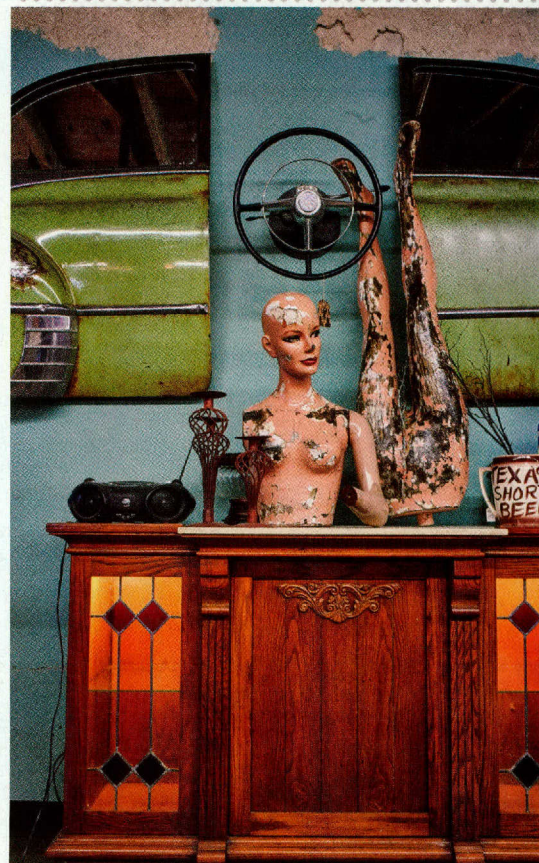
Within the last year, Revitalize Comanche has opened two shops on the square: a mercantile selling local goods and crafts, like soap and pottery; and an old-fashioned soda fountain, where you can enjoy a Dr Pepper float and listen to the jukebox.

“We like to say that we’re about an hour-and-a-half from everywhere: Abilene, Waco, Fort Worth,” Revitalize Comanche President Kristi Taylor says. “It’s an easy daytrip for a lot of folks—a quiet little town with lots of fun things to do.”—*Kimya Kavehkar*

Stay: The Rest-a-Spell vacation home offers three rooms, plus shared living areas and a wraparound porch where you can enjoy a bottle of the local Brennan Vineyards’ award-winning Super Nero red wine.

Eat: Harvest features chicken-fried steak, pecan-crusted chicken salad, and sandwiches. In the evenings, bow-tie-clad staff serve pasta and steak. Enjoy draft brews next door at Stone Eagle Beer Garden.

See: Brennan Vineyards offers visitors a peek into the production and bottling facilities, along with tastings of six wines, from rosé to port, for \$10.





Smithville



POP. 4,050

Smithville has well-earned bona fides for its photogenic

vibe: To date, more than two dozen movies have filmed here since Sandra Bullock famously came to town in 1998 to make *Hope Floats*. In fact, it was the first town in Texas to be certified as “Film Friendly Texas” by the Texas Film Commission.

Two Austin darlings have recently built outposts here: Consuela, an ebullient, electric-hued handbag company with a flagship store on Austin’s South Congress, and Micklethwait Market & Grocery, a brick-and-mortar offspring of Micklethwait’s popular East Austin barbecue trailer.

After exploring the walkable downtown—featuring unusual shops including Bella’s Cottage Antiques, with its eclectic assortment of architectural elements and stained glass windows, and the nostalgia-inducing Smithville General Store—plunk down by the fireplace at The Front Room Wine Bar for a range of imaginative hors d’oeuvres, accompanied by a glass of wine or one of 17 single malts.—*Susan L. Ebert*

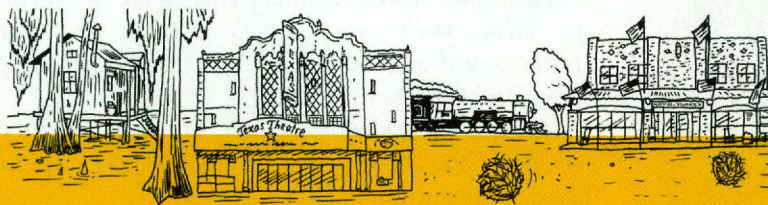
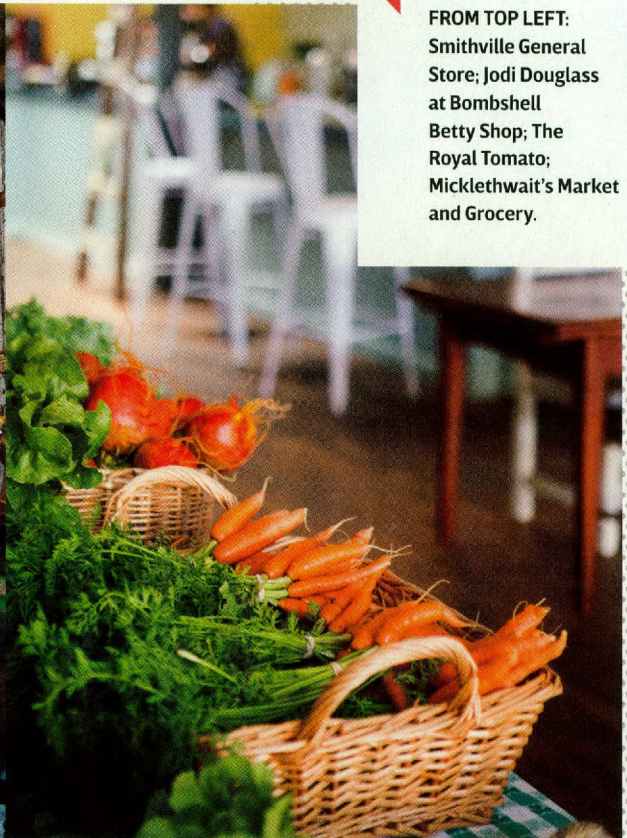
Stay: Slumber at the historic Katy House Bed and Breakfast, built in 1909 and restored in 1994, just a block from Smithville’s epicenter.

Eat: Start your day with an alfresco nosh at Olde World Bakery & Cafe and wind up with a late-night bite and brew at Honey’s Pizza.

See: Fish the Colorado River. The state record Guadalupe bass—17.25 inches, 3.7 pounds—was caught upstream from here. “The Smithville boat ramp provides access to almost 50 miles of nearly untouched water,” says Alvin Dedeaux of All Water Guides.



◀ **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Smithville General Store; Jodi Douglass at Bombshell Betty Shop; The Royal Tomato; Micklethwait's Market and Grocery.



QUIET RETREATS

UNCERTAIN, POP. 93

Set among the moss-draped pines, towering cypress, and lily pad-strewn sloughs of Caddo Lake's western shoreline, Uncertain makes an ideal jumping-off point for fishing trips and paddling expeditions. Adding to the blissfully eccentric vibe—note the “sasquatch crossing” signs—is Spatterdock,

five whimsically decorated guest houses and a collection of mosaics and metal art on the lake shore. Proprietors Dottie and Billy Carter provide kayaks, canoes, and bicycles for guest use, and Billy's nearby Johnson's Ranch Marina offers guided lake tours, where you keep company with turtles, water fowl, and the occasional gator.—*June Naylor*

TURKEY, POP. 384

Looking up at the dramatic bluffs of the Caprock Escarpment, the little town of

Turkey is home to the historic Hotel Turkey, which has welcomed guests since 1927. The hotel serves catfish on Friday nights and steak and shrimp on Saturday nights, and it hosts live music both nights. Some bands are sure to break into Western swing, a style popularized by Turkey's most famous son, Bob Wills, “the King of Western Swing.”—*Jason Boyett*

PALESTINE, POP. 18,136

Established in 1846, Palestine boasts a plethora of

historical sites, a reputation for showy spring dogwoods and fall foliage, and the western station for the popular Texas State Railroad. A linchpin of downtown's architecture is the Redlands Historic Inn, built in 1915. The Redlands has 20 suites for overnight and extended stays, a restaurant and bar, and rich historical details, such as hexagonal floor tiling, an old elevator car, and black-and-white photos that recall Palestine's frontier railroad days.—*Susan L. Ebert*



▲
FROM TOP: Fort Davis National Historic Site; Blue Mountain Bar and Grill.

Fort Davis



POP. 1,201

Fort Davis started as a military post on the turbulent Texas frontier, but nowadays you'll find a decidedly laid-back town. Some streets remain unpaved, cell phones tend to fall silent, and folks still wave to each other on the street.

"It's a quiet little town," says Larry Francell, a retired museum director. "We spend a lot of time on our front porch. The town doesn't have a lot of tourist infrastructure."

It has the essentials, though, and attractions such as the recently made-over Indian Lodge and the nearby McDonald Observatory, which last year overhauled the Hobby-Eberly Telescope and George T. Abell Gallery.

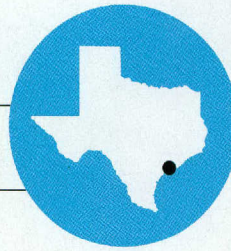
A bonus: 5,050 feet of elevation makes Fort Davis the highest town in Texas and, on summer nights, one of the coolest. —*Melissa Gaskill*

Stay: The 1930s Indian Lodge, originally constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps, features spacious rooms, dramatic mountain views, and priceless peace and quiet. In town, the 1912 Hotel Limpia transports guests back to the romance of the Old West.

Eat: Blue Mountain Bar and Grill at the Hotel Limpia serves "Texas frontier cuisine" in a European-style dining room and airy outdoor patio.

See: Hike between Davis Mountains State Park and Fort Davis National Historic Site for striking vistas and rock formations.

Palacios



POP. 4,718

If you stand on the seawall in this quiet coastal town, the stillness of Matagorda Bay might bring on a sudden sense of calm. But the calm belies just how much nature is percolating beneath the surface: Crabs are clawing, fish are spawning, oyster reefs are growing.

Over the past couple of years, locals and newcomers have joined forces to educate, celebrate, and care for the ecosystem here at the Colorado River's confluence with the Gulf of Mexico.

The Matagorda Bay Foundation hosts regular education excursions to the bay and nearby beaches, and the chamber of commerce just released a new Top Ten Birding Hotspots flier. After all the nature action, grab a cold one at the regular music nights hosted by the Outrigger Event Center, an old lumberyard turned music hall.

"Palacios is a beautiful enigma," says Laurie Beck, the founder of Palacios' annual Birdfest. "You have to go out of your way to come here. This town makes you slow down."—*Clayton Maxwell*

Stay: The Peaceful Pelican, a bed and breakfast, attracts outdoor enthusiasts from across the globe. The front porch is an idyllic spot to watch the bay and the birds that flock to it.

Eat: From morning to night, fishermen, shrimpers, birders, and beachcombers gather at the Point, a convenience store and Vietnamese/Mexican restaurant, satisfying cravings for both tacos and pho.

See: Birdfest is a rollicking March celebration of local ecology and culture that includes world-class birding, kayaking excursions, an art contest, and panel discussions—as well as a fanciful parade that would make the peacock proud.

In Palacios, a pier on Tres Palacios Bay.





▲ FROM TOP: Piñatas at Mercadome Flea Market; a great blue heron at Pintail Lakes in Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

Alamo

POP. 19,679



Alamo's claim to fame as the "Refuge to the Valley" illustrates its symbiotic relationship with the adjacent Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, an internationally renowned birding destination.

Santa Ana suffered a devastating flood in 2010, and last year it weathered a wildfire that burned 330 acres. But volunteers have helped with efforts to restore the subtropical thorn forest, which along with the carefully managed resacas, continues to draw birds such as tropical green jays, orioles, and chachalacas.

After exploring the refuge, check out the Mercadome Flea Market and Alamo Dance Hall, which draws thousands of weekend visitors to shop, eat, and move their feet to the sound of accordion-driven conjunto and norteño music.

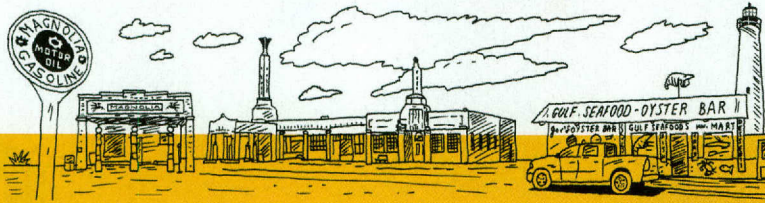
"Santa Ana and the city of Alamo have a great partnership," says Gisela Chapa, refuge manager. "Together we're working to preserve the ecological and cultural heritage of the Rio Grande Valley." —*Daniel Blue Tyx*

Stay: The Alamo Inn Bed & Breakfast, Gears, and Tours, housed in a historic 1919 building, caters to outdoor enthusiasts with staff members who have a wealth of knowledge of local bird and butterfly hot spots.

Eat: El Dorado Restaurant serves up classic Valley Tex-Mex with homemade tortillas, salsa, and fresh-squeezed lemonade.

See: Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge is in one of the most biodiverse places in the country, with over 400 documented bird species, including dozens that can't be seen anywhere in the U.S. outside the Rio Grande Valley.





HAVENS OF HISTORY

PORT ISABEL, POP. 5,055

Searching for sunken treasure? You'll find it in Port Isabel at the Treasures of the Gulf Museum, home of shipwrecked booty from a 16th-century Spanish flotilla laden with gold. Uncover culinary riches at Joe's Oyster Bar & Grill, where everything is Gulf fresh, then walk off the meal with a visit to the Port Isabel Lighthouse State Historic Site (1852), for a walk up 75 winding stairs and rewarding views.

At the Port Isabel Historical Museum, a two-story fish mural on the building's façade—first painted in 1906 and recently restored—depicts more than 200 Gulf fish species.

—E. Dan Klepper

NOCONA, POP. 2,981

Some 6 million Longhorns tramped up the Chisholm Trail through Nocona—named for Comanche Chief Peta Nocona. In 1879, Joe Justin opened his first boot-making shop just north of town and relocated to Nocona in 1889 when the railroad arrived.

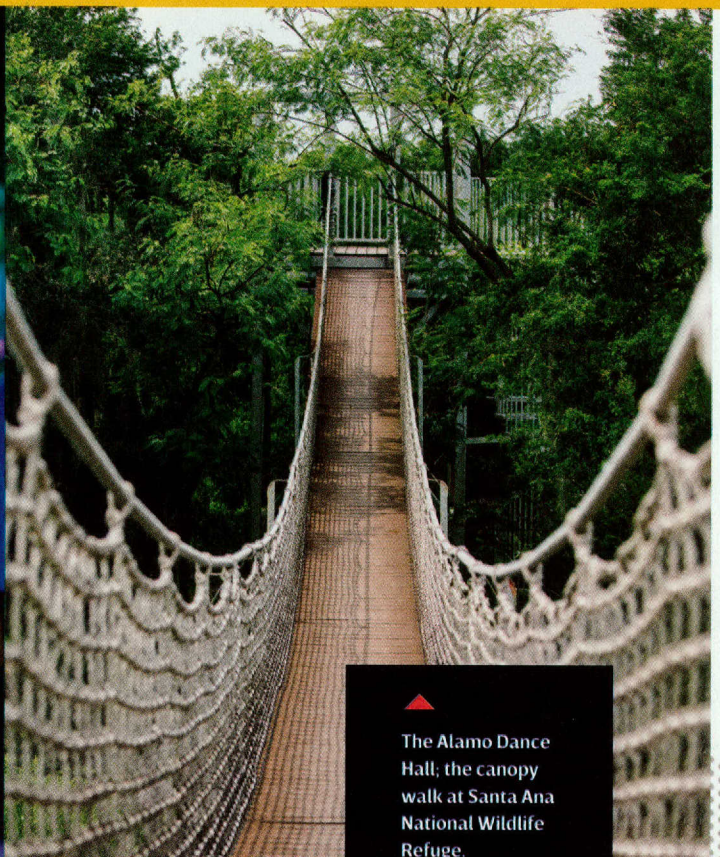
When "Daddy Joe" died, his sons relocated the Justin Boot Company to Fort Worth, but his headstrong daughter Miss Enid stayed put, launching her own boot brand, Nocona Boot Company, here in 1925. Nocona keeps its leather-working tradition alive at Nokona baseball gloves (maker of Nolan Ryan's favorite glove), and at the Fenoglio Boot Company, both of which offer tours.

—Susan L. Ebert

SHAMROCK, POP. 1,822

Shamrock, a Texas Panhandle town at the

intersection of legendary Route 66 and US 83, takes motorists back to the halcyon days of car travel with its cluster of neon-accented art-deco buildings from the 1920s and '30s. Examples include the landmark Conoco Tower Station and U-Drop Inn Café (now home to a museum and visitor center), the restored Magnolia Gas Station, and the Pioneer West Museum, which is set in a 1920s hotel. On March 17, thousands descend on Shamrock for the state's official St. Patrick's Day celebration.—Jason Boyett



▲ The Alamo Dance Hall; the canopy walk at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge.

CLOCKWISE: Oil derrick reproductions in the World's Richest Acre; High Hill Farm; the East Texas Oil Museum.



Kilgore

POP. 12,795

Oil put Kilgore on the map in the 1930s, and this East Texas town still celebrates the boom today at places like Kilgore College's East Texas Oil Museum, which debuted a renovation in January. While on campus, be sure to check out the Rangerette Showcase honoring the school's legendary 79-year-old drill team.

The Texas Broadcast Museum, opened in 2016, displays an extensive collection of working equipment, including its newest highlight: one of the three original ESPN production trucks from the network's launch 40 years ago. Don't miss the 1949 Dumont Flexible Bus, formerly owned by WFAA in Dallas and claimed to be the oldest restored broadcast vehicle in existence.

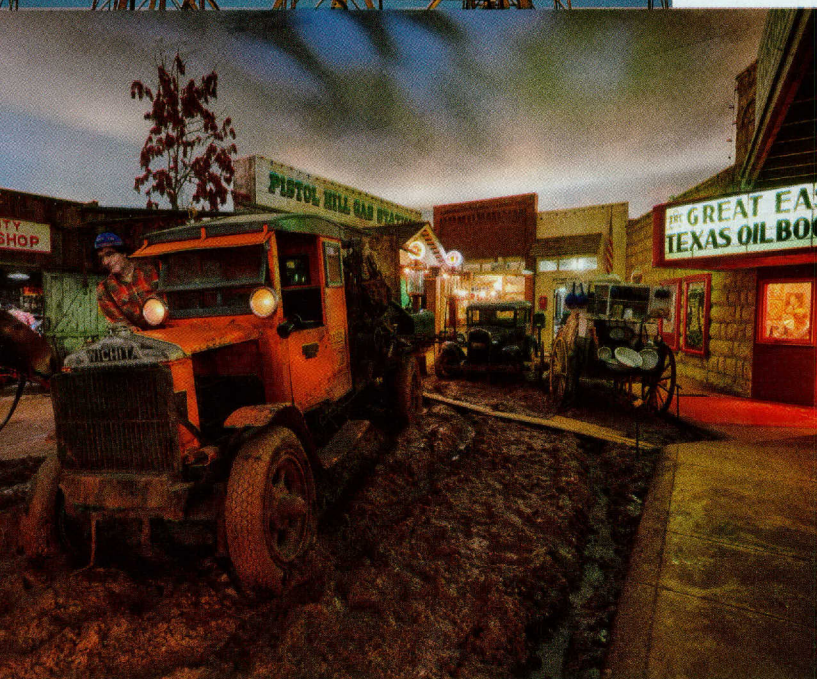
"You can't find another Telecruiser like this anywhere in the world," says Dana Pearce, the museum's operations manager.—*Dave Wilson*

Stay: Head to Arp, about 20 minutes away, and find a little California in East Texas by visiting the vineyards and staying in the bungalows at High Hill Farm, a luxury bed and breakfast.

Eat: Right across from Kilgore College, the Back Porch serves up home-style burgers, hand-cut french fries, beans, and hush puppies.

See: Reproductions of derricks that once dominated the skyline occupy the World's Richest Acre in downtown Kilgore,

where 2.5 million barrels of oil were produced. Ride the "elevator to the center of the Earth" at the East Texas Oil Museum, or take a turn at the news desk on the Broadcast Museum's set with live mics, monitors, and a green screen for weather reports.





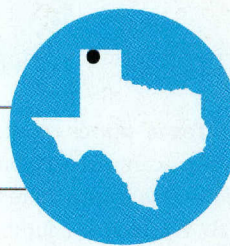
▲ First built in the 1930s, the restored La Rita hosts a variety of shows.



Dalhart

POP. 8,346

A thriving economy—spurred by the Hilmar Cheese Company production plant—and a low cost of living have transformed Dalhart into more than just a Panhandle outpost on the way to the mountains. The resulting agricultural and dairy jobs have spurred a young, diverse influx of transplants. “When I moved here, I had total expectations of what it was going to be like,” says Julia Williams, owner of Purpose Coffee Co. and the local open-air farmers market. Originally from Dripping Springs, she and her husband arrived eight years ago from Washington, D.C. “Small towns have that stereotype that there’s only one kind of person. This community has definitely challenged my expectations. It’s a unique mix of people.” Despite the transformation, history is still on full display, from the exhibits chronicling pioneering ranchers at the XIT Museum to the stunningly restored La Rita Performing Arts Theatre.—*Jason Boyett*



Stay: Along with a lineup of chain hotels for travelers heading to New Mexico and Colorado, Dalhart’s locally owned Tri-State Motel will stoke your nostalgia for the mom-and-pop establishments of yesterday.

Eat: Ten in Texas Woodfire Grill serves the best hand-cut rib-eyes and burgers in town. Its screened patio is perfect for refreshingly cool summer evenings.

See: Rita Blanca Park offers miles of beautiful hiking trails around Lake Rita Blanca, a bird sanctuary just south of Dalhart. In winter, the bird-watching is spectacular.



Orange

POP. 18,595



Built on the Sabine River on Texas' upper coast, Orange had seen its share of drama before Hurricane Harvey. Once a hideout for Louisiana outlaws on the run, the timber industry brought prosperity in the late 1800s. By World War I, lumber shipping thrived in Orange, along with cotton, cattle, rice, and eventually oil. Prominent citizens erected stately Victorian structures, some of which stand today.

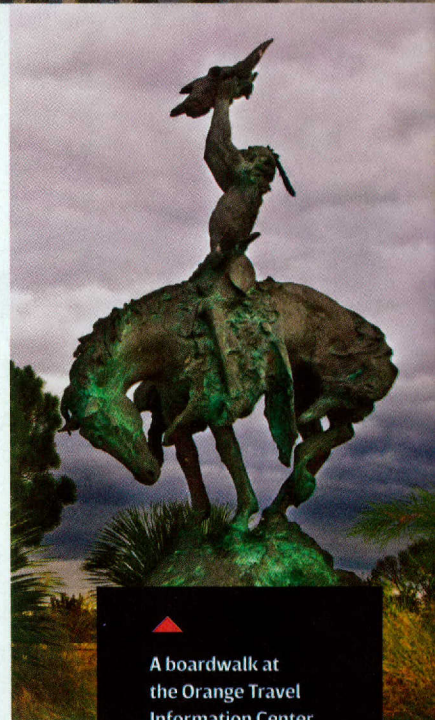
"We have always seen periodic hurricanes," says Ellen Walker Rienstra, historian and author of *The Long Shadow*, a biography of mill owner Henry Lutcher and his descendants. "But those early settlers sought the high ground."

Today, she says, the historic attractions of Orange are back online—and ready to be rediscovered.—*Dan Oko*

Stay: The Shangri-la Bed and Breakfast, a 1927 two-story home, is conveniently located downtown.

Eat: Travelers hungering for cracklings, gumbo, boudin, or a fried-seafood sampler will want to make the easy, 12-minute drive from Orange to Bridge City for Judice's Cajun Café.

See: The Stark Foundation's Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center flooded during Harvey but has since reopened its peaceful paths through manicured landscapes and conserved pockets of cypress-tupelo swamp.



▲
A boardwalk at the Orange Travel Information Center on Interstate 10; Buck McCain's *The Invocation* at the Stark Museum of Art.

The Science Mill is just down the road from Bryans on 290.



Johnson City

POP. 1,656



At the corner of US 290 and Nugent Avenue in LBJ's friendly hometown, the words "Crossroads of Art & Science" adorn the gray façade of Echo, an art gallery and antiques store. This stoplight, with the always-humming Science Mill Museum on one side and a promenade of art galleries on the other, is literally the intersection of the art and science currents flowing strong through this Hill Country town, one already steeped in history and locally made wine.

With the recent opening of Variance—a workshop and studio space that designs living plant walls, interactive museum displays, and other marvels—in a shiny Quonset hut next door to the Science Mill, the creative juices keep flowing.

"For a tiny concentrated area, we are a hot spot of art and science," artist Catherine Massaro says. "With affordable rent and a friendly atmosphere, here you can live a creative life—and that creativity is felt in the whole community."—Clayton Maxwell

Stay: For cushy camping, try the luxury safari tents at Walden Retreats just 5 miles from downtown Johnson City on the Pedernales River. The Crossroads Inn, a bed and breakfast set in a limestone home, is ideal for porch-sitting. Keep an eye out for the deluxe

Carter Creek Winery Resort and Spa scheduled to open in August.

Eat: The Pecan Street Brewery is ground zero for a brew and a burger. For something more upscale, Bryans on 290 offers gourmet

fare prepared over an open fire along with a well-curated wine list.

See: The Last Saturday Artwalk is a laid-back way to ramble through the town's creative side, as are the regular community events at the Science Mill.





Rockport



POP. 10,759

Rockport's recovery since Hurricane Harvey nearly two years ago counts among the great feel-good stories in Texas history. Rebounding in stunning ways, this little art colony beloved by visitors since the 1950s for its fishing, bucolic bay setting, and frequent festivals feels fresh again.

Part-time resident Wes Williams, a fisherman from the Fort Worth area, notes that every sign of rebirth is greeted with gratitude. "The community has pulled together so well, and everyone shows such appreciation for returning visitors after what this town has been through," he says.—*June Naylor*

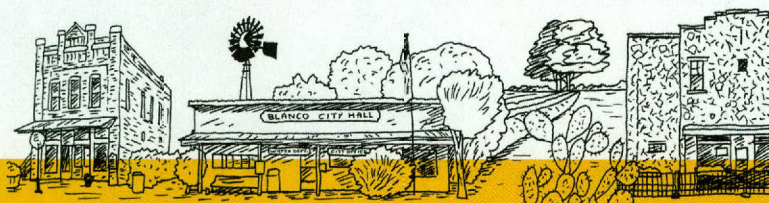
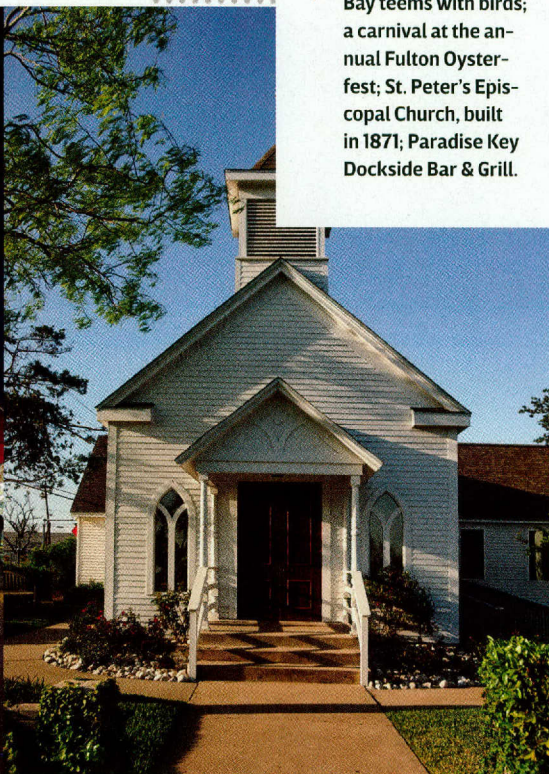
Stay: The Lighthouse Inn is unveiling its restoration gradually. At press time, ground floor rooms with balconies overlooking Aransas Bay were open once again.

Eat: Latitude 28°02' Coastal Cuisine & Fine Art is the place for blue crab cakes with chipotle remoulade sauce, served amid paintings and sculpture by local and regional artists.

See: Demolished by the storm, the Rockport Center for the Arts inhabits a temporary home and has secured a \$5 million grant that will fund a bigger venue and sculpture garden.



◀ **CLOCKWISE:** Copano Bay teems with birds; a carnival at the annual Fulton Oysterfest; St. Peter's Episcopal Church, built in 1871; Paradise Key Dockside Bar & Grill.



OUTDOOR ESCAPES

ATHENS, POP. 12,797

Start your day in this East Texas town with a visit to the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, home to a largemouth bass hatchery, fishing pond, walking trails, water wildlife displays, and a museum dedicated to fishing ephemera. After taking in the Dive Show at the underwater aquarium, try your own hand at scuba diving at Athens Scuba Park, where

clear waters fill an old brick quarry. Among the sunken treasures to explore: Ray Price's old tour bus. The park also offers swimming, snorkeling, and kayaking. —*Ashley Slayton*

SONORA, POP. 2,762

Locals tout the Caverns of Sonora, their subterranean National Natural Landmark, as the most beautiful show cave in Texas. They aren't exaggerating. See for yourself on a 1-hour-and-45-minute, nearly 2-mile tour of its crystal "palace." Or sign up for one of the cavern's tours featuring

rappelling, unique underground workshops, or photography. Above ground, explore the little-known, 37-acre Eaton Hill Nature Center & Preserve, a living classroom that studies the flora and fauna of the landscape's transition from the Hill Country to the Chihuahuan Desert. —*E. Dan Klepper*

BLANCO, POP. 2,012

Blanco calls itself the "Lavender Capital of Texas" as home of Hill Country Lavender farm and the annual Lavender Festival in June, complete with tours

of lavender crops, growing tips, and music. If swimming or fishing's your thing, head to Blanco State Park, where you can pitch a tent and stretch your legs along the Blanco River. At Real Ale Brewing Company, sip an unfiltered beer and toss washers. Each spring, the brewery hosts the popular Real Ale Ride, with Hill Country routes ranging from 15 to 80 miles and beer at the finish line. (This year, a weather postponement has pushed the ride to Oct. 26). —*Pam LeBlanc*

CLOCKWISE FROM
TOP: Inn on the
Creek; the shop at
Salado Glassworks;
a bicycle fence.



Salado

POP. 2,351

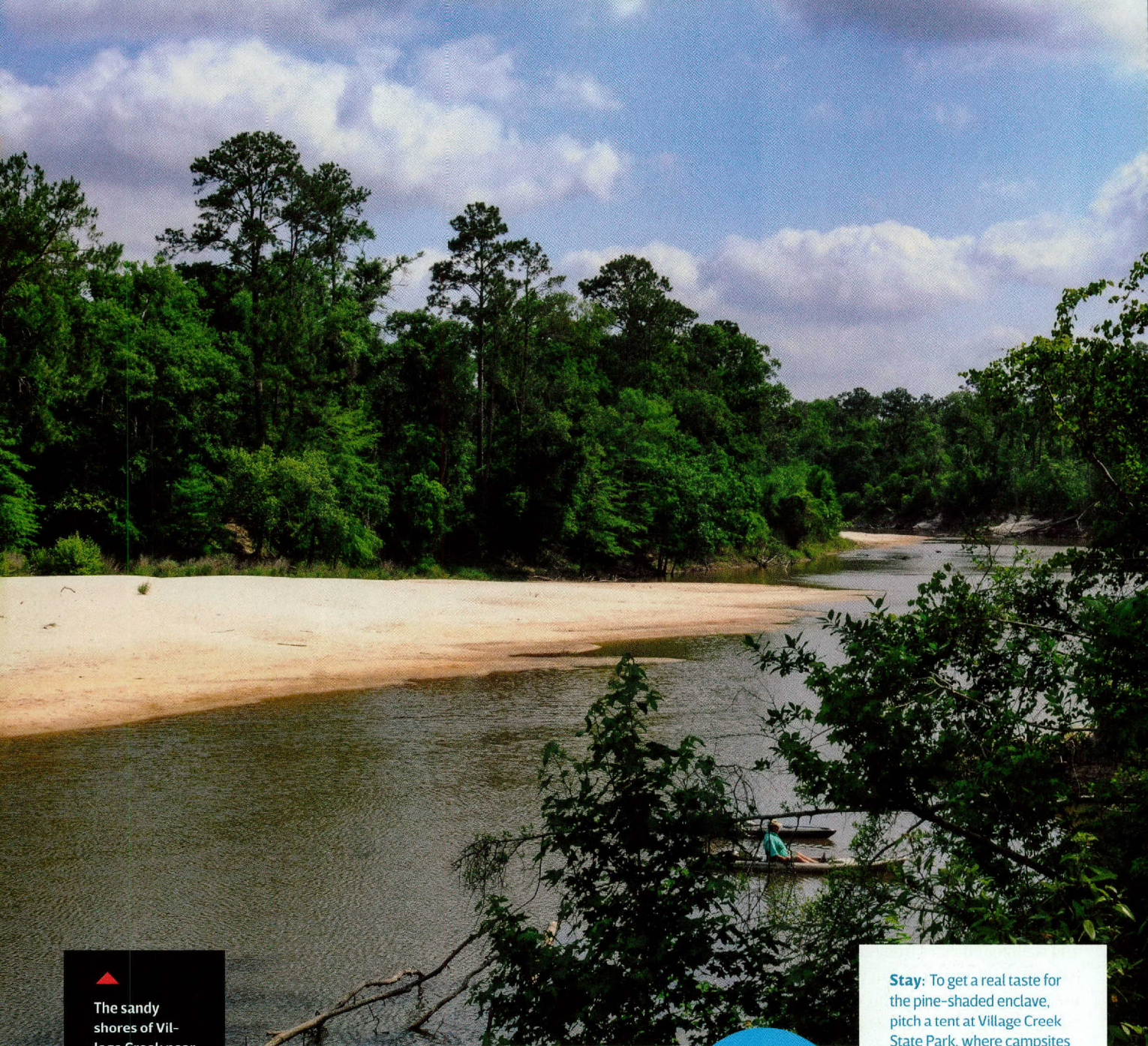
A historic Chisholm Trail stop and low-key artistic enclave, Salado suffered in recent years during heavy construction on Interstate 35. “The village was getting a bit draggy, a bit worn out, and now has completely renewed itself,” says Tyler Fletcher, a 40-year Salado resident and owner of Fletcher’s Books and Antiques. He pointed to a new generation of businesses like Barrow Brewing Co. and Chupacabra Kitchen drawing new visitors to the town as welcome signs of rebirth.—*Cynthia J. Drake*

Stay: The Stagecoach Inn, which dates to 1861, closed for a two-year renovation before reopening in late 2018 with a popular restaurant and bar, and design nod to its midcentury days as a motor lodge.

Eat: Alexander’s Craft Cocktails and Kitchen at the Inn on the Creek offers an eclectic menu complemented by views of Salado Creek and a secret passage upstairs to a speakeasy bar and dining area.

See: Catch a summer evening production of *Salado Legends*, a long-running show about the history of Salado at the outdoor Tablerock Amphitheater.





▲
The sandy shores of Village Creek near Lumberton.

Stay: To get a real taste for the pine-shaded enclave, pitch a tent at Village Creek State Park, where campsites rub shoulders with magnolia and dogwood trees.

Eat: Hungry travelers should swing by the Catfish Cabin, a family business known for fried hushpuppies and catfish, as well as crawfish pie, fried shrimp, and oysters.

See: Take in a round of disc golf at Lumberton City Park, or hike the dense forests at Village Creek State Park. Birdwatchers listen for wood ducks, herons, owls, and woodpeckers; and paddlers guide canoes down a creek the color of café au lait.



Lumberton

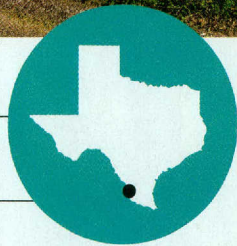
POP. 12,692

Lumberton originally rose as a sawmill town but today has evolved into a fast-growing bedroom community for nearby Beaumont. Each spring, azalea blooms brighten its neighborhoods, and in balmy weather, outdoorsy types head outside to paddle or hike. In Village Creek State Park, crews are wrapping up renovations after Hurricane Harvey flooding two years ago. “To me, Lumberton has been rejuvenated,” says Ann Hansen, a social worker and business owner. “It’s not just a drive-through place now. It’s a growing community with young families.”—*Pam LeBlanc*



San Ygnacio

POP. 667

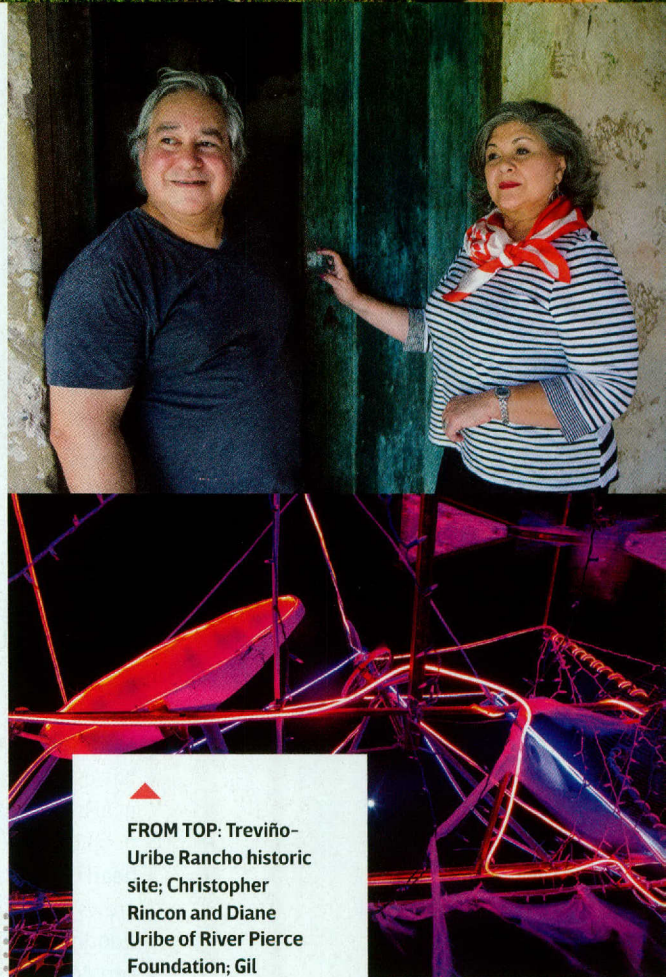


A community of artists, rich history, and nature blend together in the tiny town of San Ygnacio along the Rio Grande. Artists have been drawn to the historic architecture since the 1970s. Noted painter and sculptor Michael Tracy created the River Pierce Foundation, which has worked to preserve San Ygnacio's historic buildings, including the 1830 Treviño-Uribe Rancho. Catering to birders, bed and breakfast Posada Paloma opened this year, along with the River Pierce Foundation Visitors Center & Museum. "It's a very historic town that just feels like it's out of this era," says Nydia Tapia-Gonzales, director of Texas Birding and a Preservation Texas board member. "It's quiet, and there are no stores and no traffic." —*Cynthia J. Drake*

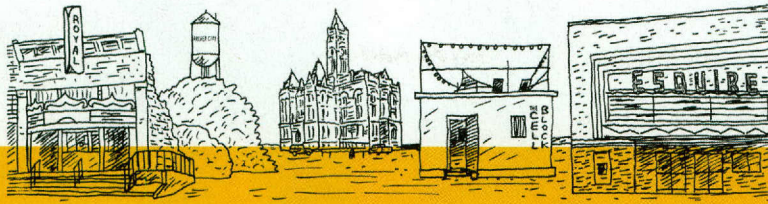
Stay: Posada Paloma offers rooms and casitas for rent, with breakfast included.

Eat: You won't find any restaurants in San Ygnacio, but 15 miles away in Zapata, Tacos El Tejano is known for guacatacos and papas asadas, Mexican-style loaded baked potatoes.

See: Visit the town square to see historic buildings in various states of renovation, and bring your binoculars to try for a rare sighting of a Morelet's seedeater, which lives in the cane along the Rio.



▲ FROM TOP: Treviño-Uribe Rancho historic site; Christopher Rincon and Diane Uribe of River Pierce Foundation; Gil Rocha's *South Texas Phototaxis*.



CULTURAL TREASURES

HALLETTSVILLE, POP. 2,625

That fiddles, kolaches, polka, and sausage all have their own festivals in Hallettsville pretty much sums up the Lavaca County seat. This is Czech/German country, with a painted church (St. Mary's) and the impressive Lavaca Historical Museum. The best time to visit is on the fourth weekend of April, when the Knights of Columbus Hall hosts the Texas State Fiddle Championship, known as the Fiddlers Frolics. The KCs also host the state straight domino tournament, which started in the early 1950s and draws

upwards of 200 players in late January.

—Michael Corcoran

CARTHAGE, POP. 6,521

As the old homeplace of Tex Ritter and Jim Reeves, as well as one the best white bass runs in Texas, Carthage deserved to be recognized long before mortician Bernie Tiede shot wealthy widow Marge Nugent and stuffed her into her own freezer—the true tale behind Richard Linklater's 2011 movie *Bernie*. Regardless, the headliner for music fans is the Texas Country Music Hall of Fame & The Tex Ritter Museum, a 13,000 square-foot showcase of memorabilia such as one of singing cowboy Gene Autry's Western suits and the leather jackets and pants Kris Kristofferson

wore in the 1973 film *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*.

—Susan L. Ebert

ARCHER CITY, POP. 1,744

Clinging to the wind-scoured Panhandle Plains, Archer City could well have fallen into obscurity save for native son Larry McMurtry, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Lonesome Dove*. The 1971 film based on McMurtry's third novel, *The Last Picture Show*, was filmed in Archer City and precipitated the restoration of the Royal Theatre that starred in the movie's title role. Nearby, the 83-year-old McMurtry himself presides over *Booked Up*, a shop with nearly 200,000 books. "Booked Up exists because books improve the culture, wherever they

may be," McMurtry says. "And the citizens of Archer City, my hometown, deserve to have books in their lives."—Susan L. Ebert

CLIFTON, POP. 3,453

A budding art scene in Clifton, a former railroad town located 33 miles northwest of Waco, radiates from Clifton Art Alley, a vibrant mural collaboration curated by local writer and farmer Kaye Callaway. The alley is also home to The Cell Block, a 1930s two-cell jailhouse converted into a boutique hotel. While in town, catch a film at the refurbished art-deco ClifTex Theatre and take a stroll to browse antiques at Bosque County Emporium and locally made goods at 219 Artisan Market.

—Veronica Meewes



◀ The San Ygnacio Bird Sanctuary.

CLOCKWISE:
Hancock Springs
Free Flow Pool;
Eve's Café;
Colorado Bend
State Park.



Lampasas

POP. 6,681



Swimmers have long flocked to Lampasas in the summer for the Hancock Springs Free Flow Pool—one of the oldest pools in Texas, dating to 1911, and one of seven mineral springs in this town on the northern edge of the Hill Country.

And over the years, the town has capitalized on the crystalline alkaline beauty of its springs with public art, such as the whimsical installations in the Hanna Springs Sculpture Garden. There's more quirky art, too: Between 2008 and 2017, artists designed eight murals around town that depict Lampasas' heritage and culture, first sketching them out as elaborate paint-by-numbers and enlisting the entire town to complete them. While downtown, stroll the courthouse square and tour the recently refurbished Lampasas County Courthouse.

Jamie Garrett grew up in nearby Bend and, except for her college years, has lived in Lampasas ever since. "Lampasas is full of hidden treasures and is intent on keeping its small-town identity," she says. "I can't imagine living anywhere else."—Susan L. Ebert

Stay: For about the price of a chain hotel, book a night at Jamie Garrett's restored 100-year-old farmhouse on Airbnb.com.

Eat: Indulge in authentic German schnitzel at Eve's Café on the courthouse square.

See: At Colorado Bend State Park, 70-foot Gorman Falls awaits hikers who tackle the moderate 3-mile round trip. On the way back, head north to Stoneledge Winery and Vineyard for wine tastings and panoramic hill-top vistas.

Albany

POP. 1,937



With a fine art museum flourishing inside an 1878 jail building,

Albany mixes cultural attractions both historic and modern with its down-home atmosphere. The Old Jail Art Center hosts a heady rotation of exhibits, along with pre-Columbian relics and works by American and European artists. New to the center are delightful oral history videos from founding families, telling stories of Albany's heritage, and from art historians detailing the town's wealth of art.

Nearby Fort Griffin State Historic Site chronicles the region's frontier history, an untamed era that comes to life with the community production of *Fandangle*, an outdoor musical staged annually in late June for 80 years.

Shopkeeper Pati Jones says Albany exemplifies small-town simplicity: "Kids still play outside and people go fishing or just go walking down Main Street. You can see incredible art, and you can also see people on horseback at the Dairy Queen drive-through." —*June Naylor* 🐾

Stay: A comfy night's sleep is assured in the two-bedroom 1930s rock cottage called Dye Guest House, and there's a boutique hotel in the works on Main Street.

Eat: The Beehive is popular for steaks and a glass of wine or a cocktail. Find puffy tacos and fajitas at Los Cazadores Mexican Grill and a scoop of ice cream at Vintage Vanilla.

See: Me & Mrs. Jones stocks necklaces and earrings, along with casual clothing and embellished straw bags.



▲
FROM TOP:
Vintage Vanilla;
the Shackelford
County
Courthouse.

THE TEXAS WORLD TOUR



BY MICHAEL CORCORAN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY NICK LU

Texas is perhaps the most self-contained state in the union, with the mindset of an island continent: Anything you need, you can get right here. That includes the itinerary of a world traveler. To visit Paris, London, Palestine, Athens, and Dublin, your gas card is the only passport needed. Borders crossed: zero.

Oh, you'll rack up more miles than Willie Nelson's bus driver in this ironic sojourn. The French and British cities of Paris and London, respectively, are actually closer together than their Lone Star counterparts. But Earth, just north of Lubbock, is only 470 miles from Mars, in Van Zandt County. Planet Earth is about 34 million miles from the Red Planet on the other hand—and not a Buc-ees along the route.

Sometimes the Texas towns were named by homesick immigrants. Berlin was a German settlement, for instance, while Praha (Prague) continues to show its Czech influence. The Ector County seat of Odessa was named after the city in the Ukraine, which also has a short-grass prairie landscape. The biggest difference is our Odessa puts goal posts on some rectangles of grass and uses an inordinate amount of electricity lighting up Friday nights.

It's tough finding fresh names in such a huge state, but some of our ancestors maybe just got a little lazy. Internationally named Texas burgs often use alternate

pronunciations to give it their own twist, so Italy is "It-lee" and Palestine is "Pal-es-TEEN" and Moscow is "Mos-COE" and Oxford is "Ox-erd."

The Paris in Texas presents a replica of the Eiffel Tower sporting a cowboy hat, and our Dublin is best known for producing an iconic beverage the color of Ireland's Guinness Stout, but many of our Euro-named townships don't reflect the originals. There's not a single four-piece rock band with killer harmonies in Liverpool, Texas, and nobody plays hockey in the Panhandle town of Canadian, where "eh" is how you pronounce the first letter of the alphabet, not something to tack onto every other sentence, eh?

With just under 100 residents, Geneva, in Sabine County, isn't big enough to host any convention. Meanwhile, check out pizza's second billing at Good Time Video and Pizza in Naples, Texas. The cries of "Mamma Mia!" can be heard all the way from the three-syllable Italy.

Other Texas towns that share names with countries include China, Scotland, Ireland, Egypt, and Turkey. But Bob Wills' hometown is named after the bird, so "Turkish" food there comes with stuffing and cranberry sauce.

Let's take a closer look at some of our internationally named towns. They may not have world-famous attractions, but they each have their charms.



EDINBURG

Named in 1911 after a prominent local businessman who was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, this sports-crazed town's castle is an arena built for the Rio Grande Valley Vipers, its NBA developmental league team. Downtown Edinburg, the seat of Hidalgo County, is well-served by the McIntyre Streetscape Project, which transformed a city street into a walking trail. Terrific birdwatching, too, can be found at the Edinburg Scenic Wetlands.

ATHENS

While the Greek capital is the cradle of Western civilization and the well-spring of philosophy, the Athens in Texas claims to be the birthplace of the hamburger sandwich (circa 1900), so we'll call it even. Ole West Bean & Burger is probably the best place today to revisit the culinary history that started in a small café downtown. And with last year's revitalization of the Texan Theater as a live music venue, the outpost has its own mini-Parthenon.

FLORENCE

While Florence, Italy, is known for its Renaissance masterpieces, this small town is focused on the art of meat processing. Florence High School offers a Meat Science program that has students running their own meat market. Unless you're Michelangelo's David, you gotta eat! (And wear clothes!) If you'd rather have the cooking done for ya, the Florence Diner downtown is known for its breakfast menu and serves a fantastic cheeseburger.

LONDON

One of the most famous Texas anthems, which some think is titled "I Wanna Go Home with the Armadillo," is actually named "London Homesick Blues." Gary P. Nunn wrote the lyrics when he was a down-on-his-luck cowboy across the pond, but it gets lyrically confusing when bands play it at London Hall, the town's 1900 dance hall. It ain't Royal Albert Hall, but London Hall is one of the greatest of the original Texas dance halls still in operation.

PALESTINE

The Middle East is big on museums, but it's hard to imagine being more entertained than at the Museum for East Texas Culture. Every aspect of life in the Piney Woods is on display, including black history. The top floor is devoted to late District Judge Bascom Bentley III's impressive sports collection, which includes a football helmet from every high school team in Texas. There's also memorabilia from NFL running back Adrian Peterson, a Palestine native.

EGYPT

An hour southwest of Houston, this town—still in recovery from the ravages of Harvey—has barely enough residents to make a human pyramid, but the Egypt Plantation, which predates the Civil War, is still operational and open for group tours (25 people minimum). The slave quarters, built in the 1850s, reveal a chilling part of its history.



CANADA



EARTH



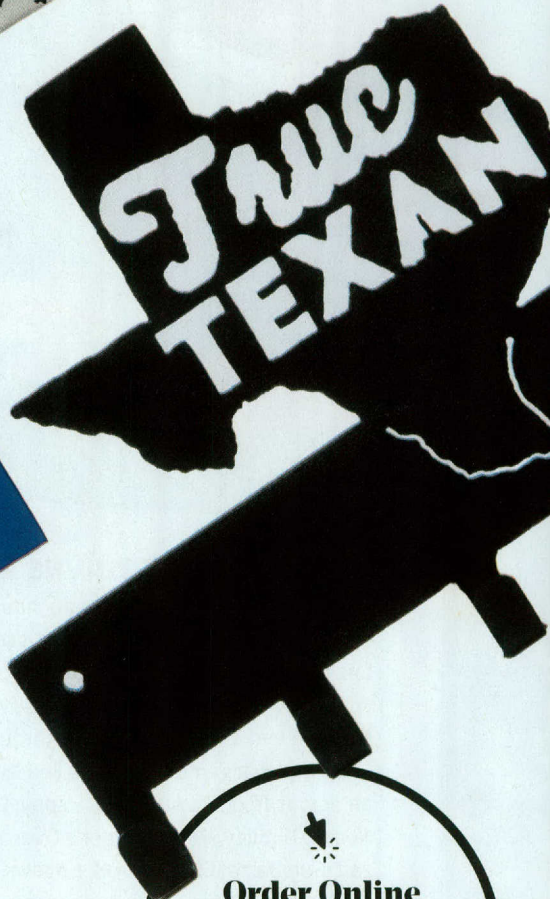


THE STRANGEST TOWNS YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF

Texas contains 254 counties and thousands of cities and towns, so it's not easy coming up with a name that hasn't already been claimed. In several cases, Texans have named their towns like hippies do kids or rednecks their dogs. Welcome to Oatmeal, Texas! Did you drive all the way from Ding Dong or did you take the laid-back, scenic route through Cool?

Let's play a game. We'll give you 18 names and you tell us the one that's not an actual Texas town: Salty, Happy, Cut and Shoot, Hoop and Holler, Bigfoot, Noodle, Smiley, Whataburger's Overrated, Eureka, Utopia, Jot-Em-Down, Tarzan, Gun Barrel City, Nimrod, Hogeye, Nameless, Fairy, and Dime Box. Some of these are even beautiful places where Texans live and prosper!

The Texas road map is funnier than most humor books. Looking closely will also possibly give you a million-dollar idea. Would Harold Jenkins have been as big a star if he didn't see "Twitty" on a Texas map and—pairing it with a town from his native Arkansas—change his name to Conway Twitty? Wonder how close he came to calling himself Conway Muleshoe? 🐾



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Chiles and Spice and Everything Nice

DeWitt Clinton Pendery started selling spices to Texans in 1870; today his descendants sell to the world

By Susan L. Ebert



PENDERY'S WORLD OF CHILES AND SPICES
1407 Eighth Ave., Fort Worth.
Open Mon-Fri 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.;
Sat 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
817-924-3434; penderys.com

Step beneath the top hat logo gracing the dormer over the front porch of Pendery's World of Chiles and Spices in Fort Worth, close your eyes, and breathe deep: Intermingled fragrances from exotic lands flood your olfactorys—perfumed Sri Lankan cinnamon; pungent Iranian cumin; sultry Jamaican allspice; smoky Spanish paprika; and chiles, lots and lots of chiles.

"I've been coming here since I was a kid," says David Hollister, the Fort Worth born-and-bred executive chef at Dallas' Gas Monkey Bar and Grill. "I have them make a lot of my proprietary blends such as

barbecue rubs, chili powder blends, and creole seasonings. Every restaurant I've ever worked for, I've tried to get them to switch to Pendery's."

Not just restaurant chefs, but throngs of Texas chiliheads and home cooks favor Pendery's chiles and spices for their freshness and purity. Chili cook-off participants rely on Pendery's fresh-ground chiles for a competitive edge, including Dallas dentist Ted Hume, who won the Tolbert Men's State Open in 1995 and 2001, the Tolbert Texas State Open in 2001, and the Original Terlingua International Chili Cookoff in 2003 and 2012. Hume's "Root Canal" chili blend remains popular with Pendery's clientele.

The Pendery's story began nearly 150 years ago when aspiring spice merchant DeWitt Clinton Pendery came to Texas. "He'd been working in the family tea and grocery business in Cincinnati and decided to join his brother in then-untamed Fort Worth," says Clint Haggerty, the company's general manager and Pendery's great-great grandson. "He cut a fine figure as he disembarked the stagecoach in his long frock coat and silk top hat, with his carefully waxed handlebar mustache. The cowboys jeered at him, and one sent a bullet whizzing through his top hat. DWC casually picked up the hat, dusted it off, placed it back atop his head, nonchalantly gathered his belongings, and continued on his way. According to family legend, this earned him immediate approval and respect."

"With an international appetite for 'all things Texan,' our products sell all over the world."

Look again at the top hat logo, emblazoned with "1870," and you'll see the hole where the bullet sailed through.

Pendery grew his fledgling dry goods business, specializing in "fancy groceries" like preserved, bottled, or canned foods, spices, teas, and other delicacies prized in a frontier town. He also developed a keen interest in regional Texas seasonings, especially the dried-and-ground chile peppers used to impart flavor to tough, range-fed beef. He experimented with ways to dry and grind the fiery chiles and developed his own proprietary blend of chile spices, christening it "Chiltomaline." By 1890, Pendery was advertising Chiltomaline via handbills on stagecoaches and in cafés and hotels, extolling its medicinal benefits. "The health-giving properties of hot chile peppers have no equal," he wrote. "They give tone to the alimentary canal, regulating the functions, giving a natural appetite, and promoting health by action of the kidneys, skin, and lymphatics."

Each generation of the Pendery family followed in their patriarch's footsteps, making Pendery's one of the oldest family-owned-and-operated businesses in Texas today.

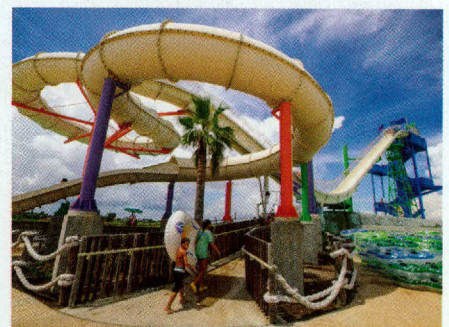


FROM LEFT: Colorful spices, Pendery's General Manager Clint Haggerty with a portrait of his great-great grandfather, DeWitt Clinton Pendery.

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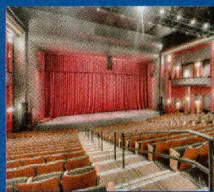
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“Each successive generation has faced its own unique challenges, having to adapt to changing times and tastes,” Haggerty says. “I can recall when ground chipotles were considered exotic. Asian and Indian immigrants, bringing their cuisine with them, have also created new demand for spices endemic to their food.”

Haggerty has also leveraged the chef-driven aspect of Pendery’s business. Proprietary blends of chili powders, barbecue and steak rubs, creole seasonings, and even bulk marinades for restaurants and other institutions account for about half of its business. Pendery’s brisk wholesale trade has delayed the opening of its long-anticipated second retail store in Dallas, where its factory and warehouse are located.

Have no fear, however, that the retail side languishes. “The world’s become a smaller place, thanks to the internet,” Haggerty says. “We used to print more than 100,000 catalogs at a time, and now it’s down to about 60,000, since most folks order online. With an international appetite for ‘all things Texan,’ our products sell all over the world—I’m working with a rabbi to create a kosher barbecue rub to be sold in Israel.”

Pendery’s currently sells many hundreds of types of herbs, spices, and chiles, plus highly sought-after items such as pure vanilla extract (with a whole Madagascar Bourbon vanilla bean tucked inside), powdered Worcestershire sauce (to give chili blends and barbecue rubs that umami kick), and chile threads (a traditional kimchi ingredient). Still, it’s chiles that brought ‘em to the dance, and Pendery’s remains locked in their fiery embrace, with about 30 unique ground chiles, more than a score of whole dried chile varieties, and a couple dozen chili blends.

The “granddaddy of ‘em all”—the original Chiltomaline—still graces Pendery’s lineup. Since it predates when garlic was able to be successfully dried and powdered, a version based on the original recipe but with the addition of garlic and other flavors joins the array of blends.

Its name? Top Hat. 🐼

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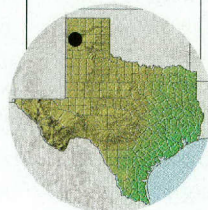
Three For the Road

This Route 66 diner and its owners do hospitality more than just halfway

By Joe Nick Patoski

MIDPOINT CAFÉ

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Location is important for practically any dining establishment. For Midpoint Café in Adrian, location is everything. The restaurant would likely not exist if it wasn't precisely 1,139 miles from Chicago and 1,139 miles from Los Angeles—the halfway point on storied Route 66.

As critical as location may be to Midpoint's existence, the three women running the six tables, six booths, and five counter stools make the difference. That would be Brenda Hammit, her sister Carrie O'Leary, and their mother, Sandy Adams, who together took over Midpoint in early 2018.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The restaurant's sign; co-owner Sandy Adams (middle) chats with diners; Elvis pie.



It's the tail end of lunch on an early spring day, and the café hums with activity inside, while outside, a family of six from Oklahoma on their way back home from Albuquerque poses for a photo in front of the Midpoint sign. (Service stops at 3 p.m.; it's just pie and drinks after that.) A cowbell clangs whenever the door opens, inevitably followed by O'Leary's greeting, "Hi guys, how are ya?" Almost all the Formica tables and Naugahyde chairs are occupied—half by locals happy to have the café open again after its extended winter break (which runs from November to mid-March), half by the first wave of foreign tourists,

chasing their dreams of midcentury American car culture down the nation's most legendary highway.

To Midpoint Café's international visitors, driving Route 66 via car or motorcycle is a requisite pilgrimage. The café opened as Zella's in 1928 in a one-room building with a dirt floor that now houses the gift shop. In 1947, the café footprint expanded, and it operated 24 hours daily. With Route 66 being the main east-west highway across the Texas Panhandle, the café and businesses like it were always busy until Interstate 40 bypassed most of Route 66 in the 1970s.

Over the years, the café's name changed to Jesse's, Peggy's, Rachel's, and Adrian Café. The name change to Midpoint Café in 1995 reflected major historic preservation efforts along Route 66.

Today, the road is littered with remnants of motels, cafés, and gas stations—a few preserved and repurposed as museums or visitor centers—but Midpoint Café still functions as originally intended. It's the oldest continuously operating café on Route 66 between Amarillo and Tucumcari, New Mexico. And it's a family affair, furthering the nostalgic feel. O'Leary takes your order, Hammit cooks your meal, and Adams, aka Grandma, makes the pies.

The women grew up raising race horses in California. Hammit moved to Adrian 25 years ago, married, and raised a family. "This town has really been good to me," she says. A few years after her husband died, her mother moved in to help with her kids. Adams worked at the café for six years, and O'Leary joined them about a year and a half ago. The family bought the business in early 2018.

Customers from 84 different countries dined at Midpoint last year.

Tony, a trucker en route to Mesa, Arizona, on a long-distance haul, sits at the counter enjoying a cup of coffee, a slice of apple pie, and a hug and small talk from Grandma. A couple speaking French sit at one table. A couple speaking German have moved from a booth into the adjoining Route 66 souvenir shop to look over T-shirts, bumper stickers declaring "We Made It Halfway!," key chains, name plates, shot glasses, and other tchotchkes.

The menu is classic American roadside diner—breakfast done several different ways, marvelously messy Angus burgers with all the vegetables and optional green chile and jalapeños, plus black bean burgers, a bologna sandwich, and grilled cheese with green chile. (Adrian is less than 25 miles from the New Mexico line, which explains the green chiles.)

To Midpoint Café's international visitors, driving Route 66 via car or motorcycle is a requisite pilgrimage.

The standouts are the Midpoint Ugly Pies, which aren't ugly at all, but rather culinary beauties ranging from classics like apple and pecan to creative hybrids like the Elvis pie, made with chocolate, peanut butter, and banana cream. "The coconut cream pie wins the popularity contest," Hammit says, but the three women running the place are partial to the lemon meringue pie with graham-cracker crust. It comes from a recipe created by Adams' mother. "That was our childhood pie," Hammit says. Adams makes only one lemon meringue pie a day. In six and a half months in 2018 "we sold 1,050 pies," Hammit says proudly.

Midpoint is on the itinerary of most Route 66 group tours and is particularly popular with motorcycle caravans. "They fly into Chicago and rent [motorcycles] from a couple different companies," Hammit says. "We know all the travel guides. They call ahead, say they'll be in the following morning about 10 o'clock. We cover the counter with blueberry and chocolate muffins, get a bunch of coffee cups out, charge them \$5 for coffee and a muffin, they go to the gift shop, look around, take pictures, have a good time, and then they're off. This happens all the time. There are always a lot of Australians."

Halfway down old Route 66, Midpoint Café and people like Hammit, O'Leary, and Adams are no nostalgia trip. They're the real thing; the kind of place and people that others from all over the world come to see and experience. And where they happen to be has everything to do with it. 🍌

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MESQUITE BEAN FLOUR is naturally sweet and made from roasted mesquite beans grown in South Texas.

Flour Power

A Rio Grande Valley family business hopes to reintroduce mesquite beans to the American palate

By Cynthia I. Drake

When Victoria Cappadona was growing up in McAllen in the 1970s, she would pluck ripe beans from wild mesquite trees and pop them in her mouth, savoring their sweetness.

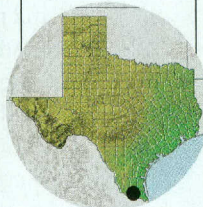
Around 6 inches long, the beans looked like strands of brown beads dangling in bunches from the scrubby trees characteristic of the South Texas landscape. “That was candy for a lot of kids,” Victoria remembers.

Little did she know that she would later play a role in reviving this obscure ingredient for a new generation with her line of Cappadona Ranch products—including mesquite bean flour. Because mesquite beans are legumes, which have high fiber and are a good source of protein, some dieticians praise their nutritional benefits.

Victoria; her husband, Justin Cappadona, a fellow South Texas native; and their three sons live on a cattle ranch in Linn, 20 miles north of Edinburg. While some ranchers and farmers have a thorny relationship with mesquite trees—they are sometimes called “devil trees” because of their hardiness and resistance to removal

CAPPADONA RANCH

Products are sold at many local retailers, including the Museum of South Texas History in Edinburg. 956-867-1819; cappadona-ranch.com



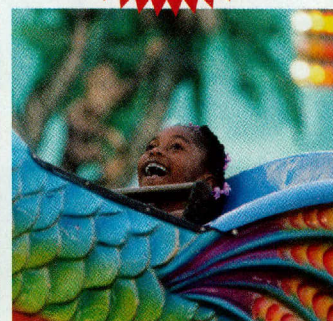
methods—Victoria saw something special in them.

First, she began experimenting with jelly recipes using mesquite beans. Then, in a kitchen mishap, she roasted the beans in the oven when she intended to dry them. “My boys were fighting, the FedEx guy was at the door, and I just got totally sidetracked,” Victoria recalls. She ground the roasted beans into coffee, recalling something she’d read about Texas Civil War soldiers using it as “camp coffee” in times of scarcity.

After peddling her jams and coffees at area farmers markets for a few years, some customers started

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JUSTIN CAPPADONA
and son Cayetano use
a tractor to pick prime
mesquite beans from
higher branches.

inquiring about flour, which could also be milled from mesquite beans. She figured she'd give that a shot, too.

The result is a gluten-free, nutrient-rich product that can substitute for regular flour in baking but can also be sprinkled raw on food like a condiment or a natural sweetening agent.

"I have a lot of customers who put it in their salt shaker so that when they're craving something sweet, they'll sprinkle it on their oatmeal—some people even sprinkle it over their vegetables," she says.

The finely milled golden flour smells like nutty cinnamon. Taste it on its own and you'll get hints of sweet, spicy mocha and dark fruit.

"Some people ask me, 'Did you add sugar to this? You didn't add vanilla? You didn't add flavoring?' and I'll tell them, 'No, it has natural sugar. This is straight-up mesquite bean flour,'" Victoria says.

She praises the product's versatility—it can be used in baked goods such as banana-nut bread and cookies, as well as to make sweet tea by mixing a few tablespoons into brewed tea and straining with cheesecloth.

Though mesquite beans haven't become a staple of modern American diets, they were a major food source for indigenous communities in the Southwest and Mexico for thousands of years. The beans are harvested summer through early fall.

Though a lot of mesquite bean products on the market come from South America, Texas is home to 75 percent of mesquite

trees in the U.S. and stands poised to emerge as a bigger supplier.

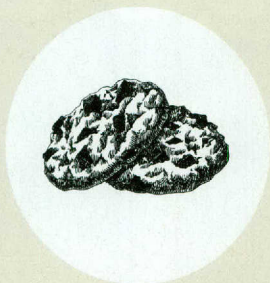
"We're now at a unique place where we can reclaim mesquite pods as an important culinary ingredient that's representative of our foodways," says Sandeep Gyawali, Austin-based founder of Texas Mesquite Movement, whose mission is to revive the use of mesquite in kitchens across the state. "Over the past several years, there has been development of a mesquite pod processing industry in the state, along with food and beverage artisans willing to use it in their craft. We've brought mainstream awareness of this delicious crop, and we hope to define it as a true flavor of Texas."

The ingredient's low glycemic index is especially important in the Rio Grande Valley, Victoria says, because of the high rate of diabetes in the area. Recent reports from the University of Texas—Rio Grande Valley place the rate of Type II diabetes in the Valley at about 30 percent, nearly 20 percent higher than the statewide rate.

Victoria says she enjoys educating people about Texas' edible native plants that have largely been ignored in modern times. While Cappadona Ranch currently sells its products in local stores and online, Victoria hopes to expand the business throughout Texas and the rest of the country.

"I'm trying to educate the public as much as I can because this is a rediscovery," she says. "It's natural, it's native, and it's so nutritious for us."

It's an idea worth chewing on. **L**



Mesquite Cookies

Makes 12 to 16 cookies

INGREDIENTS

1 stick butter, softened

¾ cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 egg

¼ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon baking soda

½ cup mesquite bean flour

½ cup white or wheat flour

½ cup rolled oats

½ cup of your choice of mix-ins:

chocolate chips, raisins, or nuts

DIRECTIONS

Cream butter and sugar with a wooden spoon, then stir in vanilla and egg until just incorporated. Stir flours, baking soda, and salt in a separate bowl and then combine with wet ingredients. Add in rolled oats and mix-ins. Scoop small balls of dough onto a baking sheet. Bake at 350 F for 10 to 15 minutes, or until lightly browned.

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TEXANA



OTIS BRYAN, 94, of Overton, was in the fifth grade when the London school exploded. "I'm one of the lucky ones that got out."

The Day a Generation Died

New London Museum recalls the most deadly school tragedy in U.S. history

By Paul McDonnold

Newsman Walter Cronkite would, in his later years, recall it as one of the worst stories he ever covered. Morning dawned over New London on March 18, 1937, with clear skies and mild temperatures. Along Main Street, students made their way to school.

Despite the pall of the Great Depression hanging over the nation, the future looked bright for the schoolchildren of Rusk County, thanks to a sea of oil and gas quivering below their feet.

Seven years earlier, thousands had celebrated as the earth shuddered and the Daisy Bradford No. 3 drilling rig shot a black fountain of oil into the sky. The town opened London Junior/Senior High School two years later, a showplace built on oil revenue. In 1934, the local football stadium became one of the first in Texas to

get lights. But soon, the same congealed energy that made all that possible would literally explode, causing the most deadly school tragedy in U.S. history.

A granite monument on Main Street memorializes victims, and in Pleasant Hill Cemetery, a numbing plethora of graves bear the same date—March 18, 1937. But to really understand the disaster and its aftermath, a visit to the New London Museum offers deeper perspective. Local survivors and other volunteers led an effort to convert a local café into a museum in 1992, establishing it in a modest building in the shadow of the memorial cenotaph, just across the street from what is now West Rusk High School. The museum still operates a café and soda fountain up front, a sweet touch to an otherwise somber topic.

“The whole world responded to this tragedy,” says volunteer archivist Becky Tyner, pointing to a display papered with messages of condolence that arrived in its wake—Japanese calligraphy, drawings from Swiss schoolchildren, telegrams from multiple countries. “This is the telegram from Hitler,” she says, noting a missive of sympathy in German bearing the infamous chancellor’s name.

The museum covers various facets of New London history, such as how local leaders tacked “New” onto the name when they discovered a London already established in Central Texas. But the museum’s greatest focus is the 1937 explosion. The story begins with the school’s decision to save money on heating by tapping into a nearby pipeline carrying cheap “waste” gas, the byproduct typically burned off by well flares. Before long, the equipment began to leak, and natural gas seeped into the school’s basement. Students and teachers reported mysterious headaches in the week leading up to the explosion, but the odorless, colorless gas continued to leak undetected. No one realized the school was sitting on a bomb. A defective belt sander would be its fuse. When a shop teacher plugged in the tool, it created a spark—and New London changed forever.

Townpeople heard a rumble and roar. They saw trees bend back and rubble arcing across the sky. For miles around, people thought lightning had struck. Then they saw a smoke cloud rising. They hurried toward the sight, from farms, oil fields, and stores, curiously at first, then in terror as word spread that the school had exploded.

Townpeople heard a rumble and roar. They saw trees bend back and rubble arcing across the sky. For miles around, people thought lightning had struck.

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Inside the demolished building, students and teachers came to, half-blinded by dust. Some were able to stagger into the open. Hundreds of others lay in the rubble pile. As men and women arrived at the scene, they scrambled to pick at debris until their hands bled. Bystanders raced the injured to medical facilities in surrounding towns. Many went to Tyler, 25 miles away. Incredibly, a state-of-the-art hospital there sat with pristine equipment, abundant supplies, and zero patients. Mother Frances Hospital would be forced into action one day ahead of its planned gala opening.

At the blast site, the rescue effort grew and organized. Lines formed to pass peach baskets in and out to remove debris. The dead were laid together with scraps of paper or cloth over their faces. The number of them grew disturbingly as the stadium lights came on, and work continued through the night. Rain fell on the grisly scene. Reporters raced toward East Texas, including 20-year-old Cronkite, a cub reporter for United Press International

who was in Dallas at the time. The Associated Press sent Felix McKnight, who penned a poignant opening line: "Today, a generation died."

In the chaos of the aftermath, far-flung observers overestimated the death rate. The museum displays a number of front pages from newspapers that chronicled the tragedy in screaming headlines. The *Boston Herald* reported 670 killed, the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 600. The final official count was lower but shocking enough at 294, including 16 teachers and students in each of the school's fifth through 11th grades.

When the rescue, clean-up, and funerals finally ended, New London was left to reckon with its grief. Some residents coped like soldiers returning from war. They locked the memories up, never spoke of them. Some moved away. But as the years came and went, survivors slowly began to seek each other out, slowly began to talk. In 1977, Wayne Shaffer, a New London elementary student at the time of the explosion, helped organize the first of the

Soon after the New London disaster, the state approved new safety regulations for natural gas use in public and commercial buildings.

memorials that continue to this day. They have become general reunions for all New London/West Rusk High graduates.

Near the back of the museum, a video exhibit titled *Healing* shows survivors telling stories of life after the explosion. One woman speaks of depression setting in every spring, another of her husband's thrashing and grinding his teeth in the night. But the reunions marked a turning point for some survivors. They began to find peace. The wife of the man with night terrors tells of his metamorphosis: "He



THIS PAGE:

A cenotaph memorializing the victims.

OPPOSITE PAGE:

John Davidson's sister, Ardyth, was killed in the blast.



grandchildren and great grandchildren.

John Davidson serves as a docent at the museum, where an exhibit is dedicated to his sister, Ardyth Davidson. Ardyth played on the school's champion softball team before being killed in the blast. John was not yet born at the time of the tragedy. Like many other victim families, the Davidsons donated some of Ardyth's personal items, including a fragment of the coat she wore to school on the fateful day. Fourteen-year-old Ardyth, an eighth-grader, had been the Davidsons' only child. In their grief they decided to try for another.

"If [the explosion] hadn't happened, I wouldn't have been born," John says.

The ramifications of the explosion extended well beyond New London. Fifth-grade survivor Carolyn Jones spoke in front of the Texas Legislature, asking that the danger of another, similar tragedy "be forever blotted out of existence." Soon thereafter, the state approved stringent new safety regulations for natural gas use in public and commercial buildings. Other states and nations followed suit.

In the museum, a strange-looking cylindrical device reflects another change in state laws brought about by the explosion. Among all of the deeply human and emotional displays, it seems out of place. Yet Tyner looks down at it as if it is critical to the story. It is an odorizer, designed to add the pungent smell of rotten eggs to natural gas, as required by the new regulations.

"This is our legacy," Tyner says. "These children died, now a lot of other people don't have to." 🐶

New London Museum, 10690 Main St., Overton, is open Mon-Fri 9 a.m.-4 p.m. year-round and Sat 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

March-August. The next New London School Explosion and All-School Reunion is scheduled for March 19, 2022, the 85th anniversary of the tragedy.

The café opens Mon-Fri 11 a.m.-2 p.m. Call 903-895-4602; nlsd.net

sleeps at night [now]. I can't believe it."

Survivors and witnesses of the 1937 blast are fewer and fewer. At the 2019 reunion, Robert Vernon Wiley, who was in third grade in 1937, was one of only two. The elementary school had already let out for the day, and Wiley was walking home with his brothers when he heard the blast. Now 91, he recalls the explosion's volume, and how he continued home as his father ran in the other direction to help. He also remembers the many, many victims.

"Sixth grade was the one that lost so many," he says.

Inside a large glass case nearby, a beautifully detailed model shows how the school looked in 1937, which is nearly identical to the current building rebuilt in 1939. On the wall behind the display, a large white board with black lines of paper-doll-style figures count the victims by grade level. The sixth-grade line stretches farthest—33 boys and 54 girls.

"It inundated that sixth-grade class," adds Wiley's daughter, Diana Crenshaw. "The yearbook next year had almost no sixth-grade students in it."

Such memories are horrific, but Wiley looks well, wearing a blue suit and a ball cap that says "Happy 90th." He lost his wife of 61 years, Marye, in 2012, but she left him with four daughters as well as



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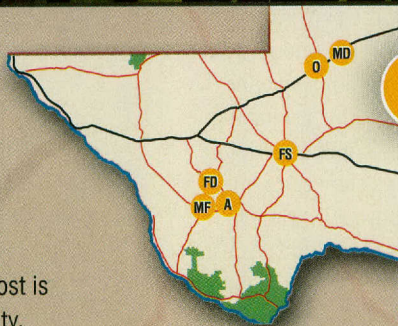
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August 4 - Pet Splash at Sherwood Aquatic Center
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August 16-25 - Real Women Have Curves
Play exploring the Latina immigrant experience, set in a tiny sewing factory in East Los Angeles – Permian Basin Playhouse

August 17-18 - Permian Basin Gun Show
Livestock, Crafts, Sewing, and more at Ector County Coliseum



MD

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visitmidland.com

Sep 6-8 - SeptemberFest at the Museum of the Southwest
Sep 14-15 - High Sky Wing CAF AIRSHO



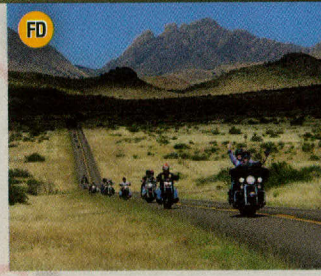
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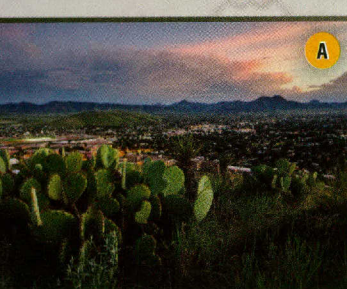
Aug 17 - Main Street Dance
Aug 23-25 - Comanche Springs Rodeo

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fortdavis.com

Aug 22-25 - Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration



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Aug 9-10 - Big Bend Ranch Rodeo
Aug 30-Sep 2 - *En Plain Air: The Art of Painting Outdoors* free workshop

MARFA—It defies easy explanation, yet any google search yields thousands of opinions. Marfa is tough to get to—tougher still to explain. But once you arrive, you get it.
visitmarfa.com

Sep 26-29 - Trans-Pecos Festival of Music+Love @ El Cosmico
Oct 11-13 - Chinati Weekend



MF

EVENTS



A Site for the Senses

A Washington County farm hosts its 13th annual lavender festival

Nestled in the heart of wildflower country, Chappell Hill Lavender Farm is a sprawling 3,000-plant landscape that offers an aromatic and scenic oasis for the soul. So when the farm hosts its free festival—held every year in August—attendees can enjoy all that and more: shopping with local artisan vendors, live music, lavender cuisine, demonstrations, plant sales, and miniature goats and horses for petting. Held during the farm's twice-yearly cutting season, guests can stroll the expansive property and cut their own lavender if it's in bloom, or enjoy the solitude of the gazebo. But even if the lavender isn't flowering, the scenery makes this a worthy daytrip, topped off with a glass of ice-cold lemonade—lavender flavored, of course. —*Mikela Floyd Kinnison*

Lavender and Wine Fest, Aug. 10
Chappell Hill Lavender Farm,
2250 Dillard Road, Brenham
979-251-8114;
chappellhilllavender.com/lavender-festival

Arts & Culture

CENTRAL TEXAS

New Braunfels Lone Star Gourd Festival and Art Show

July 31-Aug. 4

The Texas Gourd Society hosts this quirky festival featuring a gourd art competition, gourd art sales, gourd supplies, and technique classes.

New Braunfels Civic/Convention Center, 375 S. Castell Ave. 337-376-9690; texasgourdsociety.org

San Marcos Bubble Fest

Aug. 10

From a ball pit and bubble dance floor to the Art Squared Arts Market, there is free entertainment for children of all ages. *Downtown San Marcos, 111 E. San Antonio St. 512-393-8430; downtownsmtx.com*

Waco

Be the Astronaut

Through Sept. 8

This exhibit premiered at Space Center Houston to record-breaking crowds and teaches STEM-based content via a fusion of state-of-the-art video game technology and traditional exhibitry. Visitors learn about the challenges of space-flight, then apply that knowledge as they fly spaceships, pilot landers, and drive rovers in a thrilling narrative adventure to orbit Earth, the Moon, Mars, Ceres, and Jupiter. *Mayborn Museum Complex, 1300 S. University Parks Drive. 254-710-6558; baylor.edu/mayborn*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Corsicana

Faces and Places of the Chihuahuan Desert

Aug. 9-Sept. 14

This exhibition explores the topography and natural beauty of the Chihuahuan Desert and considers the human impact upon it over a period of 30 years. *Pearce Museum, 3100 W. Collin St. on the campus of*

Navarro College. 903-875-7642; pearcemuseum.com

Dallas

Celebrate the Children

April 13-Oct. 15

Sculptor Gary Lee Price's newest exhibit features handcrafted bronze sculptures of children for guests to interact with throughout the garden. *Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden, 8525 Garland Road. 214-515-6615; dallasarboretum.org*

Grand Prairie Ladies Night Out

Aug. 3

Don't miss this comedy tour hosted by Nene Leakes and featuring Loni Love, Sherri Shepard, Adele Givens, Jess Hilarious, Kym Whitley, and Janelle James. *The Theatre at Grand Prairie, 1001 Performance Place. 972-854-5111; theatregp.com*

Salado

Salado Legends

July 20, 27; Aug. 3

This outdoor musical drama depicts life in Texas in the 1850s. *Tablerock Amphitheater, 409 Royal St. 254-947-9205; tablerock.org*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Kent Ullberg: Celebrating the Wild and Wonderful

Through Aug. 18

The museum is filled with more than 50 of Ullberg's sculptures depicting detailed fish, sea mammals, turtles, native birds, and majestic land animals. *Art Museum of South Texas, 1902 N. Shoreline Blvd. 361-825-3500; artmuseumofsouthtexas.org*

Galveston

Jaston Williams: Don't Blame the Car!

Aug. 10

Known nationally as the co-author, co-star, and producer of the four award-winning plays in the Greater Tuna series, Williams is a writer, performer, and Grand favorite who will leave you in stitches. *The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice St. 800-821-1894 or 409-765-1894; thegrand.com*

DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT? If you think your event might be of interest to Texas Highway readers, submit your information at texashighways.com/submit-event

WEST TEXAS

San Angelo
Frontiers: An Artistic Exploration of Space Travel, Technology, the Age of Discovery, and More
Through Sept. 8

Artwork related to exploration is exhibited in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the first moon landing. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, 1 Love St. 325-653-3333; samfa.org*

Food & Drink

CENTRAL TEXAS

Bertram
Oatmeal Festival

Aug. 30-31
Experience an "oatrageous" weekend of fun in the towns of Oatmeal and Bertram. Enjoy a morning trail ride, parades, food, music, games, arts and crafts, a baking competition, a barbecue cookoff, and a street dance. Run for Your Oats, a 3.3-mile race, is held in downtown Bertram Saturday morning. *Various locations. 512-244-6357; oatmealfestival.org*

Bryan
Daytime and Moonlit Harvest Festivals

July 26-27; Aug. 3, 10, 17
The festival kicks off with a blessing of the vines followed by grape picking and stomping in the vineyard. Enjoy a buffet and complimentary wines. Attendees receive a souvenir "Harvest Crew" T-shirt to sign with purple stomping feet. *Messina Hof Estate Winery, 4545 Old Reliance Road. 979-778-9463; messinahof.com*

Fredericksburg
Hill Country Sunset Harvest
Aug. 23

Stomp grapes at the winery's secondary location, followed by a dinner featuring a vertical port wine tasting. *Messina Hof Hill Country Winery, 9996 US 290 E. 830-990-4653; messinahof.com*

Fredericksburg
Grape Stomp at Becker Vineyards
Aug. 24-25, 31; Sept. 1
Celebrating the end of grape harvest, barrels are cut in half and filled with grapes to stomp at this 23rd annual event. *Becker Vineyards, 464 Becker Farms Road. 830-644-2681; beckervineyards.com*

Waco
Margarita and Salsa Festival
Aug. 24

The 24th annual event features local bands and top country favorites in addition to margarita and salsa contests, where restaurants and individuals enter their recipes to compete. All proceeds benefit the scholarship program at the Heart O' Texas Fair and Rodeo. *Extraco Events Center, 4601 Bosque Blvd. 254-776-1660; extracoeventscenter.com*

NORTH TEXAS

Brownfield
The Grape Capital of Texas Vineyard Festival
Aug. 2-3

Enjoy food and wine pairings and tastings on Friday, and vineyard tours and wine competition awards on Saturday. *Texas Red Wines Event Barn, 2149 Tahoka Road. 806-637-2564; brownfieldchamber.com*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Richmond
Labor Day Backyard Barbecue
Aug. 31

Celebrate Labor Day weekend with traditional games and a 1930s-style barbecue at the historic George Ranch House. *George Ranch Historical Park, 10215 FM 762 Road. 281-343-0218; georgeranch.org*

History & Heritage

CENTRAL TEXAS

Bandera
Bandera Round-Up
Aug. 30-Sept. 1

Bandera honors its cowboy and Western heritage with a Longhorn Cattle Drive Parade, arts and crafts, music, gunfight reenactments, and a ranch rodeo. *Bandera County Courthouse Lawn, 500 Main St. 830-796-3045; banderacowboycapital.com*

Fredericksburg
Pacific Combat Living History Reenactment
Aug. 31-Sept. 1
See equipment and weapons used during WWII and a battle reenactment set on an island in the Pacific with flamethrower, tanks, uni-

formed actors, and more. *National Museum of the Pacific War Pacific Combat Zone, 508 E. Austin. 830-997-8600; pacificwarmuseum.org*

Fredericksburg
Texas Ranger Day
Aug. 3

The Texas Rangers Heritage Center honors those who have served and those still commissioned with a two-part event featuring historians and educational programs, including Ranger Camp reenactments and a cannon firing. *Texas Rangers Heritage Center, 1618 E. Main. 830-990-1192; trhc.org*

Stonewall
President Lyndon B. Johnson's 111th Birthday
Aug. 27

The public is invited to participate in this free event commemorating LBJ's birthday. *Lyndon B. Johnson State & National Parks. 830-644-2252; tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/lyndon-b-johnson*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Corsicana
Music and Musicians in the Civil War
Through Aug. 31

This Pearce Museum-produced program and body of work features information and visual aids about the role of music in the Civil War. It is composed of banners and artifacts illustrating how music influenced both the North and South, and served as recreation and inspiration for soldiers. *Pearce Museum, 3100 W. Collin St. on the campus of Navarro College. 903-875-7642; pearcemuseum.com*

Elgin
Escape Room—Haunted Hospital
Aug. 15-16

Learn about the historic Fleming Hospital's past while working through puzzles and challenges to figure out the hidden secret buried in its history. *Fleming Community Center, 802 N. Avenue C. 512-285-6434; elgintx.com*

Vernon
Summer's Last Blast
Aug. 9-10

Cruise one of the longest drags of North Texas and Southern Oklahoma. See the most prestigious classic cars, street rods, pro streets, and antiques cruise the streets as they did in the good ol' days. Listen to rock 'n' roll hits of the '50s, '60s, and '70s from a live

remote on the drag. *Various locations, Wilbarger Street. 940-886-8389; summerslastblast.com*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Leming
Battle of Medina Commemorative Ceremony and History Symposium
Aug. 17

This free, annual event honors those who died in the bloodiest battle for Texas independence 23 years before the battle of the Alamo. The commemorative ceremony is held under oak trees with reenactors presenting colors, a Native American prayer, wreath-laying ceremonies, and finally, a volley is fired using black-powdered rifles by period-dressed reenactors. *Atascosa County "Lonnie Gillespie" Memorial Annex, 25 E. Fifth St. 830-570-3289; atascosacounty.texas.gov*

Music & Dance

CENTRAL TEXAS

Bandera
Buck Sloan's Musician Reunion
Aug. 17-23

Bring chairs, camping supplies, snacks, and fans, and enjoy a community dinner every evening around 5 p.m. Listen to music, play music, or dance. *Mansfield Park, 2886 SH 16 N. 830-796-3045; banderacowboycapital.com*

Bastrop
Boogie Back to Bastrop—Country and Western Swing Festival
Aug. 23-24

This event celebrates and preserves Texas Western swing music and dance. Bands include Jeff Woolsey and the Dancehall Kings, the Rocky King Band, and Frank Cavitt and the Honky Tonk Doctors. *Bastrop Convention and Exhibit Center, 1408 Chestnut St. 512-332-8984; boogiebacktobastrop.com*

Boerne
Concert in the Cave
Aug. 31

The Marbrigo Trio have created their own hyper-romantic interpretations of the trio repertoire for viola, clarinet, and piano. *Cave Without A Name, 325 Kreutzberg Road. 830-537-4212; cavewithoutaname.com*

Gruene

Two Ton Tuesdays

Aug. 6, 13, 20

It wouldn't be summertime without popular rock-a-billy band Two Tons of Steel holding court in Gruene Hall every Tuesday evening—now in its 24th year. Come early for swing dance lessons. *Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. 830-629-5077; gruenehall.com*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Addison

Vitruvian Salsa Festival

Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24

Bring your dancing shoes every Saturday in August for live bands, DJs, free salsa lessons, and gourmet food trucks. *Vitruvian Park Amphitheater, 3966 Vitruvian Way. 972-450-7079; visitaddison.com/specialevents*

Dalhart

Fiddler's Contest

Aug. 3

The 24th annual old-time fiddling contest is free to the public, and sponsored by the Dalhart Area Chamber of Commerce. *Rita Blanca Pavilion, 1219 FM 281. dalhart.org*

Fort Worth

Rockin' the River— Live on the Trinity

Through Aug. 10

On summer Saturdays, watch a concert while floating in the Trinity River, or bring a chair or blanket and enjoy the view from shore. *Panther Island Pavilion, 395 Purcey St. 817-336-8791; rockintheriverfw.com*

Grand Prairie

Lost '80s Live

Aug. 24

Bring back the '80s with 100.3 Jack FM's live event. *The Theatre at Grand Prairie, 1001 Performance Place. 972-854-5111; theatregp.com*

Temple

Summer's Night of Art and Jazz

Aug. 17

Watch a live-art performance while listening to soothing jazz music under the stars. *Main Street. 254-298-5378; discoverdowntowntempletx.com*

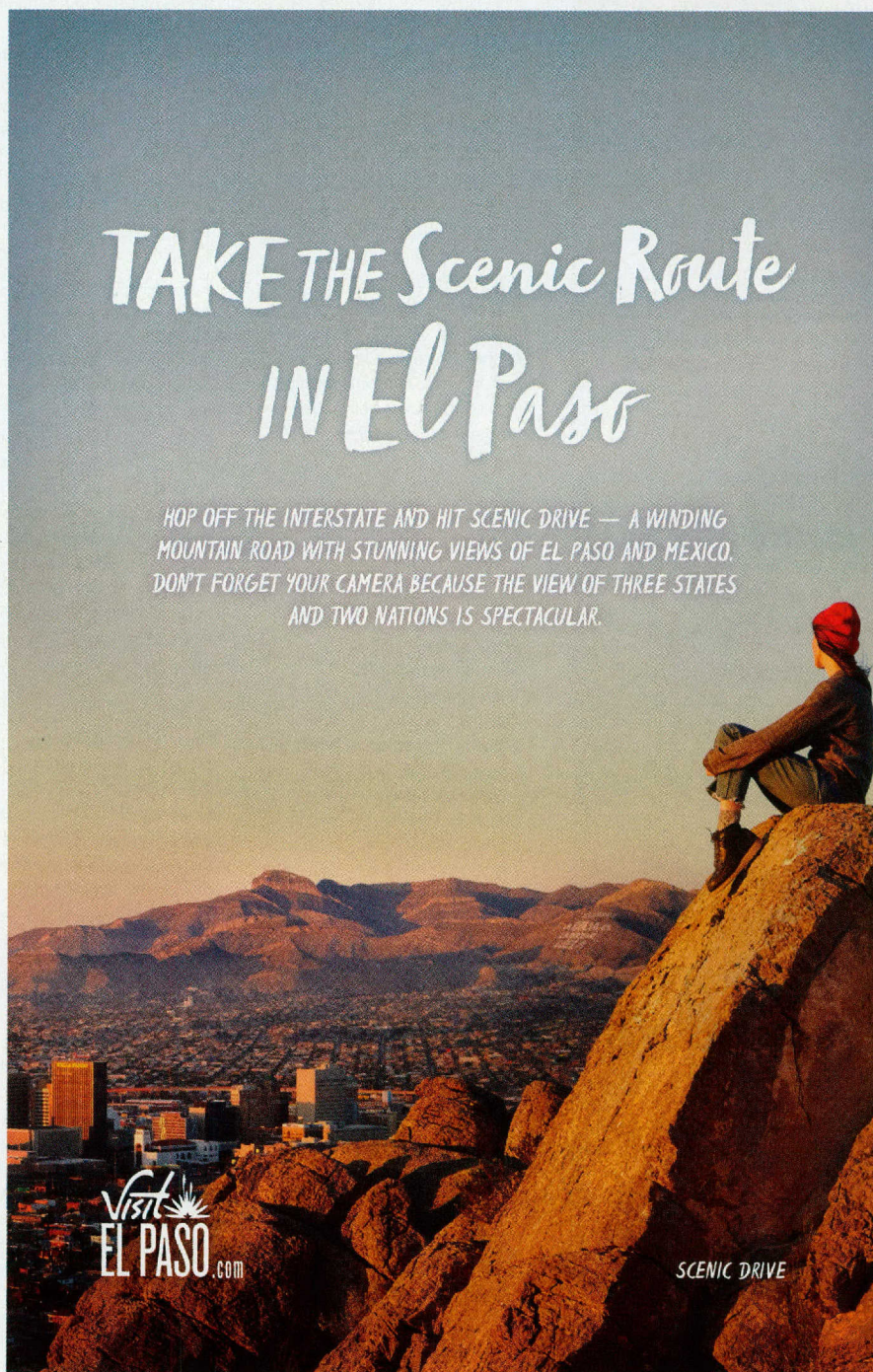
EAST TEXAS

Palestine

Dogwood Jamboree: "The Golden Age of Country"

Aug. 10

This Branson-style music show is filled with laughter and the golden



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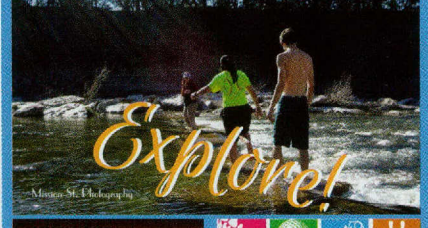
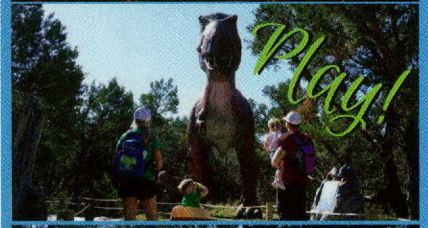
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EVENTS | AUGUST 2019

hits of country music. *Palestine High School Auditorium, 1600 SH 256 Loop. 903-729-7080; visitpalestine.com*

The Woodlands

Houston Symphony: Raiders of the Lost Ark
Aug. 29

Relive the magic of the silver screen and the original great adventure of Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with John Williams' epic score performed live to picture by a full symphony orchestra. *The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, 2005 Lake Robbins Drive. 281-364-3010; woodlandscenter.org*

Nature & Outdoors

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Wichita Falls

Hotter 'N Hell Hundred
Aug. 22-25

At one of the oldest and largest cycling events in the nation, more than 13,000 riders from across the globe come to Wichita Falls for four days of challenging and inspiring activities. *MPEC, 1000 Fifth St. 940-322-3223; hh100.org*

SOUTH TEXAS / GULF COAST

Port Aransas

Texas Legends Billfish Tournament

Aug. 7-11

This memorial saltwater fishing tournament is a big-money tournament that promotes releasing billfish and verifying the release on video. Boaters may leave from any Texas port, but the weigh-in, submission of videotapes, and dinner party are in Port A. *Weigh Station—Virginia's Dock, 815 Trout St. txlegends.com*

Port Aransas

Texas Women's Angler Tournament

Aug. 23-25

This is a women's-only fishing tournament benefiting The Purple Door, formerly The Women's Shelter of South Texas. More than 400 women anglers gather to fish the tournament. Each boat can choose its own theme, and awards are given for best-dressed boat and best-dressed captain. *Port Aransas Civic Center, 710 W. Avenue A. 361-779-8025; gofishtx.com*

South Padre Island

Texas International Fishing Tournament

July 31-Aug. 4

Surrounded by the Laguna Madre Bay and Gulf of Mexico, Port Isabel and South Padre Island play host to Texas' largest saltwater fishing tournament. Fishers young and old compete in one of three divisions: bay, tarpon, and offshore. *South Padre Island Convention Centre, 7355 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; sopadre.com*

South Padre Island

Ladies Kingfish Tournament

Aug. 9-11

The first all-ladies tournament in Texas is divided into two divisions, Bay and Offshore. *SPI Convention Centre, South Padre; Sea Ranch Marina II at South Point, Port Isabel, 7355 Padre Blvd. and 500 S. Point Ave. 956-761-3000; sopadre.com*

WEST TEXAS

Alpine

En Plein Air: The Act of Painting Outdoors

Aug. 30-Sept. 2

Partake in workshops of plein air (outdoor) painting at several locations around the Alpine area, and enjoy an exhibit of the work produced as well as examples of plein air and portrait painting by established artists from state and national painting organizations. *Various locations. 432-294-1313; bigbendartscouncil.org*

Fort Davis

Open Weekend at Davis Mountains Preserve

Aug. 9-11

The Nature Conservancy's Davis Mountains Preserve opens for hiking, biking, equestrian activities, picnics, photography, birding, and other outdoor pursuits on select days. *Davis Mountains Preserve, 25 miles northwest of Fort Davis on SH 118. 432-426-2390; nature.org*

Fort Davis

Davis Mountains Hummingbird Celebration

Aug. 22-25

Celebrate the wide variety of hummingbirds that pass through the Davis Mountains in the Hummingbird Capital of Texas. Past events have included silent auctions, hummingbird talks, door prizes, and numerous field trips for hummingbird spotting. *Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce, 100 Memorial Square, No. 4. 432-426-3015; fort-davis.com*

Ranches & Rodeos

CENTRAL TEXAS

Bandera

Bandera Round-Up Ranch Rodeo

Aug. 31

Activities include bucking broncs, steer tying, calf scramble, trailer loading, wild cow milking, and a stampede race. *Mansfield Park Rodeo Arena, 2886 SH 16 N. 830-796-3045; banderacowboycapital.com*

Boerne

Kendall County Fair and Rodeo

Aug. 29-Sept. 1

Held for more than 100 years, this annual festival includes vendors selling food, jewelry, and hand-crafted items; a pageant; a rodeo and livestock show; and a parade on Main Street. *Kendall County Fairgrounds, 1307 River Road. 830-249-2839; visitboerne.org*

Bulverde

Saturday Night Rodeo

Aug. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31

This rodeo features all types of Texas entertainment, from live music and dancing to mechanical bulls, mutton bustin, and calf scrambles. *Tejas Rodeo Company, 401 Obst Road. 830-980-2226; tejasrodeo.com*

Fredericksburg

Gillespie County Fair and Parade

Aug. 22-25

The 131st annual fair includes agricultural, livestock, and home skills displays. Enjoy horse racing, concerts, dances, a carnival, a parade, and midway—all at the oldest continuously running fair in Texas. *Gillespie County Fairgrounds, 530 Fair Drive. 830-997-2359; gillespiefair.com*

La Grange

Fayette County Fair

Aug. 29-Sept. 1

Enjoy a true Texas county fair with a queen's pageant, Little Miss and Mister contest, carnival, parade, a country store, creative arts, livestock shows, agricultural exhibits, a flower house, horseshoe and washer pitching, a fun run, barbecue cookoff, food, indoor and outdoor vendors, and loads of entertainment. Country music star Josh Turner headlines this year. *Fayette County Fair Grounds, 400 Fair Grounds Road. 979-968-3911; fayettecountyfair.org*

Sonora
Outlaw Rodeo and
Sutton County Days
Aug. 9-10

Take in a rodeo on Friday and Saturday nights and a dance on Saturday featuring Two Tons of Steel, Jason Boland and the Stragglers, and Fuerzzo. There is also a parade, arts and crafts, food vendors, the Little Mr. and Little Miss Sutton County contest, and the crowning of the new Miss Sutton County. *Sutton County Park and Arena, 1700 N. Crockett Ave. 325-387-2880; sonoratexas.org*

Uvalde
Palomino Fest and Pro Rodeo
Labor Day Weekend Celebration
Aug. 29-Sept. 1

This celebration started in 1996 as a dream by a local group of musicians who, as young brothers from a small town, dared to pursue their musical goals. The event has live music, a carnival, rodeo events, and a parade. *Uvalde County Fairplex, 215 Veterans Lane. 830-591-9040; palominafest.com*

NORTH TEXAS / PANHANDLE

Boys Ranch
Cal Farley's Boys Ranch Rodeo
Aug. 31

At the site of the old ghost town of Tascosa and where cattle still outnumber people, Cal Farley's Boys Ranch is hosting its 75th annual rodeo. The day starts with a 5K Rodeo Run, followed by a 1-mile fun run. After, adventureFEST is in full swing just outside the rodeo arena. *Cal Farley's Boys Ranch, 8 Julian Bivins Blvd. 806-533-1200; calfarley.org*

Dalhart
XIT Rodeo and Reunion
Aug. 1-3

Celebrate the cowhands who worked and farmed the 3-million-acre XIT Ranch at the 83rd annual event. Enjoy nightly rodeos, dances, and free food, including the world's largest free barbecue on Saturday. Activities throughout the weekend include a street parade, queen's contest, tractor pulls, a 5K run, craft show, melodrama, wild cow milking contest, nickel scramble, and fiddlers contest. *XIT Rodeo Arena, 2050 E. John Todd Road. xitrodeoreunion.com or dalhart.org*

Denton
North Texas Fair and Rodeo
Aug. 16-24

The annual nine-day fair and rodeo offers activities for all ages

including live concerts, horse and livestock shows, contests, cookoffs, food, and games. *North Texas Fairgrounds, 2217 N. Carroll Blvd. 940-387-2632; ntfair.com*

Dumas
Cowboy Classic Rodeo
Aug. 16-17

The 13th annual rodeo has professional riders competing for two nights. The rodeo also has events for kids, a queen contest, and rodeo clowns. *Moore County Rodeo Grounds, 1329 Durrett Ave. 806-935-2123; dumaschamber.com*

Mesquite
Mesquite Championship Rodeo
Aug. 24

Cowboys from around the world compete with the strongest horses, steers, and bulls in the country. This PRCA-sanctioned rodeo has been thrilling visitors since 1958. See traditional rodeo events in air-conditioned comfort. *Mesquite Arena, 1818 Rodeo Drive. 972-285-8977; mesquiterodeo.com*

Post
Stampede Rodeo
Aug. 8-10

This 75th annual event offers visitors a view of the Old West in true cowboy style, with a nightly rodeo and a parade Saturday on Main Street. *Post Stampede Rodeo Arena. visitpost.com*

Wichita Falls
Texas Ranch Roundup
Aug. 16-18

The original ranch rodeo celebrates 39 years of showcasing historic ranches, the hard work of true cowboys, and every facet of ranch life. Ranches compete in chuckwagon cooking, cowboy art, and of course, real ranch events. A tradeshow including bits, spurs, Western collectibles, and other items takes place both days. *Kay Yeager Coliseum, 1000 Fifth St. 940-716-5555; wfmppec.com*

WEST TEXAS

Alpine
Big Bend Ranch Rodeo
Aug. 9-10

Watch rodeo performances by real working cowboys, and enjoy a chuckwagon cookoff and evening dances. The event is sanctioned by the Working Ranch Cowboy Association. *Sul Ross S.A.L.E. Rodeo Arena. 432-364-2696; bigbendranchrodeo.com*

THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Rockwall

Burgers, boats, and big mysteries

BY CHET GARNER



As the season winds down, you may feel like you've hit a wall on summertime travel. But maybe a "wall" is just what you need... a Rockwall. With its vast lake, tasty food, and even a Texas-size mystery, this Dallas suburb is one wall you won't mind running into.

Rockwall County Historical Foundation Museum

This museum is a great place to walk through one of the most historic homes in town, see intriguing artifacts (like 100-year-old taxidermy), and ponder the mystery of the town's namesake: a rock wall. You see, early settlers of the area were digging a well when they discovered what appeared to be a manmade wall 20-30 feet underground. For decades, archaeologists have debated whether the rock wall is evidence of a pre-historic race or if it's a natural formation. To this day it still hasn't been entirely excavated, but a section of it was unearthed and now sits outside the museum for visitors to examine. It's a tripper-worthy head-scratcher. *901 E. Washington, 972-722-1507; rchfonline.org/museum*

Boots Burger

Just as intriguing is the fact that the best burger in town is served out of a converted garage. This home-based burger business has been serving tasty, greasy burgers for more than 50 years from the middle of a local neighborhood. There are no fries, no chicken options, and no places to eat on the premises, but Boots will set you up with a soda and a bag of chips to go. *701 Austin St., 972-722-5802*

Lake Ray Hubbard

Any summertime trip needs a way to outsmart the heat, and in Rockwall that's Lake Ray Hubbard. This massive urban lake offers plenty of options for outdoor recreation. You can rent boats or jet skis from Suntex Watersports, take a leisurely cruise with Harbor Lights, or if you're feeling up for a challenge, you can take a sailing lesson from the North Texas Sailing School. Powered boats are fun, but there's no feeling like whizzing through the water using nothing more than nature's wind. *lake-ray-hubbard.com*

A1 Golf Center

If you've ever been intimidated by high-class golf courses, then this is the place for you. This 9-hole, par-3 course was built by a turf and landscaping company behind their gravel yard. It's as laid-back as golf gets and the perfect place to knock a few balls around without worrying about country club etiquette. If you're like me, you'll want to bring plenty of extra balls, as the neighboring corn fields make for a tough place to retrieve those not-so-straight tee shots. *1805 E. Interstate 30, 972-771-3996*

Bin 303

Rockwall has no shortage of delicious, upscale restaurants, and this one is at the top of the list. Occupying a historic house just blocks from the old courthouse, this Texas-inspired restaurant mixes all the flavors of the Lone Star State with flair and ease, from Bandera quail brochettes to grilled Texas redfish and wood-fired steaks. *105 Olive St., 972-771-5303; bin303.com*

**Whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path,
I hope to see you on the road.**

Chet Garner is the host of The Daytripper® travel show on PBS. To view the Rockwall episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.

someone would take all the records away. Oscar did die eventually, and when we drive by on this trip, the place is now an antiques store.

THAT EVENING MY FOLKS AND I arrive at The Stampede, 2 miles outside of town on the Snyder Highway. We're here to see Jody Nix and the Texas Cowboys. My parents have danced here more times than they can count, and since I was a kid I've accompanied them more times than I care to count (they are my parents).

The Stampede has been a stop on the Texas dance hall circuit, which includes clubs as well as VFW and American Legion halls, ever since Jody's father, Hoyle Nix, along with Hoyle's younger brother, Ben, opened it in 1954. Its 65th anniversary celebration was held in May. Along with Bob Wills, with whom he was close friends, Hoyle was one of the top connoisseurs of Western swing and probably best known for arranging and popularizing "Big Ball's in Cowtown." The hall is a venue for the Nix family, but over the years a number of important musicians have played here, including Wills, "the king of Western swing," Johnny Bush, who wrote Willie Nelson's set opener "Whiskey River;" and Bobby Flores, a Grammy-award winning bandleader.

The Stampede's roughly 4,500-square-foot, stucco-painted superstructure is unassuming, with a logo on the outside still declaring it "Home of Hoyle Nix and his West Texas Cowboys." The interior walls were never finished, and the exposed wood lends the place a rustic feel. As Jody always says, "It was built to dance in. It wasn't built for looks." Still, there's a cozy warmth to the place with its red tablecloths and glowing string lights hanging above the dance floor. The only nods to the passage of time are the black light hand stamps at the door, the "No Smoking" sign, and the fact that men are now allowed to wear hats indoors.

We carry a small cooler filled with

a few beers because The Stampede is BYOB, but I'm a little embarrassed of my Austin-brewed IPAs, which immediately peg me as an out-of-towner. We sit at a table near the stage, directly facing the open, rectangular dance floor. Our neighbors are a couple from San Angelo. They tell us, "We don't like CMA country music. We're into steel and fiddle." We enthusiastically agree. They say their favorite was Ray Price, who they got to see once at the defunct Stardust in Odessa.

Jody Nix begins with a moment of silence for a woman who had been coming to The Stampede for 30 years and died earlier that day. Then he opens with her favorite song, "Sugar in the Coffee," turning to his band and saying, "G chord, boys." It's a fast one, and the dancers jump right in.

Fashion is eclectic. My mom is in all black, punctuated by her red cowboy boots, and my father sports the "Canadian tux" of denim-on-denim, his uniform since retirement. As I look around, there are people in vests and monogrammed shirts and big turquoise jewelry; 20-somethings in Vans and New Balance tennis shoes; folks in sequins and leopard print and camo print, and at least two Stars and Stripes button-downs from the George Strait clothing line. Eventually, some teenagers slink in wearing letter jackets, and the night is complete.


From the stage, Texas Independence Day gets a shout-out as do The American Rodeo Finals. The band launches into "Key's in the Mailbox" and the floor fills again. For me, the dance floor is as much an attraction as the band itself, the way the couples swim counterclockwise, sometimes in a coordinated swirl as though all one organism, and other times bumping along with little eddies spinning off from the main surge of two-steps. Onstage, Jody says, "How about a little Bob Wills, boys?" and launches into "Faded Love."

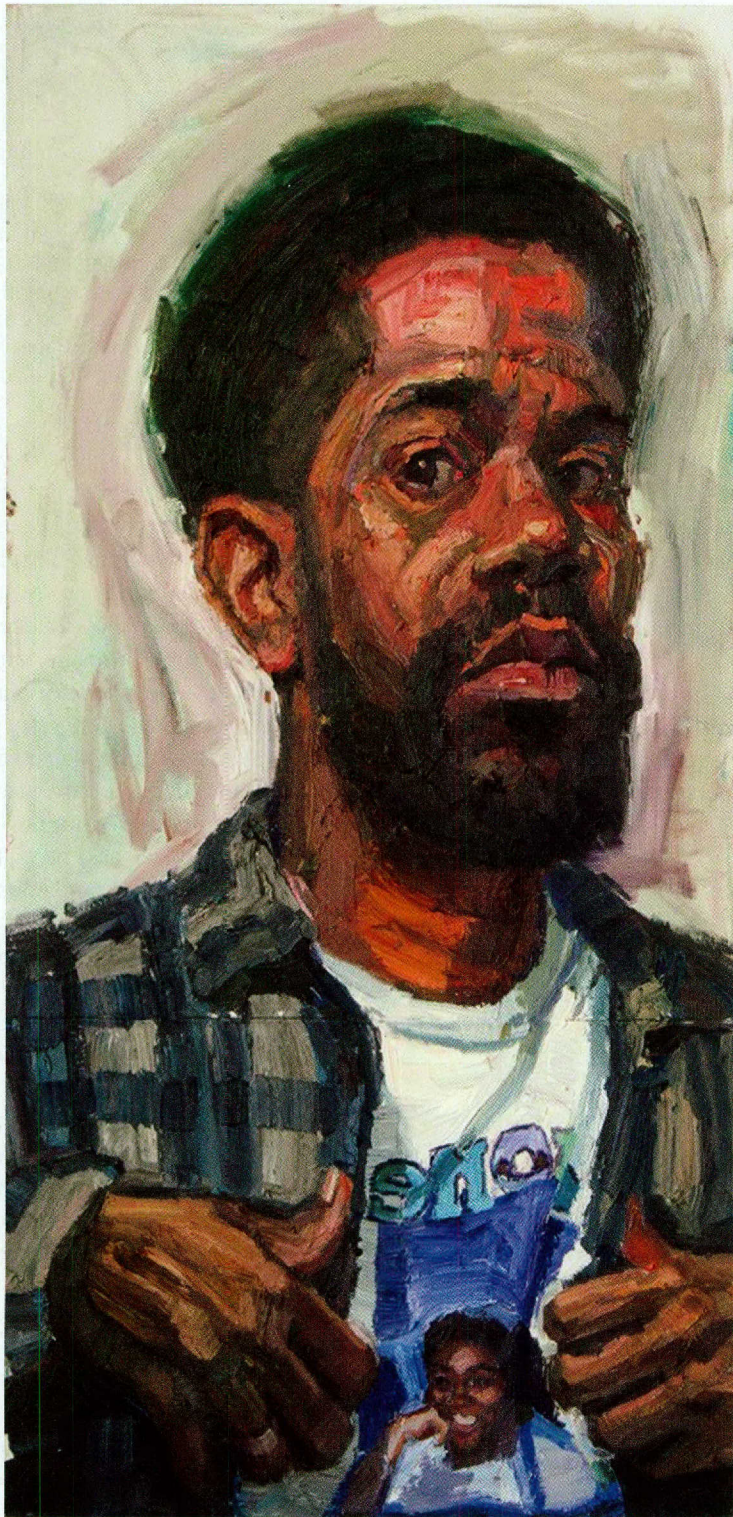
There are all ages and body types here. The kiddos, traded around the dance floor by various adults, are being educated in more than dance moves; they are absorbing an entire musical culture. I

see more Latino revelers than in the past, but no African-Americans in the crowd tonight. As much as I love this place and the Western swing it celebrates, I can't escape the ways in which country music culture can be insular, even unwelcoming. Today, the country music charts tend to be lily-white.

When the band serves up "Jim, Jack, and Rose," one of my late Uncle Randy's favorites, my Dad and I two-step together, singing the hard-partying lyrics under our breath: "Jim Beam, Jack Daniels, and Sweet Gypsy Rose." At one point, Jody dedicates the Bob Wills song "My Adobe Hacienda" to my parents, "Joe and Alice Specht from Abilene." He adds, "There's a man who knows more about the Nix family than I do, and I'm one of 'em." He's referring to my father's music articles, which include *The Handbook of Texas Music* entries for both Hoyle Nix and The Stampede.

As the night wears on, I wonder if I'll have the chance to bring my daughter here one day. Will The Stampede still be around and, if it is, will she see it as more than just a small-town curiosity? Will she disdain rural life or, like Hollywood movies, fetishize it? Will she love the twin fiddles and steel guitar like we do, or roll her eyes and beg to go home and tinker with her iPad? I'd like to think that because of how I was raised, this place will always feel like home. But the truth is, I grew up and moved away, and I'm not sure I can have it both ways.

Because of the isolated setting, it's unlikely The Stampede will be overrun by hipsters and tourists, as has happened to dance halls in and near Austin and Houston. But that's also what makes it vulnerable. It has to stay beloved by the locals to survive. Of course, unlike the Settles and the glittering parts of Big Spring's past, The Stampede didn't shutter when the executives moved to Dallas or even when the Air Force base closed. It's been here through the booms and the busts, and if this enthusiastic crowd of dancers is any indication, it isn't disappearing anytime soon. So, let's waltz, boys! 



Sedrick Huckaby

Art for the people: From the streets of Poly to a U.S. president

By Michael Hoinski

Sedrick Huckaby is a Big Momma's boy. The Fort Worth contemporary artist is devoted to the spirit of his late grandmother, Hallie Beatrice Carpenter, or "Big Momma," and finds inspiration in her century-old home. Located in Fort Worth's Polytechnic Heights neighborhood, or Poly to locals, the house's raw shiplap walls are adorned with Huckaby's paintings of family and neighbors. Huckaby creates works here, but next year the space will take on new life when Huckaby opens it as a project space for artists, tentatively called Big Momma's House.

After attending college on the East Coast, Huckaby came back to his native Texas to make art about his people, alongside his wife, Letitia Huckaby, a photo-based artist. A University of Texas at Arlington art professor and 43-year-old father of three, Huckaby draws, makes prints, sculpts, and does installations, but painting is his predominant form. He applies thick layers to canvas in a technique called impasto. It's a style that attracted former President George W. Bush, a budding artist, to enlist Huckaby as a teacher. Huckaby's low-key demeanor is at odds with his credentials. He was the recipient of a 2008 Guggenheim Fellowship and this May was a finalist in a National Portrait Gallery competition. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, all collect his work.

A rooster crows outside as Huckaby imagines Big Momma's House taking shape as a project space. In one room are pews configured to resemble a chapel, where he envisions hanging paintings of abstracted figures. In another room are wire birdcages intended as a statement on incarceration. And in a third, 101 tiny sketches depict people he encountered on the street, a project called *The 99%*. Huckaby says the lithographs, completed in 2013, changed the way he approaches art.

Q: What is The 99% project?

A: Highland Hills is the neighborhood I grew up in. It's a predominantly black neighborhood in south Fort Worth. It's rather small. There's one way in and one way out. This project was about hearing their voices. I went around drawing people and talking to them, and I would take little quotes from different ones and put them on the drawing. Somewhere along the line, I discovered I like drawing, painting, and sculpture, but I also like social engagement. I think art can be more than just making objects of contemplation. I'm discovering that now.

Q: Where did you get your start as an artist?

A: Like many of the kids in my neighborhood, I played basketball and street football. But I also participated in a lot of the programs that we had. We had a rich cultural legacy with groups like Imagination Celebration [a youth arts advocacy nonprofit now called Imagination Fort Worth]. I took my first painting class with them at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth during middle school. They had classrooms set up in the back of the Modern, and they would have a professional artist come in and teach painting. There was a lot of diversity of things like that.

Q: What is the focus of your work?

A: Usually I deal with issues of family, faith, and community. It's important to tell the stories of the people here. When was the last time you heard somebody mention Fort Worth on the national stage? You might hear Dallas. I think that in every city, in every state around the U.S., there are these small pockets, communities that you really just don't hear from. This is the place I know. It's about sticking a microphone to them and saying, "What are we here?"

Q: In 2008, you did a series of paintings and drawings capturing the final scenes of your grandmother's life. Why are *Big Momma* and this house important to you?

A: She was a person who was central to the family's unity. This house is where people would gather at the holidays, and everybody felt very welcome. As I've worked here and had to remove the carpet and take the sheetrock off the walls, you just start to really unveil the whole idea and thought of this space. There are all the memories that we have as a family. But the house was originally built in 1900, well before we ever came. So you see the histories of all of these people that have come and added to this place. You'll see spots where doors were boarded up and windows were in different places. And so it becomes not just the memories that I have, but a discovery of lives lived.

Q: What are your plans for making this house a project space for artists?

A: I'll probably start with three artists in the first year who have ideas about how to engage the community and let them do a project here. I'm interested in artists who have that kind of mindset of not just enlivening the community and not just bringing a cultural beauty and an enhancement to the community, but who can also help to elevate it and transform it.

Q: What's an example of that?

A: There was a lady I talked to for *The 99%* project who talked about a community orchard. I think it's a biblical idea that has to do with gleaning. When they would plant the fields, they would leave the corners of the fields for anybody who might be in need to just take what they need at the corners. And so she had an idea about a kind of gleaning garden. It was an orchard. It would just be a lot where trees would grow, and in due season people could pick fruit from it. And I thought, huh, that's interesting. There are people with all sorts of ideas out there, and they just need to be taken seriously.

Q: What was it like working with President Bush?

A: He was naturally drawn to using a lot

Two Sedrick Huckaby paintings are on display at UT-Austin's Blanton Museum of Art—*Big Momma's House: Living Room*, through this summer, and *The Family: Rising Sun*, until fall 2020. His work is regularly on view at Valley House Gallery & Sculpture Garden in Dallas. huckabystudios.com

of paint. I would try to show him about the use of impasto or glazing or wet-into-wet, or whatever kind of technique that seemed like it would be helpful, and just offer my critique. He is a pretty courageous artist. One of the things you want students to do is work on their own. And every time I would come, he'd have three or four things he was working on. I distinctly remember how easy he was to teach and willing to jump right into a lesson and not hesitate.

Q: What are some of your favorite spots in Fort Worth?

A: The Botanic Garden is great. I like that it has a balance of both manicured areas and areas that are less manicured and a little more natural. They have these wonderful Japanese gardens. It's like a world, and then there are worlds within that world. The museums are really great: the Amon Carter, the Modern, the Kimbell, the Community Arts Center. In that area there's also the Casa Mañana Theatre and the Museum of Science and History. So the whole Cultural District over there is great. There's also this wonderful bike trail along the Trinity River that goes for miles and miles. I don't even know where it stops. **L**

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VINTAGE



A Mining Town Band in Bastrop County

CIRCA 1915

In the first half of the 20th century, Bastrop County was a hotbed for lignite mining as companies extracted the low-grade coal for fuel. The mine companies recruited workers from Mexico, and several mining towns sprang up between Bastrop and McDade. In the town of Phelan, a community band took shape, performing throughout the county in concerts and parades. This picture of the Phelan Band was taken about 5 miles north of Bastrop at the Glenr-Belro Mine during a *Diez y Seis de Septiembre* celebration. This spring, the Bastrop County Historical Museum opened a new permanent exhibit documenting the local coal-mining boom. **L**

Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to letters@texashighways.com.

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