

Trailing Texas' First Travel Writer / By Clayton Maxwell

# TEXAS

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OF TEXAS

# 13 Things To Do In 2020



JANUARY 2020

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A man wearing a light-colored cowboy hat and a denim jacket is shown in profile, looking down and playing a guitar. The background is dark, and the lighting highlights his features and the texture of his clothing.

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**NOTE**



Davis Mountains State Park in Fort Davis offers hike-in primitive campsites as well as 26 full-hookup campsites.

## Plan On It

**T**he richness of Texas offers limitless opportunities for exploration and discovery. It can take a lifetime to experience the variety of what it has to offer, so each year in January, our editors focus on one travel intention for the year ahead.

I'm resolving to introduce my family to Rockport. Before my kids get too old to appreciate its slower pace, I want them to experience the charm of the close-knit community, the beauty of the crystal-blue beach, and the eclectic mix of shops, art galleries, and historic homes. Here's what the rest of our editors have their sights set on this year:

**Michael Hoinski, Deputy Editor:** I bought my first tent a year ago, after rain during an overnight music festival seeped through my wife's old tent and on to my head, my wife's, and my daughter's. This tainted the experience for us non-campers, but we're determined to get out there this year and unfurl this new contraption.

**Matt Joyce, Senior Managing Editor:** This year I hope to expand and refine my Dutch-oven cooking skills, and there's no better way to do so than to get outdoors. I look forward to seeing the upgrades at Texas parks and historic sites now that

voters have approved dedicating 100 percent of sporting goods sales tax to the Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission.

**Kimya Kavehkar, Managing Editor:** I resolve to add more room for spontaneity into my travel. I'm a pretty Type A person, so planning itineraries—particularly for travel—is how I stay sane. But I'm realizing there's magic in the less busy moments of a trip. I won't be afraid to detour when something pulls at my attention, especially a roadside oddity like Stonehenge II in Hunt, which I visited recently while in the area.

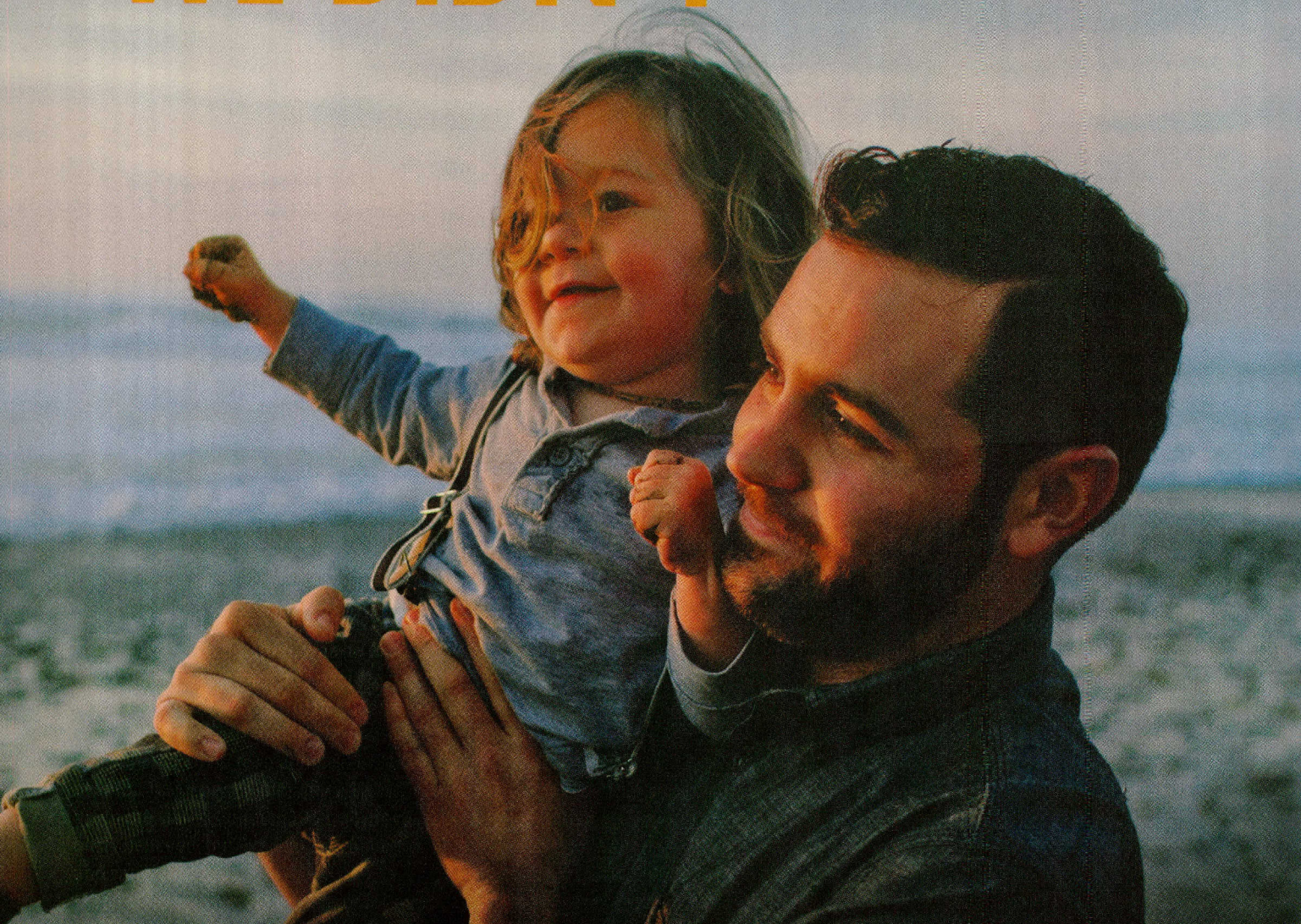
**Natalie Moore, Product and Engagement Manager:** I have always been told that fall is so beautiful at Garner State Park and nearby Lost Maples State Natural Area. Yet somehow I've managed to only spend my fall camping trips at Texas' two national parks. This is the year to make the trek to these state parks.

Read on for more 2020 travel inspiration and share your travel resolutions at [letters@texashighways.com](mailto:letters@texashighways.com).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily R Stone".

**EMILY ROBERTS STONE**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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# JANUARY

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## 13 Things To Do in 2020

It's time to mark up your unblemished calendar with plans to explore something new in Texas this year. From baseball to boardwalks, and artwork to aqueous adventures, we've got the freshest trip tips.

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## A Golden Journey

We'd know little to nothing about 16th-century Texas if Spanish castaway Cabeza de Vaca had not chronicled his incredible journey here.

Explore a land both familiar and foreign in the footsteps of Texas' first travel writer.

*By Clayton Maxwell  
Photographs by E. Dan Klepper  
Illustrations by Erwin Sherman*

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## The Fate of Flight 1380

When faced with a blown engine and a crowded airplane hurtling toward the earth, Southwest pilot Tammie Jo Shults drew on the skill and grace she developed as a pioneering female aviator and beloved resident of the Hill Country town of Boerne.

*By Michael J. Mooney*



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# JANUARY

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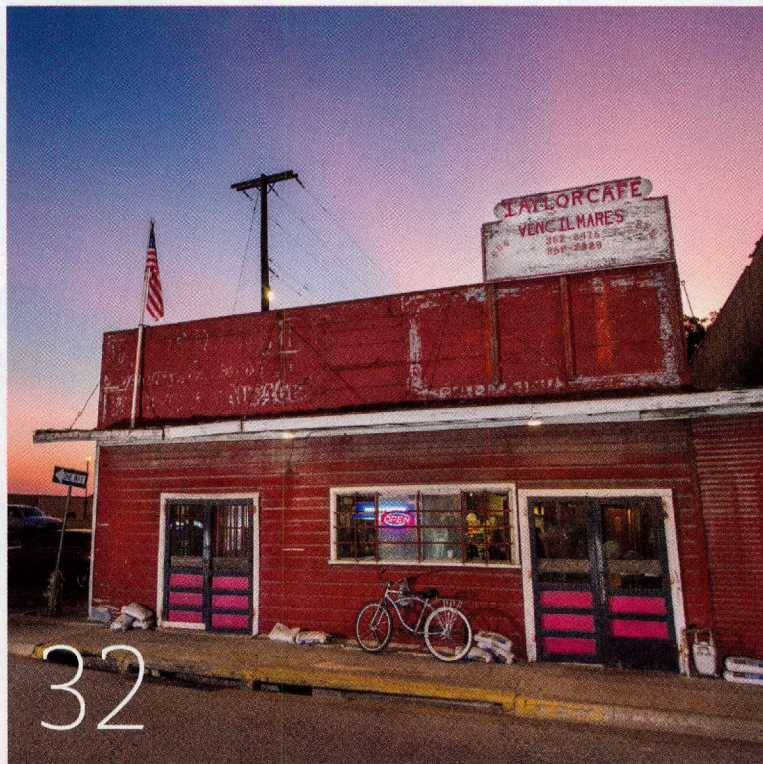
The Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo moves into a new home



### ON THE COVER

Photo by Kenny Braun

Black Rock Park, an LCRA park on Lake Buchanan



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Taking in the tales and tastes of Taylor

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## Behind the Story



For “A Golden Journey” (Page 52), Contributing Editor E. Dan Klepper recreated part of Cabeza de Vaca’s 16th-century journey through the Gulf Coast and West Texas. Collaborating with Writer-at-Large Clayton Maxwell, he staged a photo shoot in which Rodrigo Trevizo, Klepper’s friend and a Presidio native, portrays de Vaca. “We wanted to show de Vaca as he might have appeared after his shipwreck—when his journey through Texas began—and how the journey changed him by the time he arrived in present-day Presidio,” Klepper said. Klepper devised costuming for Trevizo using available references illustrating what a Spaniard like de Vaca would have looked like during the period as well as how the native people of the region might have adorned themselves. While the team encountered few challenges in Big Bend, shooting in Galveston required more effort to exclude modern-day beach fixtures like paddleboarders and motorized beach buggies.

## Featured Contributors



### Michael Corcoran

Based in Austin, Corcoran has covered Texas music for 35 years, and he reveals some of the lessons from his career in his essay, “For the Record” (Page 14). Since becoming a freelance writer in

2011, he’s reported forgotten stories of Texas’ musical pioneers. “Trends fall in and out of fashion,” he says, “but history never gets old.” He previously worked as a critic with the *Dallas Morning News* and *Austin American-Statesman*. Corcoran is working on a book about Austin’s music scene.

### Clayton Maxwell



Writer-at-Large Maxwell spent a year researching her story about Cabeza de Vaca. “A Golden Journey” (Page 52)—and what she learned stuck with her. “I can’t eat Texas pecans, oysters, or prickly pears without thinking of the thwarted Spaniard who trudged naked across our state about 500 years ago.” In October, Maxwell was recognized for her work in *Texas Highways* by both the *FOLIO* magazine awards—for range of work by a single author in the city & regional category—and the International Regional Magazine Association awards, as writer of the year.

Photos: E. Dan Klepper (top), Todd V. Wolfson (middle), Asha Poyzer (bottom)

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Subscriptions are \$24.95 annually (\$39.95 foreign).

Back issues available by calling 512-486-5858.

For letters to the editor, write to letters@texashighways.com or Texas Highways, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009



Published monthly by the Travel Information Division of TxDOT

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# MERGE



We recently moved from Houston to Burnet, where the Milky Way is stunning. It seems to drape over our home at night. We frequently wander out on the prairie with our lawn chairs to marvel at the stars. It's absolutely beautiful.

*Christine Lorence, Burnet*

Have you checked out our new "Texas Books for 100 Ages" list? At [texashighways.com/100TexasBooks](http://texashighways.com/100TexasBooks), peruse 100 Lone Star-inspired titles categorized by ages, from 1 to 100.

Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind* deserves a spot. The wind becomes a character, and anyone who spends time on the prairie understands that.  
**Robert Meyer, San Angelo**

How about *Richard West's Texas*? It's a book that has stayed with me through many moves in and out of Texas!  
**Lynda Davis, RV nomad**

What a cool idea. I'm 31 and just read *Trick Mirror* (30), so almost on target...  
 **@rosecahalan**

## Big and Bright

Texans have indeed been doing wonderful things to preserve our night-sky heritage ["The Stars at Night," December]. Your readers might be interested to know Cindy Luongo Cassidy, of Driftwood, whom you quote in the article, received the International Dark Sky Association's highest award in November, for lifetime achievement in reducing light pollution. And she's not done yet!

*Paula Marks, Buda*

The December cover image features one of my favorite Texas destinations, Big Bend National Park. However, the caption on Page 5 reported the photo as being from Guadalupe Mountains National Park. The Guadalupe are fantastic, but that park is not certified by the IDA as a dark-sky park. Big Bend recently achieved this official designation and is proud of it.

*Lance Ray, Denver, Colorado*

**TH:** December's cover photo features Cerro Castellan in Big Bend National Park, not

*the Guadalupe Mountains as captioned in the magazine. We regret the error.*

The coverage of dark-sky parks in Texas omitted UBarU Camp & Retreat Center near Mountain Home. It's unique because it's the only IDA-certified dark-sky park on privately owned land; however, it is open to the public. UBarU offers a Youth Astronomical Observatory, overnight lodging, and a kitchen. It also hosts events such as a Weekend Star Party (Aug. 13-16).

*Dr. Roy Ellzey, San Antonio*

**TH:** *The Unitarian Universalist Friends Retreat Foundation owns and operates the 142-acre UBarU Camp & Retreat Center. 830-460-6002; ubaru.org*

## Resilient Caddo

The Caddo Lake article ["Against All Odds, Caddo Lake Prevails," November] didn't mention one of Caddo's nine lives: How Caddo Lake State Park went from a small, upland park of less than 200 acres to a world-class wetlands of more than 7,000 acres. Caddo Lake State Park and the

adjoining Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area were the result of efforts led by The Nature Conservancy to acquire nearly 30 properties in the ecologically rich upper reaches of Caddo Lake in 1992.

*Shaun Hamilton, Olympia, Washington*

## San Angelo Roots

"Around the Horn" [December] was a nice story about saddle shops, but calling M.L. Leddy's a Fort Worth establishment doesn't recognize its history. M.L. Leddy started in Brady in 1922 and moved to San Angelo in 1936. It was in San Angelo that Leddy's became the gold standard for custom boots.

*Lee Weaver, Fort Worth*

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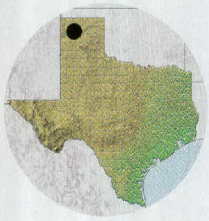




# Light up the Night

A towering 400-foot arch and twisted array of 58 cables suspend the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge over the Trinity River, creating a striking fixture on the Dallas skyline. Designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, the bridge opened in 2012, linking downtown with West Dallas. Dallas will celebrate New Year's Eve this Dec. 31 with Over the Top NYE 2019, a midnight show featuring fireworks launched from the top of Reunion Tower.





# Channing

Bob Cates finds his home on the range in this historic ranching town

By Jason Boyett



When there was talk of moving the historic XIT Ranch office to Lubbock, Bob Cates worked to preserve the building in its original Channing site.

**R**etired rancher Bob Cates has been chasing the cowboy lifestyle since he was a boy. Born in the Oklahoma Panhandle, he spent his career raising cattle across the High Plains, from Oklahoma to New Mexico. In 2007, Cates and his wife, Jimmie, retired to the tiny Texas Panhandle town of Channing—10 blocks wide and surrounded by the rugged breaks of the Canadian River—to be closer to family. He found new purpose in Channing's most noteworthy structure: the 121-year-old general office of the legendary XIT Ranch. At its peak in the early 1900s, the XIT was the largest fenced ranch in the world, encompassing 3 million acres and 150,000 head of cattle. When Cates learned of plans to move the building to Lubbock, he organized a local campaign to preserve the office in its original site. Hartley County purchased the building in 2008, and Cates, now 89, became its caretaker. Open by appointment, the restored structure displays ranching artifacts and original furnishings.

### The Cowboy Mystique

"When I was a little guy, my granddad had some Will James cowboy books. I saw the pictures, and they just fascinated me. I grew up wanting to be a cowboy, and so that's what I did. To me, I never did work a day in my life. I just done what I liked and enjoyed it. When I learned about the XIT and got connected to it, it just fell into place."

### Small-Town Retirement

"We were ranching 48 miles out in the country, north of Clayton [New Mexico]. I sure liked it out there. It was nice and quiet. But my son said, 'It's time to come in.' So we moved here. Channing is like living in the country. I think there's 70-odd head of horses right here in town. You don't have to go very far to get that outside feeling. Go 4 miles west of here and you're in grass all the way around you. That's what I like."

### XIT Crossroads

"Channing was a real important town. The XIT office didn't supply just the ranch but also the settlers coming in. Being that it's still on the original site, along the railroad track and the highway, people can come to it from four directions."

### Cowboy Christmas in July

"We thought about a Christmas party [fundraiser], but we don't have much

room inside. It's too cold outside. The first cattle herd came here in July 1885. So what about Christmas in July? This will be our third year. We have entertainers and a street dance and something to eat. Most of the people who come are from out of town, from California to Chicago. We're getting more every year. We're just old country people trying to make it come to life for historians and kids.

### High Plains Isolation

"There's one restaurant open in Channing. The Mercantile has a quick hamburger and a salad. They have a few groceries. No gas. On the ranch I had to drive 48 miles to get groceries, and I still have to drive 48 miles to get groceries! We go to Dumas or Dalhart or Vega. I think small towns like this are going to finally dry up. People want to be where the action is, seems like. I don't like action. I like the slower pace."

### History's Caretaker

"At first I kept [the XIT office] open every day, but no one stopped. But it's gotten more and more visitors. People come to the door and say, 'We seen this from the road. What is it?' I tell them the XIT was a cattle ranch, and this was the main office for it. It's just an old building to them, but it isn't to me. It's history, about cowboys and cowboy people. It's an amazing building and an amazing story." 🐾



## TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

363



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

1  
caution light



YEAR FOUNDED:

1888



NEAREST CITY:

Amarillo,  
53 miles southeast



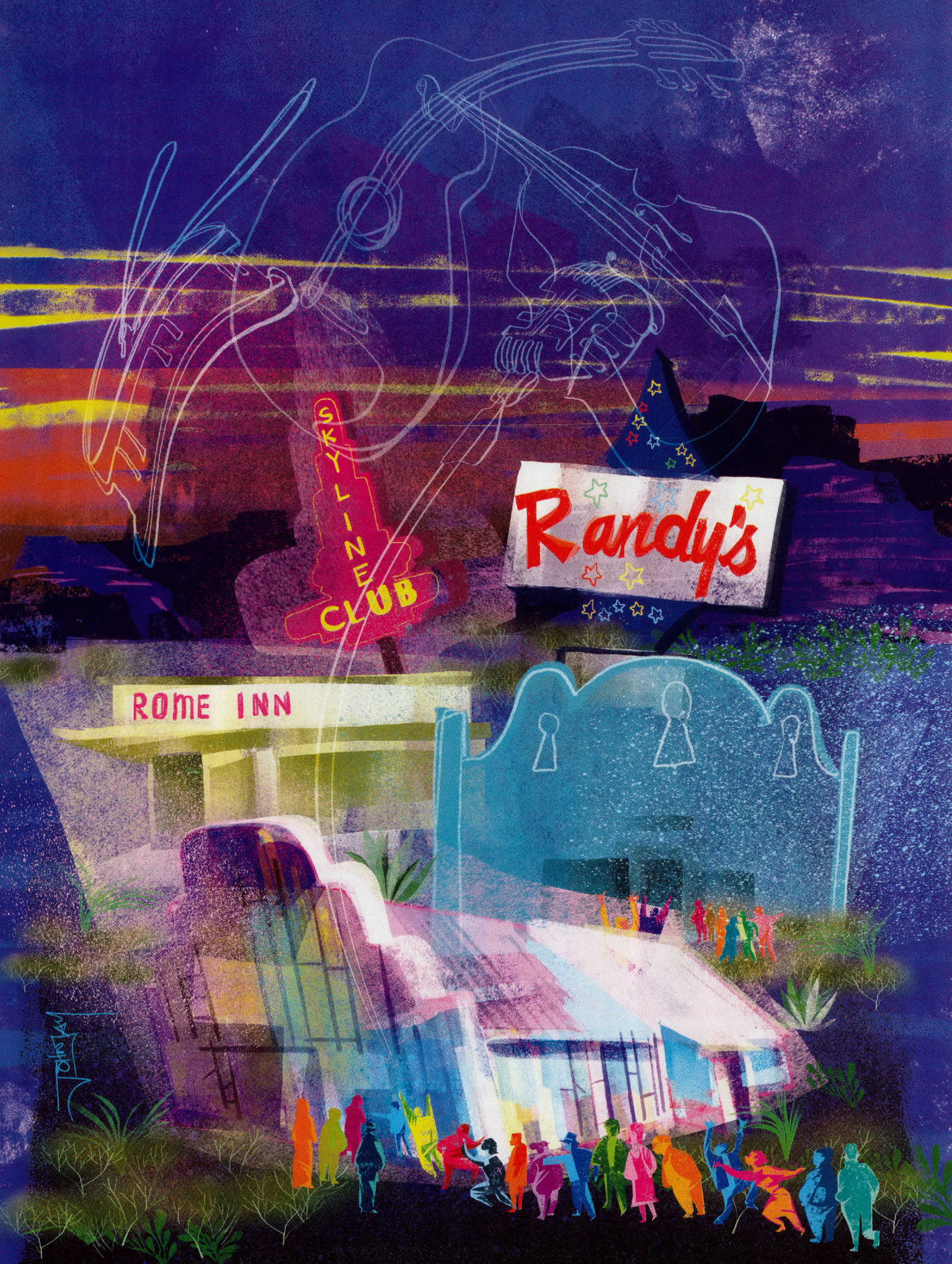
MARQUEE EVENTS:

Cowboy Christmas in July is held annually to raise funds for the preservation of the XIT General Office, with live music, a chuckwagon feast, and a live auction. July 25, 2020.



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# For the Record

Driving the backroads in pursuit of forgotten musical pioneers

by Michael Corcoran

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# R

Rats and the middle seats of full flights. Those are my biggest fears besides death. So when I entered the abandoned building from an unlocked door and saw the colony-size bag of rodent poison on the floor, I lurched back. Rats! But I didn't drive six hours to be turned away by the threat of hideous, long-tailed disease carriers (though I have driven six hours because neither window or aisle were available). Without fear, I stepped into the shards of sunlight coming through the broken windows.

The building had most recently been used to store dog food for the Howard County Humane Society, which attracted the vermin. What drew me, though, was the small wooden clump of a stage where Corsicana native Lefty Frizzell invented a new, syllable-stretching way to sing country music in the late 1940s. As the former Ace of Clubs, this decrepit structure at 2605 W. Highway 80 in Big Spring is a shrine of Texas music,

as important to the development of the honky-tonk sound as Liverpool's Cavern Club was to the British Invasion. George Jones, Willie Nelson, and Merle Haggard are among the many legends who have acknowledged a debt to Frizzell's jazz-like phrasing. I stood there, in that place where it all started, for a long time, letting the space inhabit me as much as I did it.

Long-dormant clubs used to be dead to me. I wanted to be where the action was, where the music roared and the spirits flowed. Before I devoted myself to history, I was prone to hysteria, as a rock critic in love with the notion that opinion can't be proven incorrect. There was no right or wrong, only interesting or boring. I could be outlandish or just like everybody else. I was tagged a contrarian, with which I totally disagree. I considered myself more like a roast comedian with a backstage pass.

But zingers don't linger, and these days I'm a tyrant only to my tires. It wasn't until my mid-40s that I realized nothing makes me feel more alive than telling the stories of the deceased musicians whose influences still reverberate today.

When I was a young writer, I didn't really know anything so I relied on a fearless attitude to get folks to read my stories. But with age and experience comes knowledge that can entertain in a much more satisfying way. And history has a very definite right or wrong. Making sure your information is accurate requires a work ethic akin to, as Kurt Vonnegut described the writing discipline, inflating a blimp with a bicycle pump. Anybody can do it, but many people give up when the

effort seems futile. Sometimes obsession is the talent.

The negative things in your life eventually become positive if you give them time and mileage. That's another thing I had to learn. In April 2000, the *Austin American-Statesman*, Austin's daily paper, announced—very publicly—that it was suspending my barb-laden local celebrity column, mainly because the brass felt the tone was mean-spirited. I was wrecked, humiliated. My editor was sympathetic, taking me aside and suggesting that I use the effort previously devoted to three columns a week for one substantial piece. "Take your time and write the story you didn't have the time to write," she said. "Travel if you have to."

Incidentally, a few weeks prior, I had made an exciting discovery. In the liner notes of a CD reissue, I found that Rebert Harris, perhaps the most influential

male gospel singer of them all, was still alive. He was from Trinity, 88 miles north of Houston, though he'd lived in Chicago since the '40s. In the summer of 2000, I redeemed my *Statesman* shame coupon to fly up there to interview the frail 84-year-old who taught the famous singer Sam Cooke, his replacement in the Soul Stirrers gospel quartet, how to make lyrics more elastic. Cooke's trademark *woah woah woahs* from "You Send Me" started as an improvisation when he couldn't hit the old man's highest notes.

My interview turned into a visit. Harris had just had a stroke and didn't talk much, so there wasn't anything to build a story around. Except that inside this little, hunched-over man was the voice that practically invented soul music. Harris passed away a few weeks later and when *The New York Times* obit, which didn't come for six days, contained inaccuracies

**Before I devoted myself to history, I was prone to hysteria, as a rock critic in love with the notion that opinion can't be proven incorrect. There was no right or wrong, only interesting or boring.**



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and understatement, a new chapter in my career started. I had to do everything I could to correct this injustice and elevate the stature of the gospel pioneer whose death caused barely a blip in the music press.

I headed to Trinity without knowing a soul in town. Just drove cold to that tightknit community at the tip of Lake Livingston and looked for folks who may have known the great gospel singer. I approached a couple of elderly African American men in coveralls at the general store and said I was writing a story about Harris. Did they know him? Within 30 minutes I was in the annex of a Baptist church. Services had just ended, and I was talking with people who grew up with Harris. I met former classmates and neighbors, and even a member of his first gospel quartet from 1923. That member, Hill Perkins, told me Harris was so small

he had to stand on a chair to lead the older boys at his father's Harris Chapel CME. Even at age 7, everyone knew he had a special talent, born from mimicking the birds on his family's farm.

I had hit a home run in my first at bat. But there would be many strikeouts, pop flies, and foul balls in the next 20 years of trying to tell the stories of musicians I considered criminally overlooked.

Driving is meditation with a seatbelt, and I use that time on research trips to try and solve mysteries in my head. After my first book, *All Over the Map: True Heroes of Texas Music*, came out in 2005, a writer for *The Times*, in London, called it "the work of a rock and roll detective." It's a cool quote that will adorn the back jacket of my next book, *Ghost Notes: The Pioneering Spirits of Texas Music*, coming out in April.

Often, my conclusions are built on

the sketchiest evidence because that's all there is on little-known artists, often poor and marginalized, who passed away decades ago. Sometimes the rundown houses and venues of their pasts—and the music they left behind—are the only proof they ever lived at all. So I like to bask in the dusty auras and commune with the ghosts.

I first became aware of vintage Texas gospel music in 1996. I was preparing to write a story about Fort Worth superstar Kirk Franklin and God's Property, a Dallas community choir that had an unlikely No. 1 hit on the pop charts with the hip-hop-infused song "Stomp." I needed some background in religious music, so I bought a couple of books on the history of the genre. I got a real education on how the songs the slaves sang in the fields evolved into "the Christian blues."



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Among my many discoveries was that “Nobody’s Fault but Mine,” which I knew as a Led Zeppelin song, was written and recorded by Blind Willie Johnson of Marlin, near Waco, in December 1927. On that same weekend, but in Dallas, Columbia Records recorded the curious, zither-playing East Texas preacher Washington Phillips. Beating these two otherworldly musicians to the studio by 18 months was Sherman piano thumper Arizona Dranes, a direct influence on Thomas A. Dorsey, considered “the Father of Gospel Music.”

After hearing their raw, passionate music, I became infatuated with that holy trinity of 1920s Texas gospel musicians. I did the research and writing on CD reissues of Dranes and Phillips, both nominated for a Grammy as best historical album, and wrote the liner notes for a Johnson tribute album featuring such gospel fans as Tom Waits and Lucinda Williams. It’s taken me 15 years, and counting, to correct all the misinformation on Dranes, Johnson, and Phillips.

My editors at the *Statesman* were always pulling me off my stories to work on breaking news. I received such a call the morning I confirmed that the Washington Phillips who made such haunting recordings as “Denomination Blues” and “What Are They Doing in Heaven Today” had been confused in biographies with a tragic cousin of the same name.

“Sorry, can’t do it,” I said. “I’m on my way to Freestone County.” The editor insisted I come back to Austin to write a front-page story, but there was no way. I lied and said I was already past Mexia, when in actuality I was still in Austin (on Research Boulevard, suitably). My superiors were ticked off for a couple days, but I eventually got my Phillips story. He didn’t die in the state asylum in 1938, as previously believed, but lived and preached and sang until 1954.

Delusion was a great motivator for me and fueled the long drives with big hopes. I envisioned finding a wooden chest with photographs, posters, an old guitar neck. Maybe I’d stumble upon a long-forgotten venue where the magic was honed. But I almost always headed home a few days

later with only the slightest new info: an old address, a marriage license, a foggy remembrance from a second cousin. Nothing is still something, though. You cross it off and move on to the next thing.

There’s a ton of info online, but to really tap into the spirit of the subjects, you have to walk where they walked and talk to those who knew them—a quickly disappearing group. There’s a thing I call “traveler’s memory,” like how I can’t remember what I had for breakfast today, but can recite my order from Cookie’s Place in Teague, when I went there for the Phillips story 14 years ago (beef tips and rice, fried okra, iced tea). Your mind takes

**Delusion was a great motivator for me and fueled the long drives with big hopes. I envisioned finding a wooden chest with photographs, posters, an old guitar neck.**

note of things on the road it may miss at home. But there are also hours when all roads look the same.

Driving all across Texas is like eating a large pizza by yourself. Three slices go by like San Antonio in the rearview mirror, and you wonder if large is going to be enough. But at about the fifth or sixth slice, you’ve had enough. On the occasions that I-10 is close to becoming “I quit,” I lay awake in that night’s Motel 5 ½ and wonder if it’s all worth it. But I always wake up hungry for more.

I’m sure South Padre is nice, but my

kind of vacation is to drive to Brookshire Brothers towns so I can check in at the county clerk’s office and run my right index finger over dusty documents. Then I knock door to door in poor neighborhoods looking for someone who knows something. Doesn’t that sound like the worst Corona beer commercial ever?

Visiting the vestiges of our state’s rich musical history is, at 64 years old, my beautiful sunset. In San Antonio, I’ve explored Don Albert’s Keyhole Club, the first integrated nightclub in the South, and Randy’s Rodeo, site of an infamous 1978 Sex Pistols concert. They’re currently a rental hall and bingo parlor, respectively. If I’m within a quarter tank of Wichita Falls, I’ll drive to the former site of the 13,000-square-foot MB Corral (currently The Hangar), where Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, Bob Wills, Ike and Tina Turner, and many more performed. In Dallas, there’s the recently restored Longhorn Ballroom, once managed by Jack Ruby, and in Longview I visit the former site of the Reo Palm Isle (est. 1935). The Palm Isle was the Club V disco last time through, but no amount of thumping bass can drive away the phantoms of Frank Sinatra, Loretta Lynn, and Glenn Miller from back in the day. When I told a young couple sitting outside the old Palm Isle a couple years ago about some of the legends that had graced the stage, the woman said, “What stage?”

She didn’t care—most folks don’t—but my mission is to try and make others, through my research and writing, realize the treasures that are out there, just barely holding on. Injustice motivates me. “Why aren’t these influential musicians more famous?”

I have nothing against blues guitar giant B.B. King, but T-Bone Walker of Linden invented most of the riffs King took to mainstream success, and he deserves higher recognition. Same goes for Houston’s Illinois Jacquet, whose 64-bar tenor sax solo on Lionel Hampton’s 1942 hit “Flying Home” was the foundation for the honking sax style that would dominate R&B solos in the 1950s. More people need to be aware that East

Texas singer Ray Price saved country music in the heyday of Elvis by inventing the country shuffle with the 1956 song “Crazy Arms.”

I think often about when this journey started two decades ago with a visit to Trinity, but it’s not nostalgic yearning; it’s a sinking feeling. I ended that article on Harris with the memory of my last reporting trip to the town. I was at Harris Chapel, the small, white, wooden church on State Highway 19 where I had previously met Harris’ friends. It was locked, so I sat in my car and listened to Harris and the Soul Stirrers on the CD player for a long time, imagining that this glorious music was coming from inside. It all started right here: Rebert Harris to Sam Cooke to Aretha Franklin, the evolution of gospel to soul. How ’bout that?

The truth, however, is that I’m not sure that was the CME chapel where Harris started singing in his father’s congregation. African American churches sometimes dropped the denomination over time, so I just went by the name Harris Chapel and made the connection. The county clerk’s office was closed, and I was heading home, so I was unable to verify that this white wooden church, at this location, was owned by James Harris in the 1920s.

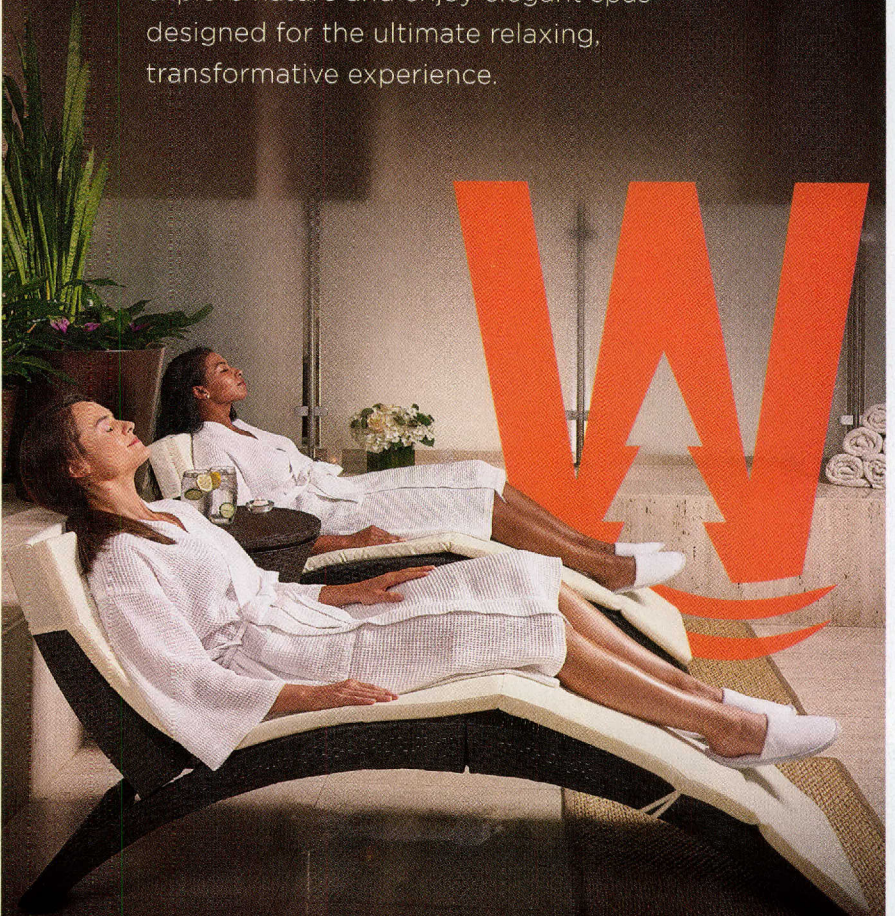
This most likely was the right spot, but that’s not good enough for history. I need to revisit Trinity and confirm the landmark location. I’ll do it on my next empty calendar square. I’m always updating, I’m always double-checking, I’m always looking somewhere I didn’t look before. Even after your work is published, the job is never done.

Back in my rock critic days, my dream was to discover the next big thing playing in some dive in front of 15 people. But in recent years, I’ve delved into musical acts that readers have zero chance of ever seeing live. That’s why I was thrilled to learn that the old Ace of Clubs in Big Spring, where Lefty Frizzell changed country music, has been preserved and is set to reopen soon. It’s great when the ghosts can hang out in their old haunts. They’ve earned it. 🍷

# “ *I needed this.*”

## WE HEAR THAT A LOT.

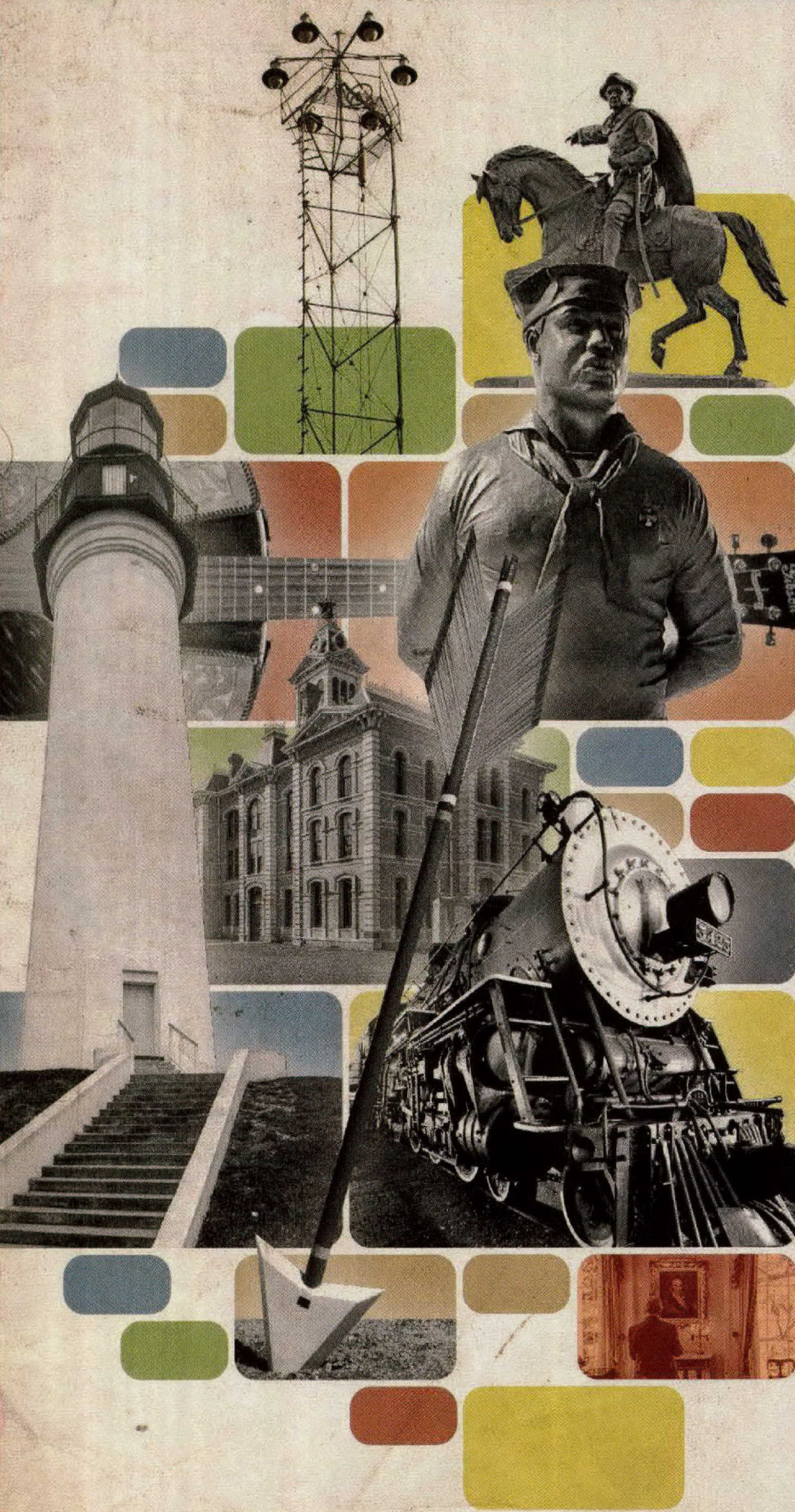
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# DRIVE



**A HIKE ALONG**  
the beach at  
Mansfield Cut turns  
up a handful of  
sand dollars.

**FERNANDO**

Garcia rappels into a cave at Colorado Bend State Park.

# Go Forth and Be Adventurous

An outdoor activity for every season, guaranteed to take you outside of your comfort zone

By Pam LeBlanc

**W**e're at the front end of 366 days of possibilities—a brand new (leap) year ripe with the potential for adventure. Getting outdoors and trying new things can help keep you energized, maintain your physical fitness, and instill you with confidence. Texas has got you covered, whether you like your adventures to unfold next to the ocean, in a desert, below ground, or in a crisp, blue-green lake. To inspire you, we've plotted a challenge for every season of 2020. Grab your gear bag, check your map, hit the road, and don't look back.



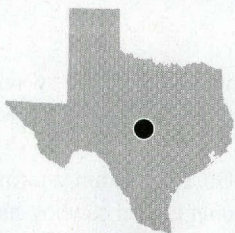
## WINTER

### Spelunk at Colorado Bend

A spiderweb of caves, including the Gorman Creek Crevice Cave, crisscrosses the ground beneath Colorado Bend State Park near Lampasas. Access to the caves requires a reservation through a tour provider. You'll have to leave the claustrophobia at home for this adventure, which involves scuttling around on forearms and knees through tight passages.

The reward comes when you emerge into a chamber the size of a booth at the neighborhood Dairy Queen, only to then have to squirm through a 2-foot horizontal crack in a slab of rock to reach daylight again. The REI Outdoor School in Austin occasionally offers cave tours at the park, and it provides helmets, headlamps, and pads for the excursion. Fair warning: Climbers who descend into the gorge require a harness for the initial 40-foot drop into the gorge. "It's a completely natural cave experience," says Cody Ackermann of REI. "It's not commercialized; it's a caving adventure."

This underground world is damp, dark, and requires a lot of elbow grease to get to, but it comes with otherworldly rewards, including a welcome chorus of white translucent crickets and fascinating rock sculptures born from eons of dripping water. When not crawling under the park, pitch a tent, hike, or check out the moss-covered Gorman Falls, a 70-foot cascade of spring water that will make you think you've detoured to a South American jungle.



Explore a spiderweb of caves beneath Colorado Bend.  
[tpwd.texas.gov/  
state-parks/colorado-bend](http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/colorado-bend)

Photo: Pam LeBlanc

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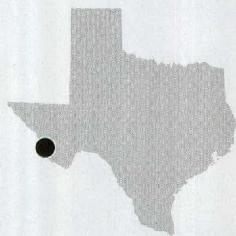
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SPRING

Saddle Up at Cibolo Creek Ranch



Venture through the desert on camelback in Marfa. [texascamelcorps.com](http://texascamelcorps.com)

Imagine yourself lurching through the desert, perched high on the back of a caramel-colored camel that swings its head back now and then to give you a wide-toothed grin. The tall, spindly-legged beasts seem perfectly at home in a West Texas desert landscape bristling with cacti. With eyes as big as apples, feet the size of pies, and a pouf of fuzzy hair atop their heads, they make comical,

friendly companions. Their swaying gait feels like rolling through gentle waves in a boat.

Since 1999, Doug Baum, a former Nashville drummer turned cowboy-hat-wearing camel wrangler, has led treks in West Texas, mostly at Cibolo Creek Ranch near Marfa, each spring and fall. He takes a course that meanders through terrain covered by camels hauling supplies for the



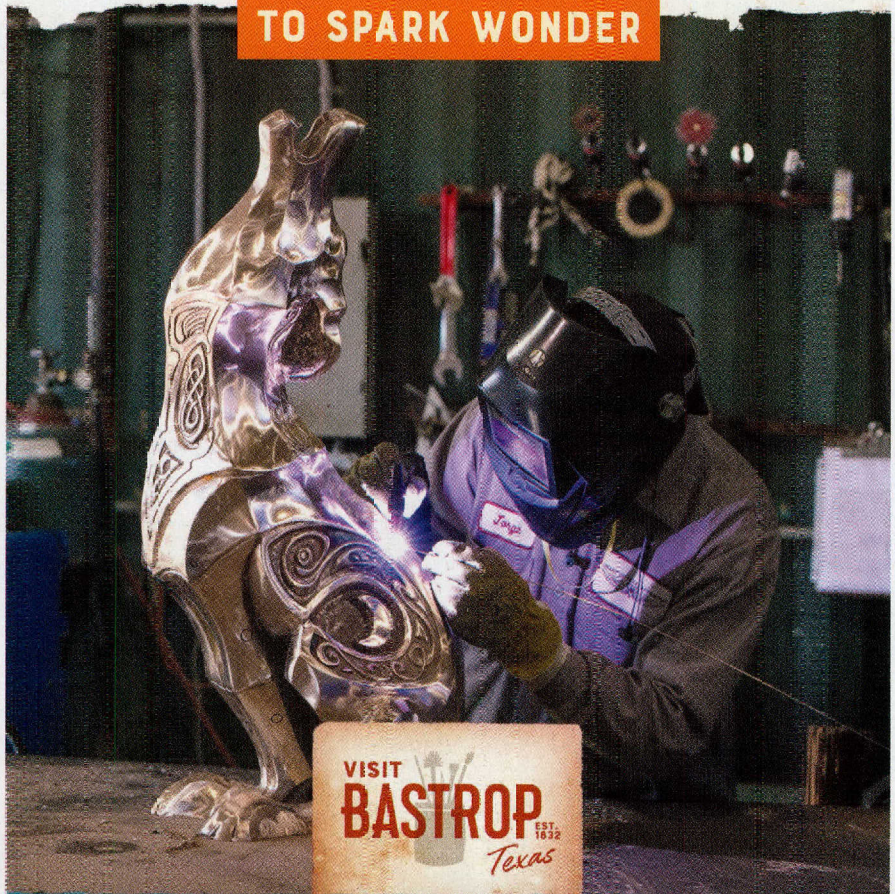
**DOUG BAUM**, walking on the left, leads camels and their riders through private land in the Davis Mountains.

U.S. Army in the 1850s and '60s. At Cibolo Creek, riders climb aboard animals that kneel genteelly for mounts and dismounts. The excursions cover about 15 miles in two days, and Baum cooks Southwestern or Middle Eastern food each evening.

"The thing that makes Cibolo such a kick in the pants is that it's got water, almost always running; big trees where we camp; and Native American rock art," Baum says. "It's the best way to see the desert. If you're driving through at 75 miles per hour, you miss everything."

# We Welcome You

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**POLLI RAYBURN**  
and Jason Jones  
serenade the sunrise  
on the Padre Island  
National Seashore.

## SUMMER

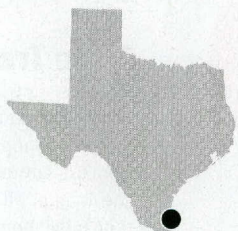
### Camp at Mansfield Cut

A camping trip at Mansfield Cut, the channel dividing South and North Padre Islands, yields amazing views of the natural world. Sea turtles bob in the water, while stick-legged birds hunt for dinner. Careful observers can find sand dollars tucked in a beach the color of Rice Krispies. "It's not only a great beach with good sand and surfing, but Kemp's ridley sea turtles hatch their eggs there," says Jason Jones of Terlingua, who camps at the Cut annually.

Beach camping requires a tolerance for grit and sweat because sand gets everywhere and, well, Texas is hot. But with the right preparation and attitude, you'll reap the rewards of gorgeous sunrises and sunsets, fresh fish for dinner, and the rhythmic crashing of waves to lull you to sleep.

To get there, either make the three-hour drive up the beach from South Padre Island (to avoid getting stuck in the sand, take a four-wheel-drive vehicle) or a four-hour drive down from Corpus Christi (pay the \$10-per-car daily fee to enter Padre Island National Seashore). Another option: pay a fishing guide in Port Mansfield to shuttle you out. An ideal place to pitch a tent is on the small, crescent-shaped beach along the north side of the channel. It offers a nice stroll onto the jetty, comprised of armchair-size stone blocks.

Bring plenty of water and a first-aid kit because there are no amenities, plus large stakes for pinning your tent to the sand to withstand brisk winds. If you own a surfboard, consider this: When Mother Nature feels generous, she doles out some of the best waves on the Texas coast right here.



Pitch a tent on the beach in the Padre Islands.  
[nps.gov/pais/index.htm](http://nps.gov/pais/index.htm)



**SWIMMERS** compete in the Marble Falls 3-mile leg of the Tex Roberston Highland Lakes Challenge.

## FALL

### Swim the Tex Robertson Highland Lakes Challenge

This multiday, open-water swimming race spans five different Central Texas lakes. At the finish each day, you'll be rewarded with something even sweeter: a slice of pie at the Blue Bonnet Cafe in Marble Falls.


"Some people swim it just to swim it, some race like crazy—and it's good both ways," says Keith Bell, who created the race in partnership with his wife, Sandy Neilson-Bell, an Olympic Triple Gold Medalist in swimming.

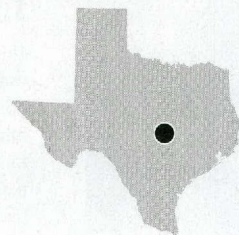
The race is named for Tex Robertson, the Texas swimming legend and former University of Texas swim coach, who reportedly learned to swim in a horse trough and later invented the flip turn. He also founded the popular Camp Longhorn on Inks Lake.

The swims vary from 2 to 4 miles. Participants face choppy water in Lake Buchanan, gaze up at the shadow of the dam at Inks Lake, swim under a bridge on Lake LBJ, glide through a cliff-edged canyon at Lake Marble Falls, and power

to a finish on an upstream section of Lake Travis.

"Every day is different," Neilson-Bell says. "We've had swims where going across it's smooth as glass, and then the wind might pick up and it's like an ocean. You can hit all kinds of conditions. At the end, the pie brings us all together."

The race takes place in October. Participants can sign up for the five-day Monster Challenge, the three-day Weekend Warrior, or a single day's race. 

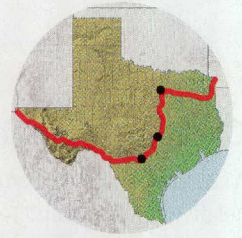


Race in the open waters of five Central Texas lakes.  
[highlandlakeschallenge.com](http://highlandlakeschallenge.com)

# I Hear The Train A Comin'

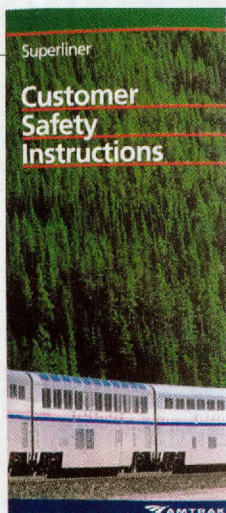
Time keeps draggin' on, but that Texas Eagle Train keeps a rollin' on down to San Antone

By Clayton Maxwell



## The Day the Eagle Flies

The Texas Eagle runs along the 1,306-mile train route between Chicago and San Antonio that the Texas and Pacific Railway built in the late 1800s. In 1948, the T&P, in partnership with the Missouri Pacific Railroad, introduced The Texas Eagle as a passenger train from St. Louis to San Antonio. The route was discontinued in 1971, but Amtrak rebooted it in 1981, and expanded its reach. Today, The Texas Eagle uses double-decker "Superliner" trains, known for their awesome observation rooms. Superliners chug through Texas towns you've likely never heard of—like Joshua, Bartlett, and Blum—and many big cities you have. Three days a week, The Texas Eagle connects in San Antonio with the Sunset Limited, which cruises west to El Paso and on to Los Angeles, California.



## "We Are All in This Together... Literally"

This motto, written on the Amtrak Customer Safety Instructions manual, is truer than one might think. Train people are talkers, or maybe they just get extra chatty given the captive audience. On a recent trip, a professor confided about the highs and lows of visiting her Dallas family; a young soldier returning home due

to an injury at Fort Hood regaled a rapt dining car with his plan to surprise his mom—she didn't know he was coming home; and an Australian couple explained that Down Under, you see kangaroos out the train window. Onboard, we are all in it together—just riders on the rails.



## Breaking Bread

The dining car, with its tradition of community seating, is conversation headquarters. Parties of three or less share a banquette with other travelers. Friendly attendants, mostly based out of Chicago and dressed in smart blue uniforms, take food orders. Try the Land and Sea (\$39), a Black Angus flat iron steak with a crab, shrimp, and scallop cake. Warm chocolate cake topped with ice cream, a seasonal dessert, is another winner. The steam drifts off the plate and through the dining car. Community seating means tales are swapped, and conversational lags are good moments to admire the scenery.

*Long live the dining car: Dining Cars, an Amtrak institution, have been eliminated on some East Coast routes with more changes anticipated. If you would like to relish the distinct experience of a Texas Eagle dining car, do it now.*



## Time Travel

Trains are late; it's an inevitability. Get the "Track Your Train" app, available from the Amtrak website. It maps all Amtrak train movement across the country in real time, so passengers can keep informed of their arrivals and departures.

# 19

## AMTRAK STATIONS

In Texas, 64 percent of the population lives within 25 miles of a station.

# 4.5

## HOURS, AUSTIN-FORT WORTH

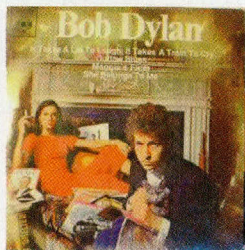
While longer than the drive, riders avoid traffic, and advance tickets are only \$24.

# 47

## PERCENT

How much more energy efficient Amtrak travel is than a car on a per-passenger-mile-basis.

Travel green with the Amtrak Rail Calculator. [amtrak.com/travel-green](http://amtrak.com/travel-green)



## Train Tracks

Music is motion, so ever since there were trains, there were songs about trains. Here are some standouts:

**It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry** by Bob Dylan

**Two Trains** by Little Feat

**Love in Vain** by Robert Johnson

**Folsom Prison Blues** by Johnny Cash

**Homeward Bound** by Simon and Garfunkel

**Crazy Train** by Ozzy Osbourne

**Midnight Train to Georgia** by Gladys Knight and The Pips

**(I Heard That) Lonesome Whistle** by Hank Williams

**Peace Train** by Cat Stevens

**Downtown Train** by Tom Waits

**Casey Jones** by The Grateful Dead

## The Lingo

### DUCK WALK

A special walk with feet angled out, hips forward, to help passengers balance against the swaying and bumping of the train. Regular riders use the term frequently, especially when advising first-timers.

### VEGAN COMPLIANT

The curiously formal way Amtrak lets a passenger know a dish is vegan. For example, on the dinner menu: "vegan compliant" rigatoni pasta with oven roasted vegetables, fruit, and soy sausage.

### ROOMETTE

Amtrak for "sleeping car."



## Taking the Scenic Route

The Sightseer Lounge is open to anyone on the Superliner. This cool space-capsule-like area has a midcentury-modern style, featuring retro wood paneling and curved floor-to-ceiling windows. The spacious booths and rows of chairs facing the enormous windows make this a prime spot for daydreaming. With any luck, it will rain, and the drops rolling down the window will add mystique to the landscape passing by. All Sightseer Lounges are on the second floor, but a café/bar with snacks, beer, and other alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages is just a narrow staircase away, on the lower level. 🚂

Photos: Kenny Braun



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**OPENING CEREMONIES**  
at the stock show  
and rodeo's old  
location, Will Rogers  
Memorial Center.

# This Ain't Your First Rodeo. Or Is It?

Dickies Arena is the Jerry World of the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo

By Michael Hoinski

**W**hat kind of Texan are you if you've never been to a rodeo? You've no doubt been to a football game, a barbecue, a bluebonnet patch—Texas rites of passage—but what about the most Texan thing of all? Seriously, if you're one of the many who consider Larry McMurtry's cattle-driving epic *Lonesome Dove* our state's sacred text, shouldn't you treat live-stock like holy cows?

Embrace our cowboy heritage at this year's Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo. The 23-day affair, from Jan. 17 to Feb. 8, was conceived in 1896 as an economic driver for the newly formed Stockyards and in recent years has drawn roughly 1 million visitors annually. This year, the show moves from its longtime home, Will Rogers Memorial Center, to the new Dickies Arena, a \$540 million, 14,000-capacity Art Deco showstopper. The building shares fancy amenities on par with its big brother 20





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**BanderaCowboyCapital.com  
 830-796-3045**

miles to the east, Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium, with a public art program and a Jumbotron featuring four 25-by-38-foot video screens.

For clueless city slickers, there are plenty of events on the schedule that don't even have much to do with rodeoing. For instance: the Celebrity Goat Milking Contest, western music and cowboy poetry, the Premier Texas Longhorn Sale, the Ag Robotics Challenge, and mutton bustin', the madness that ensues when children ride sheep as if they were bulls or broncs.

Apologies to the families who have gone to the rodeo for years, but for the rest of y'all: giddyup. 🐎

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ANTIQUES

# Treasured Through Time

Taylor's recent influx of creative movers and shakers  
has resulted in big changes for the small town

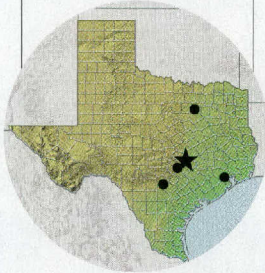
By Jen Hamilton Hernandez

**Austin**  
45 minutes

**San Antonio**  
2 hours

**Houston**  
2.75 hours

**Dallas**  
3 hours



**A** visitor might take a look at the burgeoning street art, galleries, and music scene in Taylor and call the town “up-and-coming.” But that would be ignoring a fascinating history that has long made Taylor hard to overlook.

Animator Tex Avery, who was born in 1908 in Taylor, worked for Warner Bros. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and helped to create one of the most famous cartoon characters on the planet, Bugs Bunny. Bill Pickett, a performer in Wild West shows and the first African American inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, also called Taylor home. Dan Moody, Texas’ youngest governor at 33 years old, was born in Taylor in 1893.

More recently, a new crop of dreamers and renegades has moved in. Inspired by the town’s historic red brick buildings and comforted by the community’s warmth, this new contingent has transformed Taylor from a railroad town with boarded-up buildings to a destination with plenty of diversions to fill a weekend.



**STAY**



**EAT & DRINK**



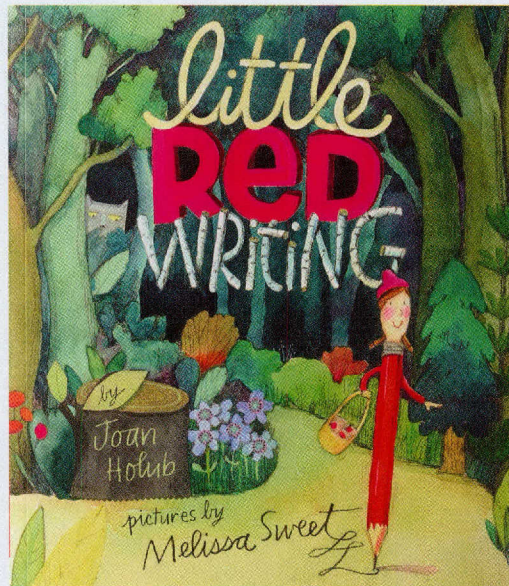
**SHOP**



**EXPLORE**

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MELISSA SWEET**

Through January 26  
Dupree Lobby

Melissa Sweet is an American illustrator and writer of children’s books. She has won several awards for her illustrations, most notably a Caldecott Honor in 2009 for *A River of Words: The Story of William Carlos Williams* and in 2015 for *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus*.

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# Friday

**4 P.M.**  
**Historic Home**

After snapping a photo at the “Welcome to Taylor” mural, featuring Avery and Pickett and painted by local artist Norma Jeanne Maloney, check in at Pecan Manor Bed & Breakfast. Retired architecture professor Janetta McCoy (who hasn’t lost her pedagogical disposition) owns the home, which was built in the late 1890s. It was moved across the street in 1922 to make way for Taylor High School. McCoy is happy to share her rich knowledge of the house and neighborhood, especially over breakfast, where she has likely prepared a veggie frittata with roasted potatoes.

**7 P.M.**  
**Bring on the Brews**

The former Taylor High is now a mixed-use entertainment and residential development. Plowman’s Kitchen offers classic dishes like meatloaf and chicken-fried steak for dinner. At the Loose Screw Craft Beer House and Garden, owners Don and Tammy Struble offer samples to help customers choose with confidence. The 46 rotating taps line a wall in a room where typing and shorthand classes were once held. Outside, enjoy live music on the weekends and fare from food trucks under pecan trees.

# Saturday

**10 A.M.**  
**Stretch It Out**

James Boone Humphreys developed a following among Taylor residents with her free Yoga in the Park series, held at the Heritage Square amphitheater. Demand for her classes grew, and in the

fall, Humphreys opened her own studio, The Wellness League, on Main Street. The Saturday morning class (\$12) is beginner-friendly with added challenges for more experienced yogis. Classes can get crowded, so claim a space early.

**11 A.M.**  
**Renaissance in Bloom**

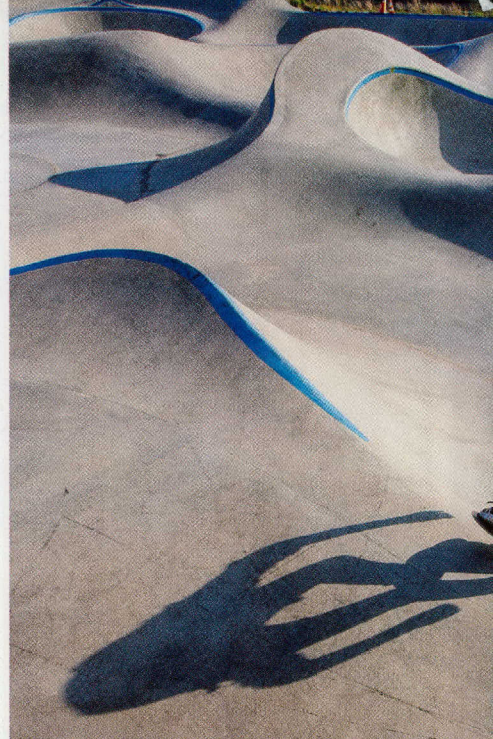
Ask anyone in town, and they’ll credit Judy Blundell, an artist and architectural designer, for kick-starting Taylor’s downtown renaissance. Blundell moved to Taylor from Sydney, Australia, to look after an elderly uncle. She saw potential all around, and in 2013 her company, Camry Boyd, bought the 33,000-square-foot McCrory Timmerman building, a former department store. “It was derelict,” Blundell explains. “There was no modern electrical or plumbing. It was inexpensive to buy the building—renovation though, was not.”

Chipping away at the layers, Blundell discovered original pine floors, exposed brick walls, and a 1948 freight elevator. Blundell combined this building with the adjacent Titsworth Building (a former furniture store) to create a mixed-use development.

Just around the corner is Maloney’s workshop, Red Rider Studios. If Blundell is responsible for the big-picture revival of downtown Taylor, Maloney gets credit for its aesthetic details. Her ubiquitous work adorns many storefronts and windows, and her murals—one proclaiming the town “as friendly as a Texan’s smile”—bring a mix of bygone quality and modern flair to exterior walls throughout town. She welcomes visitors into her shop for a behind-the-scenes look at her craft.

**1:30 P.M.**  
**Picnic in the Park**

Pick up provisions at Farm 2 Market Deli in the McCrory



**OPENING SPREAD:** Norma Jeanne Maloney’s “Welcome to Taylor” sign. **THIS PAGE,** CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: skateboarding in Pierce Park; a night of blues at Black Sparrow Music Parlor; dessert at Plowman’s Kitchen; old-school Taylor Café; Saturday morning yoga class at The Wellness League.



Timmerman-Titsworth complex for an epic al fresco meal. Once you've chosen from a selection of salads, meats, cheeses, sandwiches, and artisanal breads, roll out your blanket at Heritage Square. There, you'll also enjoy public art, a splash pad, and shaded seating. Catch skaters doing some serious shredding at recently opened Pierce Park, where you might just see a peek of future X Games participants perfecting their form.



**3 P.M.**  
**Mingling with Moody**

Taylor native Moody became Texas' youngest governor in 1927 after winning the election at 33 years old. As attorney general he investigated Governor James Ferguson, who embezzled state money. As district attorney he prosecuted four members of the Ku Klux Klan, sending them to prison in 1923, setting a precedent as members of the group had not been imprisoned in the U.S. before. In the Moody Museum, his boyhood home (where his sister Mary lived until 1975), you'll see the books that fed this trailblazer's youth and the piano that filled his first home with music. A room upstairs celebrates other notable Taylor residents.



**7 P.M.**  
**Rock On**



Though Vencil Mares, the founder of Taylor Café, passed away in November, his legacy continues. Mares opened the restaurant in 1948 after serving in World War II as a medic in Normandy. He apprenticed in Elgin, where he learned about the craft of barbecue. His deep knowledge has passed from one pitmaster to another, and still shows in the delectable pork and turkey sausage wraps. While Mares' absence is felt, the jovial atmosphere he created lives on.

Wash down your barbecue with a pint from the Texas Beer Company taproom. The brewery's Pecos Amber Lager won the prestigious gold medal at the Great American Beer Festival in 2018. But in the spirit of craft beer collegiality, the bar serves draughts from other Texas brands, too.

At Black Sparrow Music Parlor across the street, live music awaits. Shannon Bagent, who managed shows for the Austin City Limits Music Festival and SXSW, opened the venue in 2016. Named after Black Sparrow Press, a California publishing house that took a chance on writer Charles Bukowski, the place has an artist-centered spirit. The sound in this former general store is pristine. Take in a performance with a signature sake- or champagne-based cocktail.

## Sunday



**9 A.M.**  
**Read All About It**

Before heading home, explore Pecan Manor's second-floor library. You'll find architecture tomes mixed with cowboy poetry and books by Texas authors. Take your coffee in the library, then head to the dining room for breakfast, where McCoy will make sure you fill up on pan-fried bacon before hitting the road. **L**

**PARK IT:**

Four Winds RV Park, located 2 miles from downtown Taylor, offers RV sites for daily, weekly, and monthly rates. 408 Carlos G. Parker Blvd. SE, Taylor. 512-484-5593; 4windsrvpark.com



13  
Things  
to Do in  
2020




EXPLORE THE

STATE'S NEWEST GEMS,

FROM INNOVATIVE

ART EXHIBITS TO

REVITALIZED TOWNS

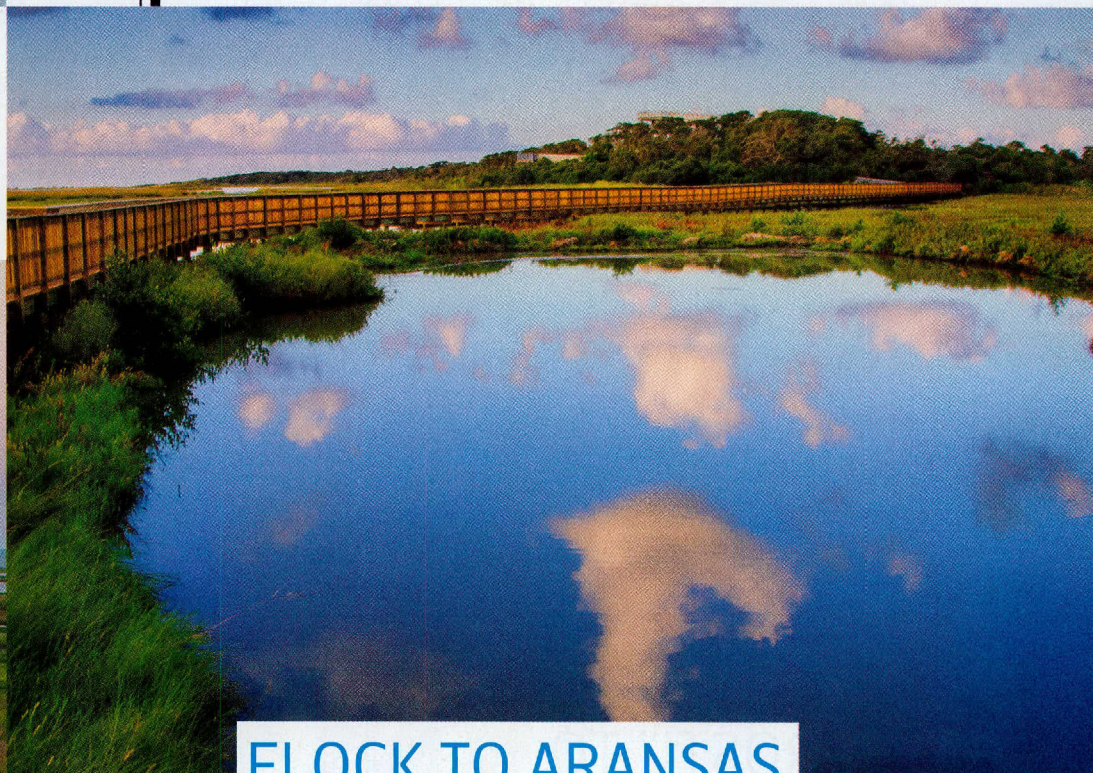


# NO MATTER HOW OFTEN YOU TRAVERSE THIS GREAT STATE,

there's always something new to see. Still, it can be easy to get stuck in a travel rut—visiting the same favorite towns, comfortably familiar landscapes, and tried-and-true attractions. Consider our 2020 travel bucket list your opportunity to push yourself out of your bubble. Explore a new region, appreciate a different culture, or test your physical limits. Make it your New Year's mantra: Go forth and explore.



**FROM LEFT:** Visitors get a bird's-eye view of the salt marshes at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge; the boardwalk extends over San Antonio Bay.



## FLOCK TO ARANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE'S NEW BOARDWALK

**Stroll along the 850-foot-long, 6-foot-wide boardwalk** at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and peer down at the teeming tidal-flat community of blue crabs, snakes, and alligators. There are even tracks of mammals such as bobcat, feral hog, and javelina. "Visitors can experience the sights, sounds, and smells of a coastal marsh without being up to their knees in marsh mud—making a sometimes inaccessible habitat available to all," says Laura Bonneau, visitor services manager. If you visit between October and April, you can admire some of the more than 500 endangered whooping cranes—North America's tallest bird and one of its rarest—that winter here. They number among the 405 bird species sighted at the refuge. The new structure, completed in August, extends over the marsh to a platform overlooking San Antonio Bay, where the refuge offers fishing access after the whooping cranes' spring departure. It also links the existing boardwalk and 40-foot observation tower to the lush, forested Big Tree Trail.

—Susan L. Ebert



### **BEST TIME TO VISIT:**

**BETWEEN OCTOBER AND APRIL**

361-349-1138; [fws.gov/refuge/aransas](https://fws.gov/refuge/aransas)



# SAY “PROST!” TO NEW BRAUNFELS’ 175TH

Famous tubing destination New Braunfels celebrates 175 years all year long.

**This March marks 175 years since settlers from Braunfels, Germany, first glimpsed the cypress-lined rivers and rolling countryside of Central Texas. Smitten by the beauty, the weary emigrants, led by Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels, ditched plans to travel farther north and planted themselves in what is now New Braunfels. “They had ample crystal-clear water, ample game, and ample building material, and thought, “This is perfect,”” says Judy Young, vice president of the Convention and Visitors Bureau. The community embraces its German roots and celebrates its anniversary in grand style every 25 years. The 2020 festivities, spread throughout the year, include cracking a keg of beer created especially for the occasion by brewers from both its Texan and German namesake cities, unearthing a time capsule buried at the 125th bash, a boat parade, a children’s costume parade, a trail ride, and several galas.**

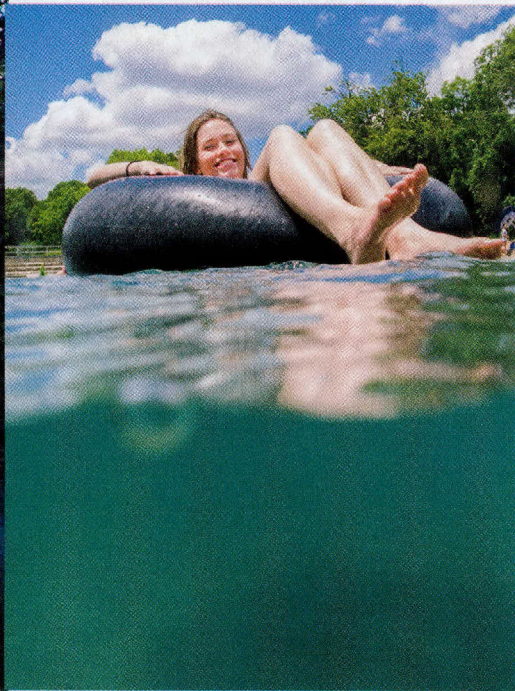
—Pam LeBlanc

### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

Many of the anniversary events take place in March, including the Founders Day Parade with fireworks, and a gala on March 21, but events are planned throughout 2020. [since1845.com](http://since1845.com)



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13



## PLAY IT COOL AT THE NEW HOME OF THE RANGERS

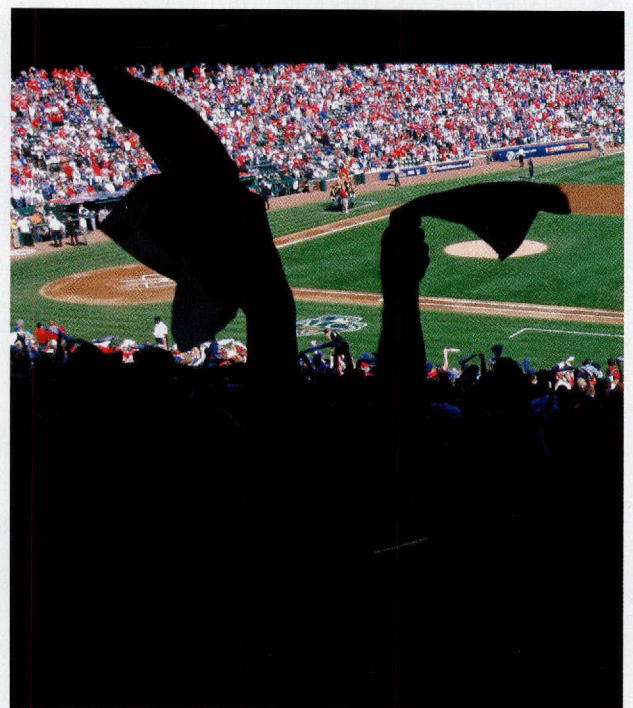
This spring, the Texas Rangers start playing ball at their new home, the 1.7-million-square-foot, climate-controlled Globe Life Field, which sits a stone's throw from the team's former Globe Life Park and the Dallas Cowboys' AT&T Stadium. The \$1.1 billion facility features a transparent retractable roof (allowing for air-conditioning during the summer) and will also host concerts and festivals. This section of Arlington has become quite the hub for sports and entertainment enthusiasts. Texas Live!, which opened in 2018, is a sprawling sports bar complex, and fans can also rest their heads steps away from the action at Live! By Loews. The 14-story, 300-room resort opened last August with its own roster of eateries and watering holes, including Arlington Clover Club, a chic "mixology lounge," and Soak, the hotel's swim-up bar.

—June Naylor



### BEST TIME OF YEAR TO VISIT:

Texas Rangers' opening day is March 31, and the regular season lasts through September. [arlington.org](http://arlington.org); [mlb.com/rangers](http://mlb.com/rangers)



## RELIVE PRESIDENTIAL HISTORY IN STONEWALL

**Constructed in 1964**, the Stonewall Motor Lodge originally housed Secret Service agents, pilots, and reporters when President Lyndon B. Johnson visited his ranch—nicknamed “the Texas White House”—2 miles down the road on US 290. Now fully refurbished, the modest 12-room motel features vintage photographs culled from the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin, newly built cabins with porches and kitchenettes, RV hook-ups, and an elevated deck lounge atop the lobby. One of the guest rooms, dubbed “The Press Room,” is an homage to the writers and photographers who stayed there; its kitchenette was once a darkroom. “They say the press corps would park [by the side of the road] on a Sunday morning, get their breakfast, and eat in their cars waiting for LBJ to go to church,” says Anita Ortiz Lubke, co-owner of the hotel. Though journalists didn’t have much else to do in their downtime in 1960s Stonewall, visitors can now take their pick of popular wineries like Pedernales Cellars and Kuhlman Cellars (known for their tempranillo and rosé, respectively) within a five-minute drive.

—*Cynthia J. Drake*

### BEST TIME TO VISIT: SPRING

14818 US 290, Stonewall.  
830-644-1040;  
stonewallmotorlodge.com



Enjoy a glass of Hill Country wine on Stonewall Motor Lodge's deck.





Test your balance and grit on this 600-foot-long inflatable obstacle course.

## CONQUER AN OBSTACLE COURSE ON LAKE TRAVIS

At **Lake Travis Waterloo Adventure**, the 600-foot-long Floating Challenge Course lets the whole family live out their *American Ninja Warrior* dreams by tackling climbing walls, hurdles, blobs, monkey bars, and slippery half-pipes. The waters of Lake Travis sit below as a forgiving cushion. Once your 45-minute session on the challenge course is over, you can jump on a floating trampoline, climb a 14-foot tower, or fly down a water slide. After a day of amped-up activity, recover in the ample lakeside lounge chairs and refuel with food truck fare like hot dogs and grilled cheese sandwiches. Owners John Shipley and Brian George, who also own Lake Travis Zipline Adventures on an adjacent property, decided to locate their businesses in a serene corner of the busy lake. That means a ticket here gives you an experience that's not available to the general public. Because there are plenty of lifeguards, the kids can wear themselves out while parents relax and admire the view.

—Clayton Maxwell



### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

**APRIL THROUGH SEPTEMBER**

14529 Pocohontas Trail, Suite A,  
Leander. 512-614-1979;  
waterlooadventures.com

# ETC.

### ALSO SET TO DEBUT IN 2020:

**SeaWorld San Antonio** will launch the state's tallest, fastest, and longest wooden roller coaster, the Texas Stingray, this spring. With a 100-foot drop, it overtakes the previous record-holder, the Boardwalk Bullet in Kemah.

The historic **P. A. Smith Hotel** in Navasota will once again welcome visitors this summer. The former hotel, which was in operation from the mid-1800s to 1890, will undergo a complete renovation that preserves its past by retaining the building's limestone walls and some of the hardwood flooring and beams. The hotel will also have a space devoted to historical photographs and memorabilia.

**The Houston Farmers Market** is remaking itself into a mecca for foodies. Opening in late 2020, the nearly 18-acre destination will offer on-site restaurants, including one headed by James Beard Award-winning chef Chris Shepherd. There will also be fresh fruits and vegetables, a butcher, and a fishmonger.

—Heather Brand



## CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE ON LAKE BUCHANAN

One of Central Texas' six Highland Lakes, Lake Buchanan, near Burnet, offers plenty of options for adventure on water and land. At Spider Mountain Bike Park, a gondola that once whisked skiers up slopes at Taos Ski Resort in New Mexico is now carrying cyclists to the top of the only lift-served mountain bike park in the state. After a seven-minute trip up the 1,500-foot "mountain," cyclists ride the banked corners, limestone gullies, and wooden ramps on the way down. Trails are rated green for easiest, blue for intermediate, and black for expert. If less-extreme activities are more your speed, book one of the pastel-colored cabins at Black Rock Park, a 25-acre getaway on the other side of the lake. There, you can swim, fish, rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard, play sand volleyball, or take a swing on a new nine-hole mini-golf course.

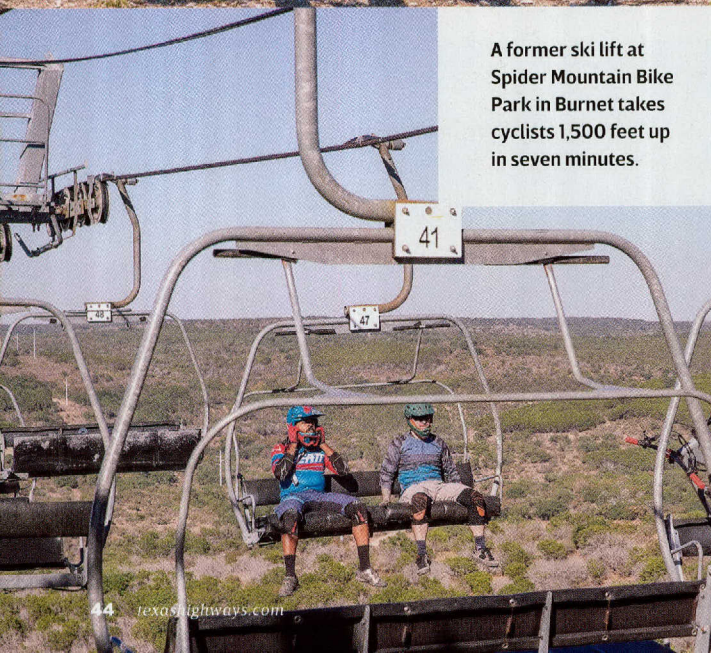
—P.L.



**BEST TIME TO VISIT:**  
**SPRING OR FALL**

Spider Mountain: 200 Greenwood Hills Trail, Burnet. 512-756-4878; spidermountain.com

Black Rock Park: 3400 SH 261, Burnet. 512-369-4774; lcra.org/parks



A former ski lift at Spider Mountain Bike Park in Burnet takes cyclists 1,500 feet up in seven minutes.



## CRUISE AMARILLO'S POLK STREET

A 1939 postcard once proclaimed Polk Street, in downtown Amarillo, the “best lighted Main Street west of the Mississippi,” thanks to its prominent neon signage and intersection with historic Route 66. Sadly, urban sprawl left the city’s once-glitzy entertainment hub a shell of its former self until the recent winds of revitalization and enterprise blew off the dust. Even the vintage neon has returned because of grants and advocacy led by nonprofit Center City Amarillo. Foot traffic has resumed, too, with recently opened businesses like Six Car Pub & Brewery, Crush Wine Bar & Restaurant, the Esquire Jazz Club, and a new arcade-themed bar called Lit. Strings of lights glow while pedicabs shuttle patrons to the new Double-A ballpark, Hometown, to catch an Amarillo Sod Poodles game. Meanwhile, on Polk Street, the 1927 Oliver-Eakle building—Amarillo’s first skyscraper—is being restored into a swanky Marriott hotel called The Barfield, set to open in April.

—Jason Boyett



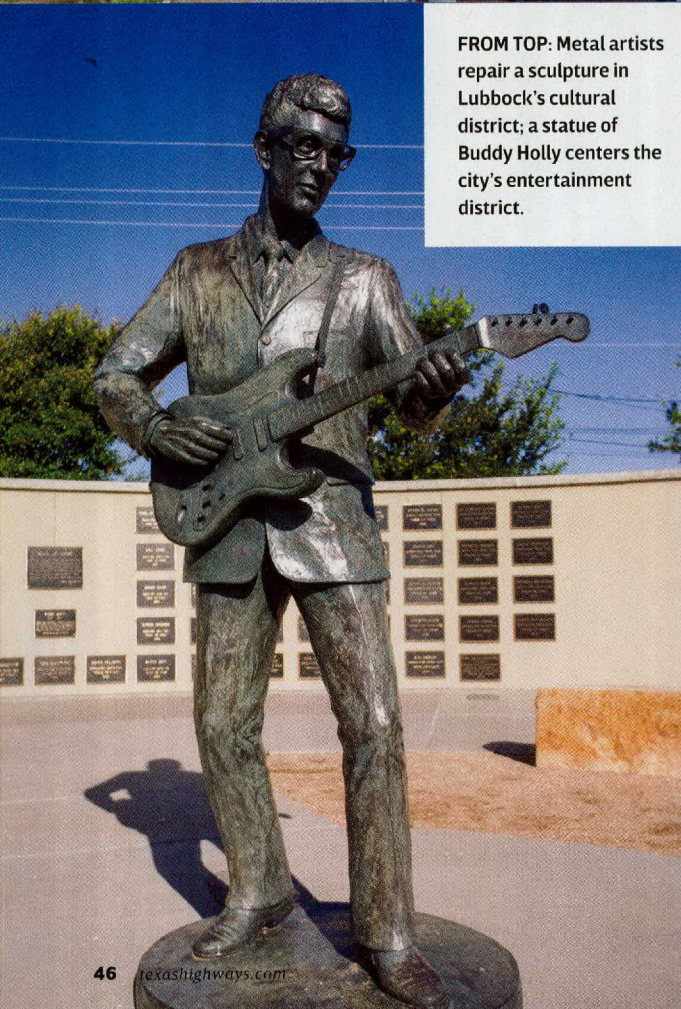
**BEST TIME TO VISIT:**  
SPRING THROUGH FALL  
[visitamarillo.com](http://visitamarillo.com)

Six Car Pub & Brewery helps light up Amarillo’s historic Polk Street.



## FIND INSPIRATION IN LUBBOCK'S ARTS SCENE

**FROM TOP:** Metal artists repair a sculpture in Lubbock's cultural district; a statue of Buddy Holly centers the city's entertainment district.



**The city that birthed Buddy Holly**, Texas Tech University, and the state's wine industry is refreshing its reputation as a cultural center. Anchoring the arts district is the \$154 million Buddy Holly Hall of Performing Arts and Sciences, opening in fall 2020. The facility will be the home of Ballet Lubbock and the Lubbock Symphony Orchestra. Also breathing new life into the arts scene is the second annual Buddy Holly Songwriters Retreat—the five-day course, starting Aug. 31, supplies mentorship and support for burgeoning singer-songwriters. Just outside the performing arts center, you can explore a wealth of gallery spaces, upscale restaurants, breweries, and wineries set in refurbished historic buildings. Lubbock's First Friday Art Trail offers the opportunity to see the shops, studios, and museum spaces up close. Retro-chic boutique hotel Cotton Court opens this summer, so you can comfortably explore all Lubbock has to offer without rushing home.

—C.J.D.



### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

LATE 2020

800-692-4035;

visitlubbock.org



## GET IN TOUCH WITH BIG BEND

**Big Bend National Park's landscape changes** with the seasons, offering plenty for its 440,000-plus annual visitors to enjoy year-round. But its exhibits were past due for an overhaul. The Rio Grande Village visitors center and historic Magdalena House exhibit building have been upgraded with new educational displays and historical photos focusing on the rich heritage of the bicultural border and how the park works with its Mexican counterparts. New installations at Chisos Basin and Persimmon Gap visitors centers are scheduled for later this year. The park's Chief of Interpretation Tom Vandenberg says the exhibits, though new, are deliberately low-tech. "We're so far away from anywhere that exhibits that depend on electronics invariably end up failing here," he says. "So there are a lot of tactile models for people to touch."

—J.B.

**BEST TIME TO VISIT:**  
**SPRING AND FALL**  
[nps.gov/bibe](http://nps.gov/bibe)



FROM LEFT: a new outdoor kiosk at Rio Grande Village visitors center; updated offerings include information on local birds.



### BIRDS NEAR RIO GRANDE VILLAGE

Common black-hawks are linked to riparian habitats. They live and hunt near water and often nest in large cottonwoods.



Vermilion flycatchers are flashy birds; the males have scarlet plumage. They perch on branches as they look for insects.



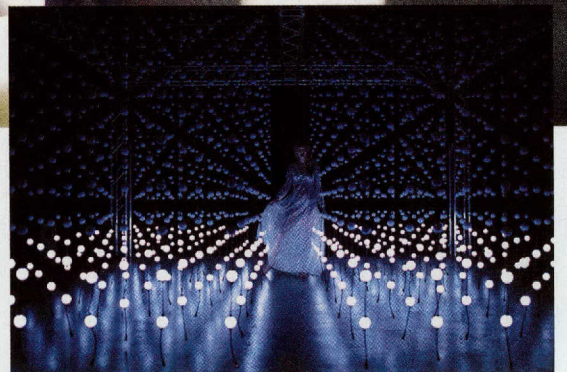


FROM TOP: "Infinity Boxes" installation at Hopscotch; another interactive work, "Matrix."

## GORGE YOURSELF ON A VISUAL FEAST IN SAN ANTONIO

This year, San Antonio shows how deeply personal art can be. Hopscotch, a nearly 20,000-square-foot interactive art space opening downtown this spring, dissolves the line between art and viewer. The 13 installations invite visitors to participate by dancing, moving, shouting, and playing—touching the art is actually encouraged here. After testing the concept with a six-week pop-up in Austin, Hopscotch found its permanent home in Alamo City. "Experiences over things' has become my mantra," says Nicole Jensen, one of Hopscotch's co-founders. "People enjoying themselves together through art is an impactful thing." Also breaking boundaries is Ruby City, a free contemporary art center that opened this past October in the Southtown neighborhood. Designed by international architect Sir David Adjaye, it houses selected works from the 900-plus-piece collection of late San Antonio artist and philanthropist Linda Pace, of the Pace salsa family. The project originated from a dream she had before her death in 2007 in which she envisioned a shining ruby city. Twelve years later, that vision has been realized. Inaugural exhibitions include *Playtime*, a video installation by filmmaker Isaac Julien; and *Waking Dream*, a collection of works from artists like Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović and San Antonio-based painter and printmaker Cruz Ortiz.

—C.M.



### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

**SPRING**

for Ruby City

**SUMMER THROUGH**

**WINTER**

for Hopscotch

Hopscotch: 213 E. Travis St.

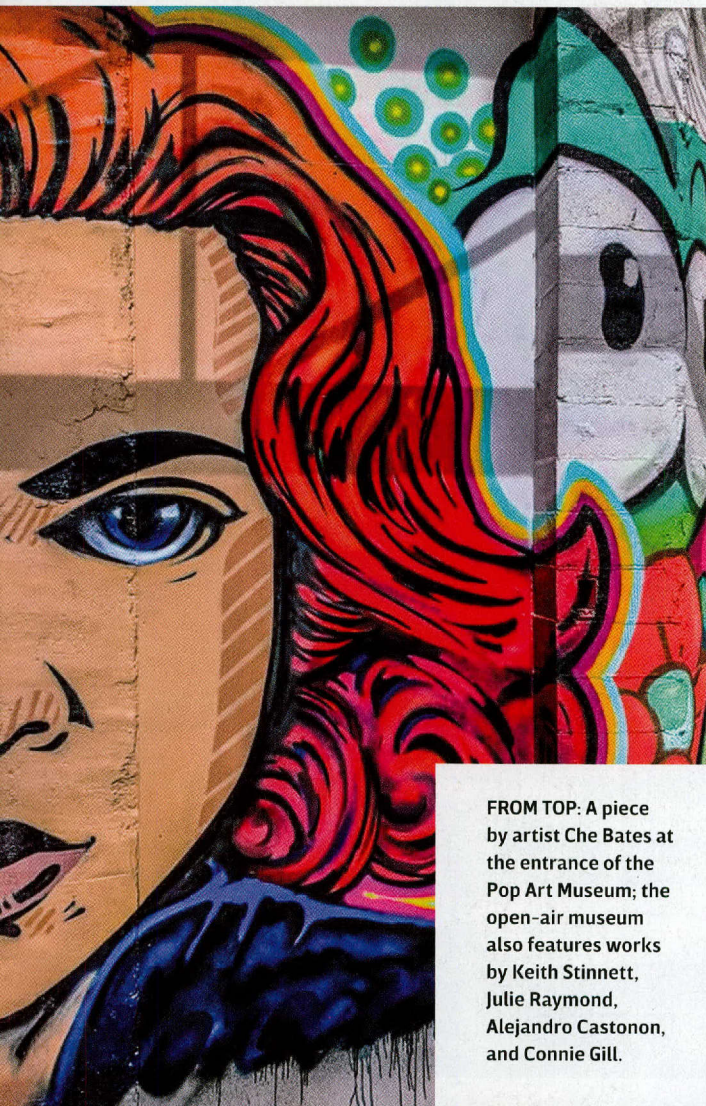
letshopscotch.com

Ruby City: 150 Camp St.

210-227-8400;

rubycity.org





FROM TOP: A piece by artist Che Bates at the entrance of the Pop Art Museum; the open-air museum also features works by Keith Stinnett, Julie Raymond, Alejandro Castanon, and Connie Gill.

## JOIN THE POP PARADE IN SAN ANGELO

San Angelo nonprofit **Art in Uncommon Places** continues to paint the town red—as well as every other hue—with its novel Pop Art Museum. The open-air museum, a cooperative effort with Downtown San Angelo, Inc., is located a block from Paintbrush Alley, an outdoor mural space that was revamped in May 2019 and features a permanent tribute to the film *Giant* rendered by nearly 60 San Angelo artists. The Pop Art Museum, which opened in October, is housed in a now-roofless former bowling alley. It showcases more than 50 pieces, including some by San Angelo native and pop luminary James Francis Gill, an Andy Warhol contemporary, whose depiction of Marilyn Monroe graces the entrance. All works celebrate the vibrant midcentury aesthetic of the Pop Art movement. AIUP President Julie Raymond, an art teacher for 20 years, says these two 24-hour free museums have long been a dream of hers. “I love putting art in the public’s faces and seeing how it transforms people,” she says. “It heals us every day.”

—S.L.E.



### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

#### SPRING AND FALL

Pop Art Museum: 125 W. Twohig Ave. Paintbrush Alley: 200 block of S. Irving St. [downtownsanangelo.com](http://downtownsanangelo.com); [artinuncommonplaces.com](http://artinuncommonplaces.com)





The historic Fort Worth Stockyards' Mule Alley is receiving a full makeover this year, adding new shops, lodging, and restaurants.

## REDISCOVER FORT WORTH

It's fair to say that **Cowtown is having a moment**. Last May, it was recognized as the 13th largest city in the country in terms of population. Coming off the heels of that news, Fort Worth is determined to make everything bigger and better, starting with the \$540 million Dickies Arena that opened in November. With 14,000 seats, the stadium will host everything from parts of the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo and March Madness games, to concerts from the likes of George Strait. Two blocks away, the Amon Carter Museum of American Art recently unveiled its yearlong renovation, which includes enlarged and expanded galleries to display newly acquired works by late artists Scott and Stuart Gentling, famous for their watercolor paintings of Texas landscapes and wildlife. In the historic Stockyards, old Mule Alley reveals an extensive update that adds new luxury lodging, Hotel Drover, and a herd of new shops like the Lucchese Collection and restaurants like The Biscuit Bar. Slightly off the well-trod path, the once-industrial Near Southside neighborhood now houses fresh occupants (like Leaves Book and Tea Shop, Locust Cider & Brewing Co., and Black Cat Pizza) that have transformed it into a booming entertainment district.

—J.N.

## EXPAND YOUR MIND AT UPGRADED MUSEUMS ACROSS THE STATE

Several museums around the state benefited from updates, expansions, and new amenities in 2019. In September, the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum debuted with state-of-the-art exhibitions and a black-box theater in which Holocaust survivors, appearing as three-dimensional projections, answer questions posed by visitors. In the same month, the El Paso Museum of Art revamped and reinstalled its second-floor permanent-exhibition spaces, which display Latin American, early Texas, and American art, among others. The Holocaust Museum Houston completed a \$34 million expansion in June, more than doubling its size and rebuilding its exhibition spaces. The Contemporary Austin's Laguna Gloria campus grew with the addition of a café and shop carrying artist-designed merchandise in May. The café, called Épicerie at the Contemporary, offers French-Cajun fare and outdoor seating on a terrace overlooking the lush grounds near Lake Austin. 🐾

—H.B.



### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

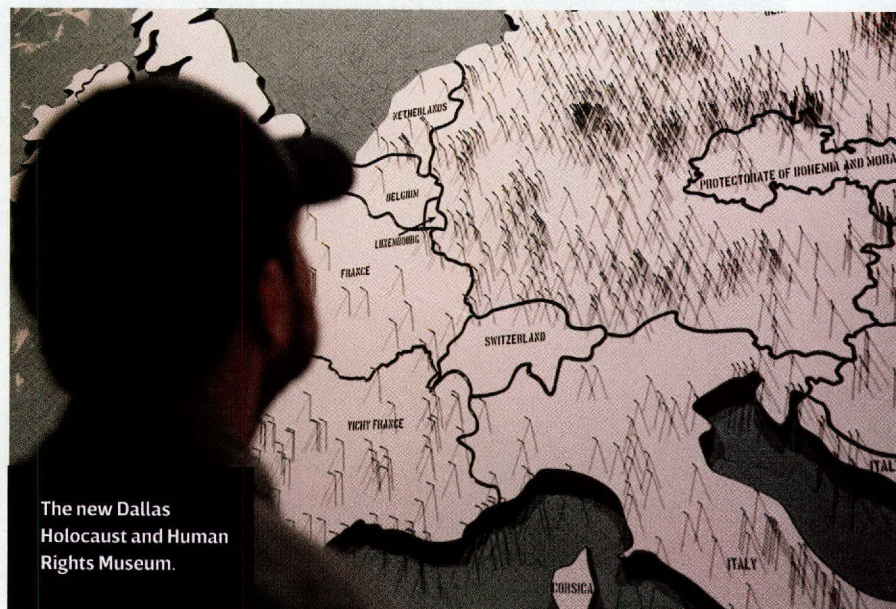
#### SUMMER

dhhrm.org; epma.art;  
hnh.org; thecontemporaryaustin.org

### BEST TIME TO VISIT:

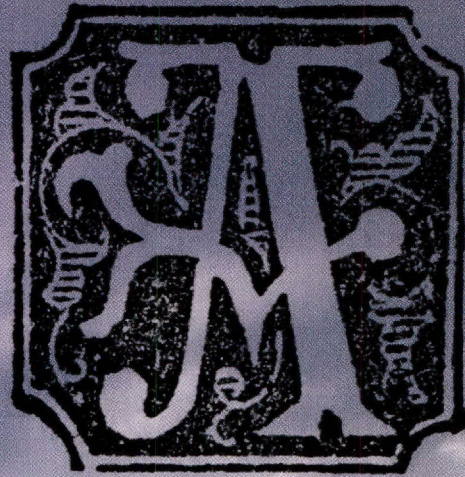
#### JANUARY AND FEBRUARY

fortworth.com



The new Dallas  
Holocaust and Human  
Rights Museum.

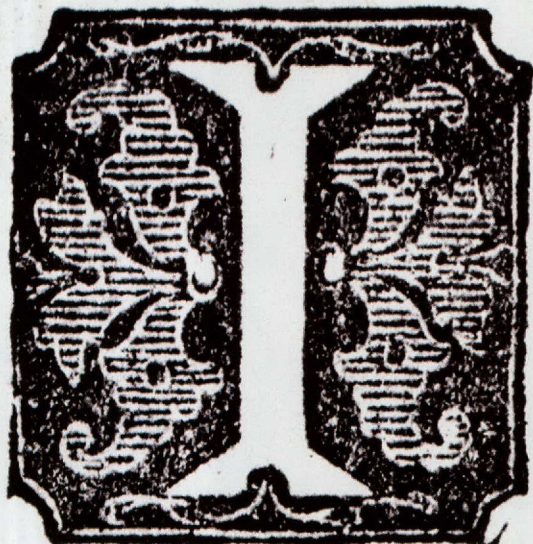




# GOLDEN JOURNEY

FROM GALVESTON TO THE  
CHINATI MOUNTAINS—ON THE  
TRAIL OF CABEZA DE VACA,  
TEXAS' FIRST TRAVEL WRITER

BY CLAYTON MAXWELL  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY E. DAN KLEPPER  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERWIN SHERMAN



## IT'S NO SIMPLE TASK,

following the footsteps of Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, the first nonnative to step foot in Texas and live to write a book about it. First off, if you want to do it right, you'd have to do it naked. And hungry. And how do you find traces of a thwarted Spanish conquistador, thirsty for gold and glory, who washed up on the coast near Galveston one cold November in 1528 and then walked hundreds of miles over many years, encountering dozens of native groups along the way?

Further complicating matters, we don't know exactly where he went. Although the book Cabeza de Vaca later wrote about his wild trek, *La Relación*, is full of juicy details, scholars rely on educated guesses to surmise his route. They have debated this, sometimes hotly, since the 1850s at least. Therefore my journey, which loosely follows the route proposed by the late Alex D. Krieger, an archeologist at the University of Texas from 1939 to 1956, is more impressionistic than precise.

I am seeking traces of this scrappy survivor—far more than just a funny name from Texas history class (Cabeza de Vaca translates to “Cow Head”)—because there is still much to learn from his odyssey. While interpretations of *La Relación* vary, there is no question he overcame astonishing odds to be the first chronicler of Texas. He was the first to record its plants and animals, the first to advocate for the people he met here, and the first to seek a peaceful coexistence rather than kill or enslave the natives like other Spanish conquistadors.

He was also the first Texas travel writer. He sat down with his quill and ink well to figure out—like me—how to relay his saga in a way that was respectful to those he met and meaningful for his readers. Because he was the first to write about our state, and often did so with an endearing openness, Cabeza de Vaca is my personal patron saint of Texas travel writers.

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**OPENING SPREAD:** An interpretation of Cabeza de Vaca on Galveston Island, the area where he washed ashore in 1528.

## MALHADO, THE ISLE OF MISFORTUNE

“TO THIS ISLAND WE GAVE THE NAME MALHADO,” Cabeza de Vaca wrote in *La Relación*, his report for the Spanish king, published first in 1542 with a second edition in 1555. Translated as “The Isle of Misfortune,” Malhado is a fitting name given that, of the 80 men in the expedition who washed up near Galveston on makeshift barges—having abandoned their ships back in Florida—only a few survivors made it off the island.

But there were some silver linings. The natives who found the men on the beach handed Cabeza de Vaca arrows, a sign of friendship. Then they carried the foreigners back to their huts, lighting bonfires on the way to keep them from freezing. Cabeza de Vaca learned their languages and observed their customs. And even though at first he was a slave, he was savvy enough to earn their respect and eventually gain some freedom as a traveling merchant.

As I drive along the Galveston Seawall, with high-rises and the carnival rides of the Pleasure Pier framing my view, I'm hard-pressed to imagine such exploits once unfolded nearby. But that changes inside The Bryan Museum, where I gaze upon one of the handful of surviving copies of the 1555 edition of *La Relación*, a small leather soft-bound book. It's so unassuming, visitors around me walk right past it.







PRESENT DAY  
TEXAS

LA JUNTA  
DE LOS RIOS

CHINAPI MOUNTAINS

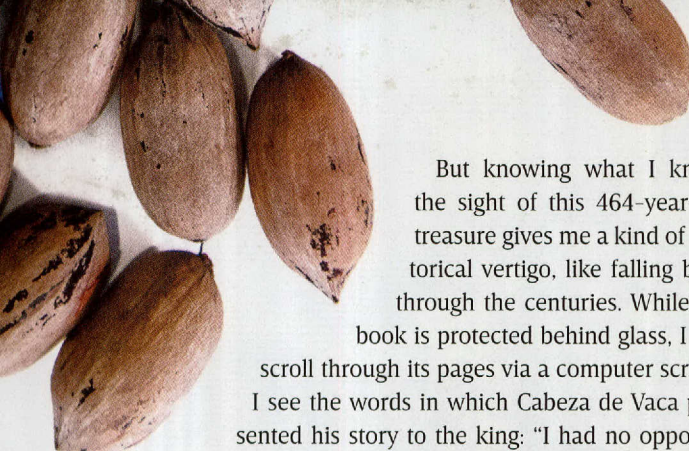
RIO GRANDE  
RIVER

RIVER OF NUTS  
(GUADALUPE RIVER)

MALHADO  
(GALVESTON  
ISLAND)

GULF OF MEXICO

TO MEXICO CITY



But knowing what I know, the sight of this 464-year-old treasure gives me a kind of historical vertigo, like falling back through the centuries. While the book is protected behind glass, I can scroll through its pages via a computer screen. I see the words in which Cabeza de Vaca presented his story to the king: "I had no opportunity to perform greater service than this, which is to bring to Your Majesty an account of all that I was able to observe and learn in the nine years that I walked lost and naked through many and very strange lands ... because this alone is what a man who came away naked could carry out with him."

He wrote a lot about nakedness—19 times according to the index of a 1999 translation of the book by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz. It must have been shocking, after all, for a devout Catholic from the Spanish aristocracy to lose his armor and walk through Texas buck naked. But that's what the locals did, so he did it, too. It's also a metaphor. The guy lost everything.

I drive down the coast and camp by myself at Galveston Island State Park. This is the closest I can get to the wilderness of Malhado and the loneliness Cabeza de Vaca must have felt as the sole European slave to the tribe that took

him in, his countrymen dying off, the whereabouts of other survivors unknown. For about four years, he lived with the hunter-gatherers along this stretch of coast.

Sitting on the driftwood-strewn beach, I watch the sky darken as a storm begins to brew over the ocean. It's going to be a wet and blustery night. I wonder if Cabeza de Vaca looked back across this water and lamented all he'd left behind in Spain.

I try to set up my tent on the bay side of the park just as the squall hits, the winds whipping the tent out of my hands and forcing me to chase it down. Later, as I try to sleep, rain drips through my tent and a mosquito buzzes around my head. On this we can commiserate. "We found throughout the land a very great quantity of mosquitoes of three types that are very bad and vexatious, and all the rest of the summer they exhausted us," Cabeza de Vaca recalled.



## REUNION AT THE RIVER OF NUTS

**AFTER HIS YEARS WITH THE TRIBES AROUND MALHADO,** Cabeza de Vaca headed south, seeking the Spanish settlement at Rio Pánuco, in what is now the Mexican state of Veracruz. At Matagorda Bay, he met the Quevenes group, who



reported seeing other foreigners traveling with tribes headed for the harvest at the River of Nuts, which scholars agree is the lower Guadalupe River near Victoria. Here, in 1533, the Spaniard reunited with Estevanico (a slave from Morocco), Andrés Dorantes de Carranza, and Alonso Castillo Maldonado—the three remaining survivors of the expedition. “This day was one of the days of greatest pleasure that we have had in our lives,” he wrote.

Today, Riverside Park in Victoria bursts with pecan trees. Sitting on a picnic table and chomping on trail mix, I can imagine Cabeza de Vaca’s joy at reuniting with his castaway pals, the four of them gorging on sweet pecans. As a cadre,



united, they would help each other on the long road ahead. Had they not found each other, Cabeza de Vaca would likely not have survived—all he discovered about early Texas history and later wrote about would be lost.

I leave Victoria and drive southeast toward Seadrift, where the Guadalupe flows into San Antonio Bay. On the road, I consider the people Cabeza de Vaca described who once called this land home: The People of the Figs, the Camoles, and the Guaycones. “All these peoples have dwellings and villages and diverse languages,” he wrote. His depictions

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After landing on or near Galveston Island, Cabeza de Vaca was enslaved by a native tribe. He later escaped.

often convey awe: He describes the groups along the Texas coast, for example, as people who “see and hear more and they have sharper senses than any other men that I think there are in the world.” His words are all we have left of them.

## THE LAND OF THE TUNAS

**MOST SCHOLARS BELIEVE THE FOURSOME, STILL CAPTIVE,** headed down through South Texas, possibly near Alice, for the annual prickly pear harvest. As I cruise down US 77 listening to the audiobook of *La Relación*, the landscape strikes me as way too spiny to offer anything edible. However, Cabeza de Vaca encountered something different among the fields of cactus. “The best season that these people have,” he wrote, “is when they eat the prickly pears, because then they are not hungry, and they spend all their time dancing and eating of them, night and day.”

In early fall of 1534, the four travelers escaped from captivity and crossed the Rio Grande south of Laredo near Falcon Lake. They then turned away from the coast and headed west toward the mountains of northeastern Mexico. Along the way, they attracted hundreds of followers who considered them healers who “came from the sky.” In an extraordinary metamorphosis from slaves to heroes, the Europeans—now with an entourage—blessed the natives’ babies and food, and received a bounty of gifts in return. After their transformative trek across Mexico, they eventually crossed the Rio Grande near Presidio and arrived back in Texas.

Before driving out to Presidio, I detour to The Wittliff Collections at Texas State University in San Marcos, home to another 1555 edition of *La Relación*. The Wittliff released a revamped digital version of its copy on its website in 2018. It quickly became the archive’s most popular search item, with more than 100,000 hits per year.

On the top floor of Texas State’s Alkek Library, Wittliff literary curator Steve Davis sets down an archival box just under a foot long and lifts the leather-bound book from within. This time I get to actually touch its almost 500-year-old rag-paper pages, a spellbinding sensation.

Davis tells me Cabeza de Vaca is making a comeback in Texas history books. “J. Frank Dobie, who basically invented Texas literature, was advocating in the 1920s that students should be learning the story of Cabeza de Vaca,” he says.



## CABEZA DE VACA TRAVEL TIPS:

### 1

#### Keep an Open Mind:

Rather than criticize when he realized that an indigenous group did not have a Western concept of time, he wrote that they were “very skilled and well-practiced” in understanding “the differences between the times when the fruit comes to mature ... and the stars appear.”

### 2

#### Help Out in a Jam:

Cabeza de Vaca carried his companions who couldn't swim across rivers. He removed an arrow point from the torso of a native man. When you're on the road, it feels good to be useful.

### 3

#### Listen and Ask Questions:

Cabeza de Vaca asked why indigenous mothers breastfed their children until they were 12, and they explained that it was the best way to help their children survive food scarcity. Rather than judge, he listened and learned.

### 4

#### Learn the Language:

Cabeza de Vaca learned at least six different languages. When the locals realized he could speak with them, his chances of survival shot up.

### 5

#### Express Gratitude:

Cabeza de Vaca was grateful to the locals who helped him, and they showed their appreciation for him in return. One group gave him 600 deer hearts—a prized food source—as a thank-you gift, most likely for a healing he had performed.

“Somehow it didn't happen. Thanks to changes over the last 20 or 30 years, students have been able to get that story more in their Texas history classes. It's finally in the forefront where it deserves to be.”

Just a short walk from the archive, Don Olson, a Texas State physicist, historical astronomer, and scholar of Cabeza de Vaca, works in an office lined with books and folders stuffed with his research on the Spaniard. High on one shelf rests a cooler Olson filled with branches and nuts from the piñon pine trees Cabeza de Vaca praised in his memories of northern Mexico: “There are throughout that land small pines, and ... they have a very thin hull.”

In 1996, Olson led a team of students to Mexico to find those pines, evidence for the theory that Cabeza de Vaca dipped south of the Rio Grande; pines in West Texas and New Mexico have thick hulls. “The truth is very hard to find,” Olson says. He opens the cooler for me, and even though they've been in there for years, the piñon needles still smell like the pine-filled Mexican mountains Cabeza de Vaca crossed in 1535.

I ask the professor why the Wittliff's online version of *La Relación* has so many hits. “I don't know,” replies Olson, who's currently working on an article that examines astronomical references in Cabeza de Vaca's book. “I can only tell you why I am doing this. The *Relación* is an important book, the first written about this land we now call Texas. I am a physicist, and I want to know the facts—where he went and when. I'm trying to solve the mysteries.”



## LA JUNTA AND THE PEOPLE OF THE COWS

AMID THE DEBATE ABOUT WHERE CABEZA DE VACA traveled, historians agree he visited La Junta de los Rios, a settlement where the Rio Grande and Rio Conchos meet near Presidio. He called these natives, who were bison-hunters, “The People of the Cows,” and he was elated to find they were farmers, the first he'd encountered in Texas.

“They gave us frijoles and squash to eat,” he wrote. “The manner in which they cook them is so novel that, for being such, I wanted to put it here so that the extraordinary ingenuity and industry of humankind might be seen and known in all its diversity.”

I drive to Presidio the same weekend a former ambassador from Spain, Miguel Ángel Fernández de Mazarambroz, is in town to meet with archeologists from Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and Sul Ross State University's Center for Big Bend Studies. It's part of a reunion organized by Bill Millet, director of the 2018 documentary *Texas Before the Alamo*. This crew believes that by sharing archeological resources across borders, we can strengthen our countries' relationships.



Historians believe Cabeza de Vaca's journey through Texas took him back and forth across the Rio Grande, including near the present-day border town of Presidio.

"The European history of Texas starts 500 years ago, not with the Alamo," de Mazarambroz says. "Cabeza de Vaca is like a Texan in the sense that he is a strong man, and you see he was also a kind man. We shouldn't cut off that part of history."

From La Junta, Cabeza de Vaca and his companions walked northwest along the Rio Grande and then crossed back into Mexico where they eventually came upon Spaniards on horseback. Shocked to find these ragtag naked survivors, the Spaniards led Cabeza de Vaca to Mexico City. From there he headed to a port for a long journey back to Spain. The castaway was eager to share his new knowledge with the king and, many historians believe, advocate for a more humane colonization of the West Indies. While details are uncertain, it is believed he lived out his final days in Spain in his hometown of Jerez de La Frontera and died in either Valladolid or Seville.

On a cool spring morning, I walk along the Rio Grande, just outside of Presidio, until I see the actual "la junta," or joining, of the Conchos and Rio Grande. Cabeza de Vaca wrote that the Rio Grande "had water that came up to our chests; it was probably as wide as that of Seville." Today, the river here is so narrow I could jump across it.

My heart skips to see the jagged Chinati Mountains standing tall on the horizon. Cabeza de Vaca walked toward these mountains, too, stepping one bare foot after another. After so many years lost, he was transformed. No longer a conqueror, he'd enlarged his worldview and become an ally to the locals, the best things a traveler can do. What he did bring back with him—his story—is the most valuable gold there is. 🐾



★ ★ ★

**FIRST, SHE OVERCAME  
GENDER INEQUALITY  
IN THE MILITARY. THEN  
SHE SAVED LIVES  
AT SOUTHWEST.  
MEET CAPTAIN TAMMIE  
JO SHULTS, AMERICAN  
HERO TWICE OVER.**



# THE FATE OF FLIGHT 1380

BY  
MICHAEL J.  
MOONEY

# CAPTAIN TAMMIE JO SHULTS WASN'T SUPPOSED TO FLY THAT PLANE THAT DAY.

But her husband, Dean, a fellow Southwest Airlines pilot, knew their son had a track meet at the end of the week and Tammie Jo coached him in the throwing events. So, like he'd done so many other times, Dean switched their schedules to make sure she could get back in time. That's how Tammie Jo Shults ended up piloting Southwest flight 1380.

The runways at New York's LaGuardia Airport are usually a mess of congestion, but that morning, April 17, 2018, Shults and First Officer Darren Ellisor were cleared for takeoff before they even got to the runway. Within minutes, the Boeing 737-700 was up into the clear spring sky, heading for Dallas. The New York City skyline faded behind them. The trip was supposed to take about three and a half hours. At first it seemed like the thousands of other flights Shults had flown in her 30-plus years as a pilot.

About 20 minutes in, though, as they climbed past 32,000 feet somewhere over Eastern Pennsylvania, there was a sudden, life-changing explosion. In the cockpit, it felt like another plane had hit them on the left. They were thrown sideways with a force Shults had never experienced, even in simulators, and now they could feel the plane skidding through the air. Then everything started shuddering so hard they couldn't read the instruments. The whole world was a violent blur. Within seconds, the aircraft was diving toward the earth and starting to roll. That's how Shults knew they'd lost an engine.

Nobody in the main cabin could have known what an extraordinary person was captaining the



**OPENING SPREAD:** Tammie Jo Shults was one of the first female fighter pilots in the Navy. **RIGHT:** Tammie Jo and her husband, Dean, at Southwest and in the Navy.





★ ★ ★  
**WITHIN SECONDS,  
THE AIRCRAFT WAS  
DIVING TOWARD  
THE EARTH AND  
STARTING TO ROLL.  
THAT'S HOW SHULTS  
KNEW THEY'D  
LOST AN ENGINE.**



plane. Shults had flown for Southwest for more than 20 years by then. Before that, she'd been one of the first few female fighter pilots in the Navy, a station she achieved through incredible skill, determination, and grace. She's also a mother of two and long-time Sunday school teacher from Boerne, a quaint town in the Hill Country.

As she and Ellisor struggled to get the plane upright, Shults noticed smoke coming in from the air conditioning system. She could barely breathe. She didn't know it at the time, but a window in row 14 had blown out behind a wing, and the cabin was quickly depressurizing. The sound was a blistering, unconquerable roar, like ice picks through the eardrums of everyone on board. There was also a cockpit alarm blaring, warning them about the loss of oxygen.

In that moment, time slowed down for Captain Shults. Ellisor reduced their airspeed, which mostly stopped the intense vibrations. One at a time the captain and first officer put on their oxygen masks, making sure at least one of them had eyes on the plane at all times. They also started talking to the local air traffic control.

At this point, nobody in the crew knew what happened or how far the plane could fly, but Shults knew they needed to land as soon as possible. Ellisor spotted the Philadelphia airport on the radar, about 50 miles away. It was familiar: Southwest flies to Philadelphia, so both the captain and first officer had landed there hundreds of times. Philadelphia also has long runways, emergency medical capabilities, and a metropolitan fire department. In a calm, firm voice, Shults told the passengers that they were landing there.

In the first five minutes, the plane descended about 19,000 feet, at a rate more than twice as fast as usual. They were near 8,000 feet when the flight attendants told the cockpit what had happened in row 14.

In recordings from that day, Captain Shults sounds astonishingly calm. Matter-of-fact even. At one point, as they got closer to Philadelphia, she asked the air traffic controller to have ambulances meet the plane on the runway, noting that they have injured passengers.

"Is your airplane physically on fire?" the air traffic controller asked.

"No, it's not on fire," Shults said, as composed as someone chatting about the weather. "But part of it's missing."

A pause stretched on for several seconds. The air traffic controller had no response.



Shults continued: "They said there's a hole and someone went out."

"Um, I'm sorry," the air traffic controller replied. "You said there's a *hole* and somebody went out?"

## JUST PLANE SMART

When the story of flight 1380 first broke, the residents of Boerne weren't too surprised. They'd known how special Shults was for years. Staci Thompson, a longtime friend of Shults' from her church in Boerne, told reporters the pilot has always had "a very soft spirit." Even wild animals would approach her, unafraid. Robert Bruce, who owns the small airfield in Boerne where Tammie Jo and Dean kept their personal plane for years, said she wasn't "the type to panic."

Born Tammie Jo Bonnell, in 1961, she grew up in rural New Mexico, not far from Holloman Air Force Base. As a kid she'd gaze up at the sleek, white fighter jets chasing each other through the open skies above her. She read books about legendary female aviators like Beryl Markham and Amelia Earhart.

★ ★ ★

**SHE DECIDED TO GO TO COLLEGE TO BE A VETERINARIAN. BUT SHE STILL YEARNED TO FLY. THEN, HER SENIOR YEAR OF COLLEGE, SHE MET A FEMALE PILOT IN THE AIR FORCE. HER DREAM SUDDENLY SEEMED POSSIBLE.**



Tammie Jo pours Dean one of her decaffeinated, blended teas from an antique kettle.

She loved *Jungle Pilot*, a biography of Nate Saint, a missionary pilot who flew medicine and food to remote villages in Ecuador. By the time she took her first flight—on a school trip to Washington, D.C., her junior year of high school—she already knew flying was what she wanted to do when she grew up.

At a career day during her senior year, though, an Air Force pilot told her “girls don’t fly for a living, and this is career day, not hobby day.” A guidance counselor at school agreed. This sort of thing would become a theme throughout her career. But her parents raised her to be, as she puts it, “blind to such nonsense.”

She grew up riding horses and loved animals, so she decided to go to college to be a veterinarian. But she still yearned to fly. Then, her senior year of college, she met a female pilot in the Air Force. Her dream suddenly seemed possible. But her local Air Force recruiters turned her away. Same with the Army and Navy. Undeterred, she started taking private flying lessons. Then she talked to a different Navy recruiter who was happy to sign her up.

She went to Aviation Officer Candidate School, then flight school. For two years, she was the only

woman in any of her squadrons. But after a few years she was certified to pilot an array of Navy jets. Still, during the first Gulf War, when her male peers were flying missions over Iraq, she had to stay stateside, working as an aggressor pilot, simulating the “bad guys” in training—because women weren’t allowed in combat.

There were other times she was completely left out, overtly discriminated against, told she couldn’t do what the men could. Mostly, she tried to put those things out of her mind. Life was interesting, fun, despite the obstacles. In the late ‘80s, she started dating a fellow Navy pilot named Dean Shults. He was in the squadron she was instructing at the time and also went to her church. They got married a few months later, then both left the Navy to fly for Southwest and start a family.

They moved into a new antebellum-style home on 5 acres in Boerne, a little more than half an hour outside San Antonio. She taught Sunday school at their church and became the kind of person who makes friends with the staff of her favorite restaurants in town and invites hurricane refugees to stay in her guest house. The type who, wherever she was in the world, no matter what she was doing, would stop for a calm moment of quiet prayer every morning.

Not that she was always composed. She was the kind of mother who, in her words, “spins up” when one of her kids would leave a dirty dish on the table. She and Dean dealt with life’s troubles: health issues, work stress, all the ups and downs of parenting. But by 2018, it seemed like things were slowing down. Their daughter, Sydney, was starting a family of her own. Their son, Marshall, got his pilot’s license and entered the Air Force Academy. Life felt peaceful.

Then came that fateful flight.



Dean and Tammie Jo with one of their miniature horses, Beau (pronounced Boo).

## HELP FROM ABOVE

Southwest Airlines has been a fixture in Texas for more than five decades. It started as a low-cost regional airline. The Dallas-based company has famously embraced a Texan vibe at every turn, creating a company culture that seems to embody the word *howdy*. It became the fun airline, the type of place a regular passenger would recognize the flight attendants. Where you came to expect jokes or songs over the PA system and free drinks on holidays. Southwest was featured regularly on many “Best Companies to Work For” lists.

Now Southwest flies more passengers domestically than any other airline, and the ethos hasn't changed much. It's also been one of the safest airlines in America since its founding. Before flight 1380, Southwest had never had an onboard fatal accident in the company's five

decades of operation.

In fact, commercial flight has become so safe and ubiquitous that sometimes it's easy to forget what an incredible feat it is to launch a machine the size of a small train tens of thousands of feet into the air and thousands of miles around the globe—all while the people aboard the plane eat, sleep, read, and watch movies. It had been nearly 10 years since a commercial passenger flight crashed in the United States.

There were 144 passengers on-board the morning of flight 1380, and five crew members, including Shults. Ellisor, Shults' co-pilot, was a former Air Force pilot she'd flown with the day before. It was his turn to fly, so he controlled the plane most of the way down. But in emergencies the captain lands the plane, so Shults took over as they closed in on Philadelphia.

With only one engine, limited power, and a strong drag to the left, Shults knew she'd only have one chance to approach the runway. As she lined up to land, the cockpit voice recorder caught her saying, softly, “Heavenly Father.”

She could see the firetrucks at the end of the runway. The plane slowed as it approached, but at 700 feet in the air it was still going nearly 200 miles per hour—much faster than the 160 mph on a usual landing. In the cabin, the three flight attendants instructed passengers to brace. Then, roughly 20 minutes after the explosion at 32,000 feet, flight 1380 was safely back on the ground. She wouldn't remember saying it, but on the voice recorder Shults says, “Thank you, thank you, Lord.”

Throughout the flight, several passengers worked to get Jennifer Riordan, the

injured passenger in row 14, back inside the plane. The 43-year-old mother of two, a Wells Fargo executive from Albuquerque, New Mexico, had been on her way home to see her son's baseball game. She was eventually retrieved, but the blunt force from shrapnel and other hardware proved too much. She was taken to the nearest hospital yet she never regained consciousness.

As the plane sat there on the runway, Shults walked down the aisle to check on the passengers. She expected a panicked mob, anxious to exit. But there was none of that. Most people were solemn, quiet. She heard one man say he wanted to "shake the hand of the man who landed this bird." As the passengers deplaned, Shults hugged nearly every one of them.

## HOPE FLOATS

A year and a half after that flight, Shults is sitting at her kitchen table in Boerne, talking about that day with yet another reporter. She is a reluctant hero. She offers a choice of teas she's blended herself, then heats the water in an antique kettle over a candle flame, mindful to strain the caffeine. She's careful in conversation, similar to how she is at the helm of an airplane.

She says she's uncomfortable with the attention, stressing that she didn't act alone that day. She notes the bravery and quick thinking of the other people on-board: how the flight attendants risked injury to help passengers, how Ellisor handled the moment with poise, how fellow passengers tried diligently to bring Riordan back into the plane and then performed CPR on her.

As relieved as she is that the plane didn't crash, Shults knows that the survival of many still doesn't eclipse the death of one. Dean has reminded her that it's possible to grieve and rejoice at the same time. He pointed to a quote from Ecclesiastes: "There is a time for everything ... a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." That helped.

"When you can put something into words," she says, "it doesn't stir around and bother you."

Shults says her own composure that day was a result of both her training and her spiritual life.

"I had that isolated moment in time, and I did think that was going to be the day I met my maker," she says. "That headlong rush to that cliff of 'What if' stopped short at that thought, and I realized I

wouldn't be meeting a stranger. That really gave me a calm."

Her voice has the same cool, measured cadence from the recording.

After the flight, there were investigations by the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board. The FBI wanted to know if the explosion was terror-related. It wasn't. For hours after the landing, the crew was quarantined, questioned, and drug-tested. Reports would later show that a fan blade in the engine under the left wing had spontaneously failed, leading to the catastrophic explosion. Part of the engine casing was blown against the wing and the fuselage, shattering the window next to row 14. In the end, it was an extraordinarily rare equipment malfunction. The people aboard were lucky to have Captain Shults piloting that day.

Here's how Ellisor later put it: "Tammie Jo is more than a hero; she is a role model to young and old, in her community and across the country."

The airline gave each passenger aboard \$5,000 and a \$1,000 voucher for future travel. The crew members were told to take off for as long as they needed. Dean was told to take time off, too, to be with his wife.

Shults was back in the air a few weeks later. She missed flying: the rituals, the mental acuity required, the serene calm of soaring above the clouds.

Life now is strange. She's met the president and Jeff Bezos. She'd always been a pioneer in her field, but there were never many interviews until flight 1380. Now it's a regular thing. She does some public speaking—something that nothing in her life prepared her for.

"It's far more pressure than flying an airplane with an exploded engine," she jokes.

She also had a book published in October, *Nerves of Steel*, which chronicles that terrifying morning and everything in her life that led up to it. She's spoken to a big-name Hollywood director about possibly adapting her story into a movie.

For Captain Tammie Jo Shults, her tale boils down to hope. When she was a kid watching the skies, when she faced challenges in her career, when she thought she was going to die on a flight from New York to Dallas. There was always hope. It's what she was giving her passengers when she announced that they were landing in Philadelphia. It's what she gives everyone who hears her story.

"Hope doesn't change our circumstances," she says. "It changes us." 🐦

### BOERNE FOR BEGINNERS

When Captain Shults isn't flying, she's enjoying all that Boerne has to offer. Here are a few of her favorite spots:

#### 259 Brantley's Bistro

"It's my favorite place to eat."

#### Sno Biz Hawaiian Shaved Ice

"We've enjoyed Ms. Sandy and her shaved ice since the month we moved to Boerne, 18 years ago."

#### Mary's Tacos

"The best breakfast tacos in town."

#### Hungry Horse

"The largest selection of sides I've ever seen."

#### Traditions at the Depot

"The sweetest Texas hospitality."

#### Boerne Pilates

"It's an amazing place to keep in shape, and what you wear is the last thing anyone cares about."



MEET OUR MAKERS

# Rhyno Clayworks

**POTTER RYAN LUCIER** and graphic designer Melanie Pavao joined forces to form Rhyno Clayworks in Austin in 2011. Together, they update classic ceramic forms with contemporary surface treatments, sometimes glazing only part of a vessel while leaving other parts exposed. They offer an array of stoneware for home and garden, including birdhouses and planters, crocks and tumblers—and even a set of mugs printed with line-drawings of the heroes of the Texas Revolution. “I think I finally just reached a point where I knew I wanted more freedom and that I needed to be designing and creating as a full-time potter,” he says. “I was passionate about what I was doing. The rest I would figure out along the way.” *Shop more Rhyno Clayworks products at [shop.texashighways.com](http://shop.texashighways.com)*



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# PLATES



**SRSLY CHOCOLATE**  
turns the beans from  
cacao pods into  
chocolate in Taylor.

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# SRSLY

chocolate



**BOB WILLIAMSON,**  
co-owner and  
chocolate-maker at  
SRSLY Chocolate.



# Craft Cocoa

Taylor-based SRSLY Chocolate is serious about its artisanal bars

By Susan L. Ebert

**B**ob Williamson flings open the hatchback of his Honda Fit, and the aroma of freshly roasted cocoa beans wafts around us.

“I just returned from Third Coast Coffee,” he says, hefting a burlap sack onto his shoulder. “I roasted these in their IR-2.5 Diedrich roaster. All the rest of the steps from bean to bar take place right here.”

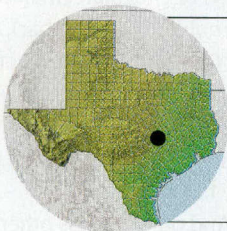
He walks into SRSLY Chocolate’s retail store and factory in downtown Taylor, which Williamson and his business partner and wife, Robin Simoneaux-Williamson, opened in September 2018. The place has a retro-chic atmosphere with its whitewashed vintage brick walls and sleek modern fixtures.

The couple moved to Austin five years ago but decided to set up shop in nearby Taylor. The town’s modest real estate costs played a role in the couple’s choice, but so did the desire to put down roots and start a family.

“We just fell in love with Taylor and its really good sense of small-town charm,” Williamson says. “Taylor’s going through quite a renaissance, with a variety of new businesses opening downtown. The old-time Taylor people have been extremely receptive, supporting our shop and attending our workshops.”

Before Williamson crafted cocoa, he was a cheesemaker. While working at Sweet Grass Dairy in Thomasville, Georgia, he learned how processing could elevate a raw natural product. He dabbled in home-brewing, pickling, and jam-making before settling on chocolate-making, which had an accessible cost-of-entry into the market and nearly zero waste (the cocoa husks are recycled into mulch).

The Williamsons launched SRSLY Chocolate in 2012. They were living in Tallahassee, Florida, at the time, but realized they would need a broader customer base for their fledgling business to thrive. “Tallahassee—about a quarter the size of Austin—just wasn’t big enough to support our business year-round,” he says. “We came to



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**FROM LEFT:**  
roasted cocoa beans;  
grinding cacao nibs in a  
melanger; breaking up  
untempered chocolate;  
filling molds.



Austin in 2013 because of a built-in network of friends and found it to be a great food incubator.” The risk paid off—today, SRSLY produces about 1,200 pounds of chocolate a month.

Though the chocolate-making process begins in Taylor, the beans come from at least 2,000 miles away. They are harvested in the Duarte province of the Dominican Republic, where the Öko-Caribe farming cooperative tends native Criollo cacao trees. Criollo trees produce the world’s most cherished cocoa bean: low-yielding, but incomparable in flavor. To transform the cacao seeds into cocoa beans, they’re harvested from the pod-like fruit, fermented for seven days, dried, and transformed into delicate, fragrant beans revered in the chocolate trade.

SRSLY offers a dozen or so bars, depending on the season—the cocoa content ranges from 30 percent to 100 percent. Some feature locally sourced ingredients such as the Texas Mesquite, with caramel notes of mesquite bean flour; the Cranberry & Texas Pecan, featuring Yegua Creek pecans; and the Sal de Rey, sprinkled with sea salt harvested

from the eponymous South Texas lake. Other flavors include Dark Milk, Sea Salt & Almond, and Coconut Milk. Some bars are made from difficult-to-procure, rare beans from organic cooperatives in Belize, Guatemala, and Haiti. SRSLY even concocted a limited-edition brisket chocolate bar, flecked with smoke-dehydrated burnt ends from Stiles Switch BBQ & Brew in Austin. They all share a glossy finish, tantalizing aroma, melt-in-your-mouth sensation, and satisfying snap when you break off a piece.

“In a perfect world, I’d like to release a new flavor each week,” Williamson admits with a grin.

---

**“Chocolate-making scratches all my itches: engineering, craftsmanship, creativity, teaching, collaboration, and fun. And it puts a smile on my face.”**

In addition to sampling and buying SRSLY Chocolate at the Taylor store, you can also find the products at Whole Foods Market, other specialty stores in Texas and on the East Coast, and online.

Still, the best way to experience SRSLY Chocolate is to attend one of its hands-on workshops. With a showman’s banter, Williamson guides attendees through all of the chocolate-making steps, sending everyone home with a sack of small chocolate bars that were molded and flavored in class. Simoneaux-Williamson leads bon bon-making classes at the Taylor shop, teaching aspiring chocolatiers how to make ganache and how to paint, shell, fill, and cap handcrafted bon bons.

The couple is also happy to show visitors around the factory and explain the steps of chocolate-making, from roasting to molding (see sidebar).

“Chocolate-making scratches all my itches: engineering, craftsmanship, creativity, teaching, collaboration, and fun,” Williamson says. “And it puts a smile on my face.”

And on countless other faces as well. **L**



## A Chocolate-Making Primer

### 1 GRADING AND ROASTING:

The beans are graded, with inferior beans being discarded. Williamson stresses using a “light hand” to tease out flavor in the roasting process. “If it starts smelling like chocolate brownies, you’ve roasted too long,” he says, adding that roasting produces chemical reactions that reduce bitterness, enhance the chocolatey flavor, and separate the inner cacao nib—chocolate in its purest form—from its papery husk, simplifying cracking and winnowing.

### 2 CRACKING AND WINNOWING:

Next, Williamson cracks open the beans to release the cacao nibs from their outer husks. He then transfers the nibs and husks to his handmade winnower, a Rube Goldberg-type contraption powered by a Shop-Vac that vacuums away the light husks from the heavier nibs. He donates the husks to local farms for mulch and retains the nibs for processing.

### 3 GRINDING AND CONCHING:

The nibs are then ground in a melanger (a type of wet stone mill) around the clock for several days, with friction from the stones generating a temperature between 115 F and 130 F. Once the nibs have become a thick, smooth paste, organic cane sugar is added. Continuous grinding ripens the chocolate, reduces grittiness, develops flavor, and improves viscosity. The process, called “conching,” is said to have been invented by Swiss chocolatier Rodolphe Lindt in 1879.

### 4 TEMPERING AND MOLDING:

“Chocolate is a prima donna when it comes to tempering,” Williamson warns. “When cooling, chocolate can form six different crystal arrangements: Four are undesirable, one is unachievable, and one—the Stage 5 crystal—is glossy, very strong, more heat resistant, and has that beautiful mouthfeel; not grainy or sandy.” To achieve the Stage 5 crystal, he heats the chocolate to 110–115 F and then stirs continuously while cooling it down to 85 F to agitate the crystals. Bringing the temperature back up to 90 F gets rid of Stages 1 through 4 crystals. The warm chocolate can now be poured into molds.



**IN THIS UNTEMPERED** chocolate, you can see the crystalline structures that form.



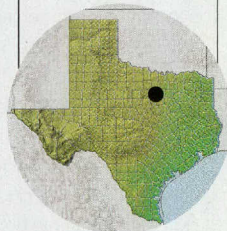
# The Dough You Know

At Hutch's Pie and Sandwich Shop, the Hutchens family has offered fried pies since the Great Depression

By Amanda Ogle

## HUTCH'S PIE AND SANDWICH SHOP

145 College Park Drive, Weatherford. Mon-Sat, 6 a.m.-3 p.m. 817-594-0751



**Y**ou know a place is important to a community when people use it as a way to give directions. “You hear people all the time saying, ‘Well, you know where Hutch’s is, right?’” says David Hutchens, the second-generation owner of Hutch’s Pie and Sandwich Shop in Weatherford, which has been serving handmade fried pies in the area for decades.

Despite selling around 3,000 fried pies a week, Hutch’s is a humble operation run by the same family that founded it more than 80 years ago. Hutch’s started in 1935, when David’s dad, R.F. Hutchens, and pal Frank Grimes decided to try to revive an old café in town. (R.F. went by “Hutch.”) Like the previous owners, they were unsuccessful—people didn’t eat out much during the Great Depression.

They made another failed attempt at selling chili and found some success selling chili bricks—frozen chili, cut into bricks and wrapped in paper—to stores around town. Once the weather warmed, chili sales plummeted, though, and Hutch suggested a new venture: fried fruit pies.

Traditionally shaped like a half-moon, with crimped edges and a gooey fruit filling, handheld fried pies are considered a Southern delicacy. They were often made from leftover dough, lard, and preserved or dried fruit, which made them easy to make year-round since dried fruit and preserves don’t spoil quickly.

Hutch’s father showed him and Grimes how to make fried pies. They tweaked the recipe to their liking and began selling fried pies to mom-and-pop grocery stores and cafés around town for 3 cents each. Grimes’ mother agreed to let the duo use her garage as a pie shop. They leveled the dirt floor, laid down a piece of linoleum, and brought in a stove and a pot of grease.

A few weeks later, Grimes dropped out to pursue a different career. Meanwhile, Hutch married Grimes’ sister, Eula Fae Grimes, who started making the pies while Hutch went around delivering. Eventually, Hutch purchased a 1931 Model A Ford with a rumble seat—an exterior folding seat in the rear that opened

to reveal a bench—fixed for pies to sit in. It became Hutch's first delivery vehicle.

After building up the delivery business, Hutch retired in 1977 and sold the business to his son, David. In an effort to generate more cash, David began wholesaling the pies (which ended in 2017) and opened the Hutch's storefront in 1985, the same year that he and his wife, Sue Hutchens, started making fried breakfast pies and serving lunch.

"The breakfast pies are our big money maker," David touts. On a recent Saturday morning, patrons were lined up to order sausage, egg, and cheese fried pies; bacon, egg, and cheese pies; sausage and gravy pies; and the ham and cheese roll. The last is a generous serving of ham, rolled up with American cheese stuffed inside pie dough and fried to crispy perfection.

The recipes used today are essentially the same as the originals, except David uses modified food starch instead of corn starch to make fruit pies creamier and sturdier when you bite into them. Fruit fillings are made from scratch, with popular flavors including apple, apricot, cherry, and peach, although the chocolate, pineapple, and lemon also hold their own.

## Despite selling around 3,000 fried pies a week, Hutch's is a humble operation run by the same family that founded it.

What sets a Hutch's pie apart is its crust. David's son, Brandon Hutchens, who oversees daily operations, says there is no secret ingredient. There's just a balance of the key ingredients: flour, salt, and butter. "We've tested other pies out there, but our crust is flakier and has more flavor," Brandon says. Freshness is also a factor in Hutch's pies, as other fried pies found in the area probably come from gas stations or franchised companies, where the pies are coming in frozen and are flash-fried on-site.

Hutch's has been there through the highs and lows, the recessions and booms, and the changes of the surrounding landscape. And after all these years, the pies still serve as a staple, giving Weatherford a piece of golden-fried history to hold onto. 🍌

FROM LEFT: a fried pineapple pie. Hutch's simple, fresh dough makes it a stand-out.



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# Fill 'er Up

Castroville's historic rest stop pumps its customers with coffee and treats

By Shari Biediger

**E**ven before US 90 linked the remote farming towns west of San Antonio in the 1960s, travelers could count on finding a place to rest and refuel in Castroville.

Magnolia Filling Station opened on the corner of Fiorella and Lafayette streets in the 1920s, after automobiles displaced horse-drawn carts. In the years since, the station has supplied everything from new tires to bus tickets in “the little Alsace of Texas.”

French diplomat Henri Castro founded Castroville in 1844. (Castroville celebrated its 175th birthday in September.) Settlers from the Alsace region of northeastern France built the town, which mimics a charming European village in a Texas landscape. Visitors take walking tours of the historic homes—especially in spring when the poppies are blooming—and go antiquing, fishing, or floating on the Medina River. But not before filling up on coffee and sandwiches.

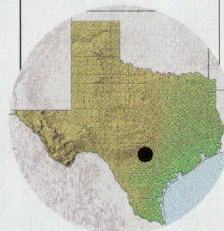
The Filling Station's original red fuel pump, a remnant of the building's historical use, stands sentry at the entrance

to the shop. Beneath the portico, old wooden doors open onto a cozy seating area with the work of local artists adorning the walls. At the counter, a full menu offers teas and coffee drinks made with beans from San Antonio roaster What's Brewing? There are also made-to-order sandwiches, bagels, gelato, and a variety of pastries, cookies, and other treats like lemon shortbread with blueberry buttercream.

When Shelly Mackie stopped in for a coffee in 2015, on a road trip with her husband and son, she had a special feeling about the café and the town.

“We came for the weekend and never left,” says Mackie, who was then living in San Antonio. “I told my husband, Jerry, he would have to drag me out of

**MAGNOLIA FILLING STATION**  
1101 Fiorella St.,  
Castroville.  
Open Mon-Sat,  
7 a.m.-7 p.m.  
830-538-5001;  
facebook.com/  
magnoliafillingstation



**She aspired not only to fill cups with good coffee, but also to build fulfilling relationships with her customers.**

here.” Mackie often recommended the coffee shop—then known as Octane Coffee and Tea House—to visitors of the local RV resort where she worked.

Then she got word the shop owners were moving on. “I came straight here on my lunch break,” Mackie says. She hoped to keep it open for the sake of the town—and saw it as an opportunity to put down roots.

Within two months, Mackie had enrolled in Texas Coffee School. She got to know baristas in the region and, despite having no previous small-business experience, acquired the keys to the old filling station in December 2017.

In the first weeks, Shelly and Jerry worked late into the evenings painting, constructing a counter, choosing furnishings, and renovating the kitchen. She hired a few people and opened the doors two months later.

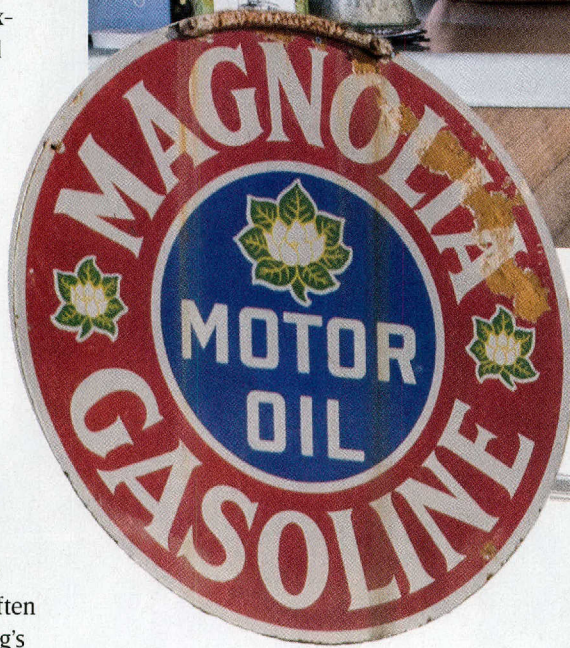
Mackie aspired to not only fill cups with good coffee but also to build fulfilling relationships with her customers “by listening to them and to their stories.” And she wanted to respect the legacy of the property, which Castro once owned.

“I knew I had to bring it back as the Filling Station,” Mackie says. Locals often stop in to tell her stories of the building’s rich past, showing up with faded photos of the place in its early days.

Some vestiges of those bygone days remain, such as the orange paint on the front door trim, a color that once coated the entire interior. They serve as mementos of the building’s past enterprises: The Old Highway Filling Station, Painter Bus Line stop, beauty shop, antiques store, and café. The same



**CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:** latte and cinnamon muffin with maple glaze, owner Shelly Mackie; a guitar with a “Play Me” sign encourages guests to sing for their coffee; original sign.



goes for the vintage fuel pump and the stone-walled basement, which is said to have stored liquor during Prohibition.

It’s the building’s resilience and legacy as a community centerpiece that keep regulars and sightseers coming back. “I like to say it’s a business for people,” Mackie says. “But the coffee’s good, too.”



# TEXANA



**GOLD LEAF**  
beautifies the  
domed ceiling of  
the Armstrong  
Browning Library's  
McLean Foyer  
of Meditation.

## How Do I Love Thee?

A Baylor University library embraces the romance  
of poets Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning

By Robyn Ross



**L**ate-morning sunlight warms the sculpted surfaces of the Armstrong Browning Library and Museum's bronze front doors, which bear bas-relief depictions of scenes from Robert Browning's poems. My hand closes around the torch-shaped handle, worn shiny by the grips of thousands before me. I pull, but the three-quarter-ton door barely moves. With my entire weight, I slowly pry it open and slip inside, where Jennifer Borderud waits in the foyer, amused. She's watched this scene play out before, as library visitors arrive unprepared for the heavy doors—or what they'll find on the other side.

"People have no idea what they're about to get into when they walk into the library," says Borderud, the library's director. "They don't expect a building like this to be in Texas, or in Waco."

Stained-glass windows filter the sunshine into a muted blue that reflects off the foyer's marble walls. Above, the ceiling is carved into an elaborate octagon pattern. I feel the urge to whisper: The imposing space inspires a sense of reverence I associate with temples and cathedrals.

The library, which is part of Baylor University, houses the world's largest collection of materials related to Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, prominent English poets of the Victorian era. The two famously courted by mail, exchanging more than 560 love letters before they married in 1846. Elizabeth later wove phrases from those letters

**The Armstrong Browning Library and Museum**, 710 Speight Ave. in Waco, opens Mon-Fri 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sat 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Self-guided tours available; call ahead for guided tours. Donations accepted. 254-710-3566; [baylor.edu/browninglibrary](http://baylor.edu/browninglibrary)

# TEXAS 2020 CALENDAR

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**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** A bust of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the library's facade on the Baylor campus; Martha Jane McMurray Wofford speaks about Barrett Browning.



into *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, which includes her most famous work, “Sonnet 43: How do I love thee?” It opens with the indelible line, “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”

The library’s research collection includes many of the Brownings’ original manuscripts and handwritten letters, as well as other materials related to 19th-century literature and culture. While these treasures draw researchers from around the world, the library also welcomes curious visitors for self-guided tours that showcase the Brownings’ writing desks, various personal belongings, and perhaps most striking, the breathtaking building itself.

Interestingly, the Brownings never visited the United States, and they may never have heard of Waco. Baylor houses their materials because of the determi-

nation of A.J. Armstrong, who chaired the university’s English department from 1912 to 1952. Armstrong admired Robert Browning’s work and amassed a collection of the poet’s papers. After Armstrong donated the collection to Baylor in 1918, he and his wife, Mary Maxwell Armstrong, set about raising money to build a dedicated library. They brought poets—including Robert Frost and W.B. Yeats—to campus and organized overseas tours for scholars and Browning literary clubs. The proceeds were funneled to the construction of today’s three-story Italian Renaissance building, which opened in 1951.

Adjacent to the foyer, the John Leddy-Jones Research Hall, with its walnut-paneled walls and long tables, is a popular study spot for Baylor students. Stained-glass windows—the library

has 62—illustrate scenes from Robert Browning’s poetry, including “The Pied Piper of Hamelin,” based on the German folktale. In the Hankamer Treasure Room, a glass case displays an envelope and pressed flowers that were part of the Brownings’ romantic correspondence. The two, who were familiar with one another’s work, were introduced by English poet John Kenyon. Kenyon encouraged Robert to write Elizabeth after she mentioned him by name in a poem. Though they had never met, Robert began his first letter, written in January 1845, “I love your verses with all my heart, dear Miss Barrett,” and later in the missive, boldly wrote, “and I love you too.”

More stained-glass windows in the Elizabeth Barrett Browning Salon—

**“It wasn’t all that common for a woman, after marriage, to be regarded by her husband not only as his peer but even sometimes as his superior.”**

modeled after a 19th-century living room with the poet's desk as the show-piece—tell the story of their secret courtship. The two met in May 1845 when Robert began visiting Elizabeth, who suffered from frail health, including a lung condition, at her home in London. For reasons unknown, Elizabeth's father forbade his 12 children from marrying, so the couple wed in secret in September 1846, when Robert was 34 and Elizabeth was 40. They moved to Florence (the inspiration for the library's Italian influence), and three years later Elizabeth gave birth to their only child, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning, whom they called "Pen."

Elizabeth was the more popular of the two poets during her lifetime, says Joshua King, the library's scholar in residence. Robert's work received more attention in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but today, Elizabeth is again the more widely read poet.

"It wasn't all that common for a woman, after marriage, to be regarded by her husband not only as his peer but even sometimes as his superior," says King, an associate professor of English at Baylor. "I think Robert Browning was not only a tremendously gifted poet, but someone who was able to recognize his

wife's gifts."

"Sonnet 43: How do I love thee?" is one of 44 she wrote during the Brownings' courtship, inspired by phrases from their letters. Elizabeth didn't show the poems to Robert until three years after they married.

"When he read them, he thought they were the best sonnets since Shakespeare's and that they had to be published," Borderud says. "But because they were so personal, they decided to call them *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, hoping people would think they were some obscure Portuguese sonnets that Elizabeth translated into English."

The public, however, wasn't fooled. "Sonnet 43" plays a role in the McLean Foyer of Meditation, where the ceiling soars 40 feet overhead, and lofty opaque windows are flanked by columns of Italian marble. A 2-ton bronze chandelier is suspended from within a recessed dome in the ceiling. Workmen pressed the 23-carat gold leaf into the plaster there with their thumbs, Borderud says, creating the illusion of a velvety texture. Marble benches along the walls are topped with velvet cushions bearing the same golden sheen. A mysterious amber light filters through the tinted windows and pools on the polished floor.

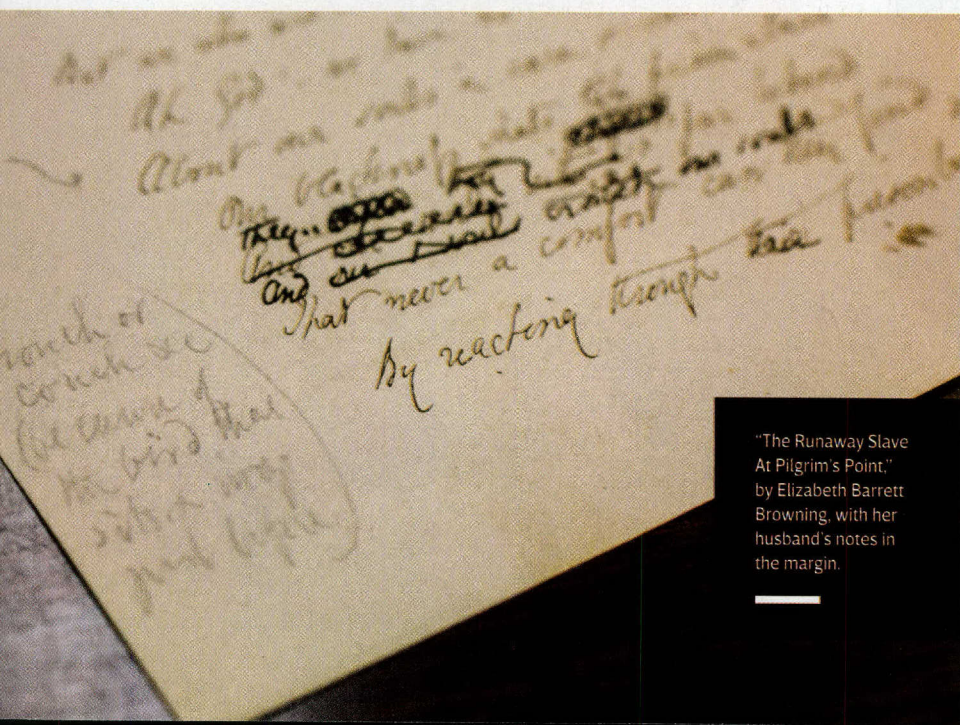
On April 24, the Armstrong Browning Library and Museum will celebrate its namesake poets with Browning Day. Barbara Neri, a Michigan-based artist and scholar, will speak about Elizabeth Barrett Browning's wardrobe and its influence on her image. Browning Day takes place annually on a spring date between the birthdays of Elizabeth (March 6) and Robert (May 7).

"Dr. Armstrong wanted there to be a room in the building that was just a place of beauty, where people could sit and be inspired—maybe to be the next Chaucer or Shakespeare or Browning," she explains.

Borderud leads me up a few steps to a recessed alcove in one wall. Here, tucked behind a marble archway, is the Cloister of the Clapsed Hands, a little nook that takes its name from a bronze cast of the Brownings' hands. American sculptor Harriet Hosmer, a friend of the couple, made the piece. "This is considered a very romantic spot on campus," Borderud says.

It's easy to see why. The walnut paneling on one side of the alcove is inscribed in gold with "Sonnet 43," which ends: "And if God choose, I shall but love thee better after death." The opposite wall bears the invocation to Robert Browning's acclaimed verse novel *The Ring and the Book*, which he wrote several years after Elizabeth died at age 55 after a lifetime of illness. Robert declares she is still his muse: "O Lyric Love, half-angel and half-bird, And all a wonder and a wild desire, ... still, despite the distance and the dark, What was, again may be."

Every year, the poets' devotion to one another inspires the numerous couples who get engaged in the cloister and who marry in the Foyer of Meditation. In a city they'd never visited, 130 years after both of their deaths, the Brownings' romance lives on. **L**



"The Runaway Slave At Pilgrim's Point," by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, with her husband's notes in the margin.

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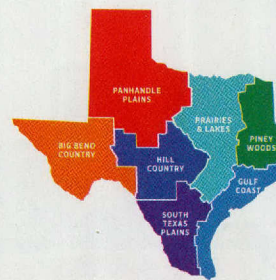
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# EVENTS



## Living the Dream

Houston hosts one of the most-watched parades in the country

Taking place on Jan. 20, the MLK Grande Parade in Houston celebrates the legacy of civil-rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Starting in Midtown and following a 1-mile route, the 26th annual parade is expected to feature more than 15 floats and 30 marching bands from around the South. With an annual turnout of 300,000 spectators, it's one of the largest single-day multicultural events in the United States to honor the life of King. It's also one of the most-watched parades in the country after the Rose Parade and Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, drawing nearly 4 million television viewers. A Battle of the Bands follows the parade with high schools showcasing their marching band expertise and spirit. After the parades have come and gone, the work continues with the MLK Parade Foundation, whose purpose is to encourage racial harmony through education and activism involving schools, churches, and the general public.

—Mikela Kinnison

MLK Grande Parade  
Jan. 20  
The parade route starts at San Jacinto and Elgin streets in Midtown Houston.  
[mlkgrandeparade.org](http://mlkgrandeparade.org)

### BIG BEND COUNTRY

#### ALPINE

##### Plein Air Painters of the Four Corners

Jan. 17-March 22  
Members of the Plein Air Painters of the Four Corners exhibit their images of Big Bend landscapes at Museum of the Big Bend, located on the Sul Ross State University campus. An opening reception will be held Jan. 18. Museum of the Big Bend, 400 N. Harrison St. 432-837-8143; [museumofthebigbend.com](http://museumofthebigbend.com)

#### EL PASO

##### WinterFest

Through Jan. 5  
Now in its fourth year, WinterFest has become one of El Paso's most anticipated annual events. Festivities include the Celebration of Lights, downtown art and farmers market, free movie showings, and story time. Downtown Arts Festival Plaza, 125 W. Mills Plaza. 915-231-1100; [epwinterfest.com](http://epwinterfest.com)

#### MONAHANS

##### Resolution Run

Jan. 11  
Start the year off right and in a scenic setting. This event features 5K and 10K runs and a 1-mile health walk. Monahans Sandhills State Park, 2500 E. I-20, Exit 86. 432-943-2187; [monahans.org](http://monahans.org)

#### ODESSA

##### Sandhills Stock Show and Rodeo

Jan. 3-11  
Events throughout the week include rodeo festivities and a livestock show. Ector County Coliseum, 218 W. 46th St. 432-366-3951; [sandhillssr.com](http://sandhillssr.com)

### GULF COAST

#### BAY CITY

##### Wild Game and Wine Camofest

Jan. 25  
Indulge in wild game, wine, and craft beer, plus live entertainment, vendors, shopping, and activities for kids. Sixth Street and Avenue G. 979-245-8081; [baycitycamofest.com](http://baycitycamofest.com)

### BEAUMONT

##### Critters and Creatures Day

Jan. 25  
For a day of exploration and discovery, kids can meet creepy-crawly friends from around the region. Beaumont Children's Museum, 701 Main St. 409-347-7919; [beaumontchildrensmuseum.org](http://beaumontchildrensmuseum.org)

### CLUTE

##### Planetarium Show

Jan. 7, 14, 21, 24, 28  
The planetarium features a 30-foot dome equipped with a Spitz Star Ball projector to produce the night sky as it appears to the naked eye. A large variety of high-tech equipment gives a close-up feel for things like comets, exploding stars, and black holes. Center for the Arts and Sciences, 400 College Blvd. 979-265-7661; [brazosportcenter.com](http://brazosportcenter.com)

### CORPUS CHRISTI

##### Winter Lecture Series

Jan. 22-Feb. 26  
Learn about a variety of nature and horticulture topics that define the South Texas environment. South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, 8545 S. Staples St. 361-852-2100; [stxbot.org](http://stxbot.org)

### EDNA

##### Brackenridge Winter Carnival and Snow Day

Jan. 25  
Come play in 80,000 pounds of snow and on two snow slides. Activities include inflatables, games, a s'mores station, a craft zone, and food trucks. Brackenridge Main Event Center, 284 Brackenridge Parkway. 361-782-7272; [brackenridgepark.com](http://brackenridgepark.com)

### FREERPORT

##### MLK Day Parade and Celebration

Jan. 20  
Observe Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday by honoring his memory and the legacy of his achievements. The parade starts in Downtown Freeport and ends at Freeport Municipal Park. Various locations. 979-233-3306; [mlkcc.org](http://mlkcc.org)

## GALVESTON

### Happy New Year Vienna Style

Jan. 5  
Celebrate the New Year with the Galveston Symphony Orchestra's Viennese-style New Year's pops concert. *The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice St. 800-821-1894; thegrand.com*

## GALVESTON

### The Greatest Love of All: A Tribute to Whitney Houston

Jan. 11-12  
Belinda Davids takes audiences on a heartfelt journey through Whitney Houston's greatest hits. With the accompaniment of a live band, backing vocalists, and choreographed dancers, the show is a beautifully crafted tribute to the late singer. *The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice St. 800-821-1894; thegrand.com*

## GALVESTON

### The Oak Ridge Boys in Concert

Jan. 18-19  
Join lead singer Duane Allen, bass Richard Sterban, tenor Joe Bonsall, and baritone William Lee Golden as they deliver one of the most distinctive and recognizable sounds in the music industry. *The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice St. 800-821-1894; thegrand.com*

## GALVESTON

### We the People

Jan. 30  
This musical revue promises to make social studies exciting and accessible through musical styles relevant to today's youth, including rock, rhythm and blues, and hip-hop. Students learn about the three branches of government, the First Amendment, presidential elections, and the judicial process. *The Grand 1894 Opera House, 2020 Postoffice St. 800-821-1894; thegrand.com*

## HOUSTON

### The Ice

Through Feb. 2  
Glide beneath the glittering lights of downtown Houston and embrace the holiday cheer on Texas' largest outdoor ice skating rink. *Discovery Green, 1500 McKinney St. 713-400-7336; discoverygreen.com*

## HOUSTON

### Telegraph Quartet in Concert

Jan. 21  
Winner of the Fischhoff (2014) and Naumburg (2016) awards, the quartet makes its Chamber Music Houston debut. This San Francisco-based ensemble brings a combination of brilliance and subtlety to a program that includes the neo-Baroque dance suite with Schulhoff's "Five Pieces." *Rice University, Alice Pratt Brown Hall, Stude Concert Hall, 6100 Main St. 713-348-5400; chambermusichouston.org*

## HOUSTON

### Sonnambula in Concert

Jan. 31  
Houston Early Music presents a Hispanic Heritage Series concert, *El Laurel de Apolo: Zarzuela from the Baroque to the New World*. Through song, Sonnambula provides an opportunity to visit Spain's Palacio de la Zarzuela, where, in 1657, a new dramatic genre was performed. Zarzuela alternates between spoken and sung scenes. Houston native Camille Zamora, soprano, joins the ensemble for this performance. *Christ Church Cathedral, 1117 Texas Ave. 713-325-5377; houstonearlymusic.org*

## LA MARQUE

### Magical Winter Lights

Through Jan. 5  
Bigger and better than ever, Magical Winter Lights has more than 6 million lights, upgraded installations, interactive displays, eight themed lantern sections, a dinosaur exhibit with kid-friendly dinosaur rides, arts and crafts created by skilled Chinese artisans, carnival rides, games, food, and a new nightly Chinese acrobatic show. *Gulf Greyhound Park, 1000 FM 2004. 832-582-5811; magicalwinterlights.com*

## LAKE JACKSON

### Bird Banding

Jan. 18  
Every third Saturday of the month, visitors can watch volunteers collect baseline data on bird populations at the sanctuary. The banding station is an excellent opportunity to see birds up close and to learn all the birds of the Brazosport area.

*Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, 299 SH 332 W. 979-480-0999; gcbo.org*

## LAKE JACKSON

### Patti Austin in Concert

Jan. 18  
Come hear Patti Austin lend her sultry voice to old and new jazz songs accompanied by the Brazosport Jazz Orchestra. *The Clarion, 500 College Drive. 979-230-3156; brazosport.edu/business-community/clarion*

## PALACIOS

### Winter Texan Chili Dinner

Jan. 9  
The Palacios Chamber of Commerce hosts a dinner for those visiting the area for the winter from other states and countries. There are also numerous door prizes and gifts given to the participants. *Serendipity Bay RV Resort, Cabins, and Marina, 1001 Main St. 361-972-2615; palacioschamber.com*

## ROCKPORT

### Gospel Music Festival

Jan. 10-12  
This event features numerous gospel groups from around the nation, including Rockport's Gospel Force. *First Baptist Church, 1515 N. Live Oak St. 361-205-2789; gospelforce.org/festival.html*

## ROCKPORT

### Rockport-Fulton Market Days

Jan. 17-19  
Enjoy live music, 100-plus vendors, more than a dozen food trucks and food vendors, and seating under the shade at this pet-friendly market that takes place every third weekend of the month. *The Festival Grounds at Rockport Harbor, 100 Seabreeze Drive. 361-463-0125; fultonmarketdays.com*

## ROCKPORT

### Winter Texan Appreciation Day

Jan. 25  
The RV Park Council and Rockport Fulton Chamber of Commerce host an Appreciation Day for winter guests. Come by for refreshments, a meet-and-greet, special presentations, door prizes, and other entertainment. *Aranas County Airport, 421 John D. Wendell Road. 361-729-6445; rockport-fulton.org*

## SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

### Polar Bear Dip

Jan. 1  
Take a plunge into the Gulf of Mexico at this annual New Year's Day beach party, featuring live music and costume contests. *Clayton's Beach Bar and Grill, 6900 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; sopadrem.com*

## SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

### Winter Outdoor Wildlife Expo

Jan. 21-25  
This five-day exposition is a family-friendly way to learn about the wildlife and environment of the Rio Grande Valley. Guest speakers cover a variety of coastal outdoor and nature topics, and each day has a different theme. *South Padre Island Birding, Nature Center and Alligator Sanctuary, 6801 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; spibirding.com*

## SOUTH PADRE ISLAND

### SPI Kite Fest

Jan. 30-Feb. 1  
What started out as a mere "fun fly" is now one of the biggest kite festivals in the country. *South Padre Island Convention Centre, 7355 Padre Blvd. 956-761-3000; sopadrem.com*

## SPRING

### Grand Canyon Photographs: Celebrating the Centennial

Through Jan. 11  
This timely exhibition commemorates the establishment of Grand Canyon National Park 100 years ago. *Pearl Fincher Museum of Fine Arts, 6815 Cypresswood Drive. 281-376-6322; pearlmlfa.org*

## SUGAR LAND

### Into the Woods Jr.

Jan. 3-5  
National award-winning performing arts studio and theatre Inspiration Stage presents this junior production of *Into the Woods*. *Sugar Land Auditorium, 226 Lakeview Drive. 713-302-5329; inspirationstage.com*

## SURFSIDE BEACH

### Dunes Day

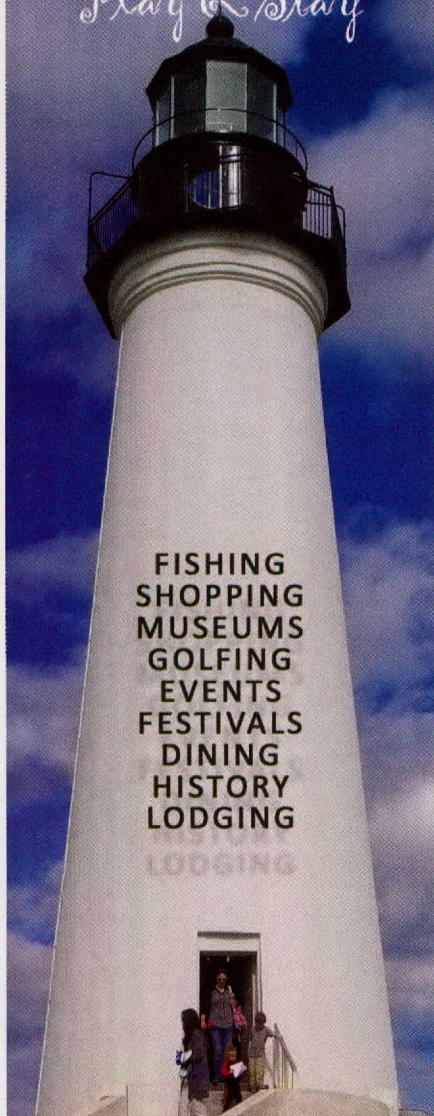
Jan. 18  
Recycle your used Christmas trees into beneficial sand dunes

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along the Brazoria County coastline. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 Bluewater Hwy. 979-864-1152; [brazoriacountyparks.org](http://brazoriacountyparks.org)

## SURFSIDE BEACH

### Surfside Food and Art Festival

Jan. 25  
The third annual festival includes a chili cookoff, art for sale, a kite show, and live music. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 Bluewater Hwy. 979-233-1531; [surfsidetx.org](http://surfsidetx.org)

## VICTORIA

### Comic Fest

Jan. 25-26  
Victoria's only comic, gaming, and toy exposition. Browse rare items from multiple vendors and dress up as your favorite character for the cosplay contest. *Victoria Community Center*, 2905 E. North St. [victoriacomifest.com](http://victoriacomifest.com)

## VICTORIA

### Super Diamond: The Neil Diamond Tribute

Jan. 25  
Sing along to "Sweet Caroline," "America," "Cracklin' Rosie," and other hits when the Victoria Symphony accompanies this Neil Diamond tribute band. *Victoria Fine Arts Center*, 1002 Sam Houston Drive. 361-576-4500; [victoriasymphony.com](http://victoriasymphony.com)

## VICTORIA

### Woodworking Show

Jan. 31-March 22  
Local artists and craftsmen display their handmade wood creations. *The Nave Museum*, 306 W. Commercial St. 361-575-8228; [navemuseum.com](http://navemuseum.com)

## HILL COUNTRY

## AUSTIN

### Fashion Forward

Through April 12  
Fashion takes center stage in this exhibition showcasing the history of style in Texas, particularly Dallas' influence on the fashion industry. The show draws from the Texas Fashion Collection at the University of North Texas and includes pieces by Christian Dior, Anne Klein, Geoffrey Beene, and Missoni. *Bullock Museum*, 1800 Congress Ave. 512-936-8746; [thetoryof texas.com](http://thetoryof texas.com)

## AUSTIN

### City-Wide Vintage Sale

Jan. 4-5, 18-19  
Formerly known as City-Wide Garage Sale, this is Austin's classic

vintage market since 1977, with vintage, antique, and repurposed items only. *Palmer Events Center*, 900 Barton Springs Road. 512-441-2828; [citywidevintagesale.com](http://citywidevintagesale.com)

## AUSTIN

### Ed Ruscha: Drum Skins

Jan. 11-July 12  
The iconic American artist and pioneer of the Pop Art movement, whose career spans 60 years, debuts a new collection. His already vast body of work ranges from painting and drawing to photography and print. *Blanton Museum of Art*, 200 E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 512-471-5482; [blantonmuseum.org](http://blantonmuseum.org)

## AUSTIN

### 3M Half Marathon

Jan. 19  
More than 7,500 runners annually attempt to beat their personal bests at one of the country's fastest 13.1-mile courses. *Various locations*. [3mhalfmarathon.com](http://3mhalfmarathon.com)

## BOERNE

### Kendall County Junior Livestock Show and Sale

Jan. 5-11  
Come see what the future farmers and ranchers of Kendall County have raised, including poultry, lambs, goats, steers, and hogs, at this annual livestock show. Money from the livestock sale goes toward the participants' higher education goals. *Kendall County Youth Agricultural and Equestrian Center*, 649 FM 289. 210-380-3001; [visitboerne.org](http://visitboerne.org)

## CEDAR PARK

### Trolls Live!

Jan. 31  
Get ready for another hair-raising adventure when Poppy, Branch, and all their troll friends come to life on stage in *Trolls Live!*, their first ever live tour. The show is jam-packed with epic music, glitter, humor, and happiness. *H-E-B Center at Cedar Park*, 2100 Avenue of the Stars. 512-600-5000; [hebcenter.com](http://hebcenter.com)

## FREDERICKSBURG

### Eisbahn Outdoor Ice Skating

Through Jan. 5  
This annual outdoor ice skating event celebrates the season while also benefiting local nonprofit organizations. *Marktplatz*, 100 W. Main St. [skateinfred.com](http://skateinfred.com)

## FREDERICKSBURG

### Hill Country Gem and Mineral Show

Jan. 18-19  
Organized by the Fredericksburg

Rockhounds, the 51st annual gem and mineral show includes artifacts, exhibits, demonstrations, jewelry, minerals, and fossils. *Pioneer Pavilion at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park*, 432 Lady Bird Drive. [fredericksburgrockhounds.org](http://fredericksburgrockhounds.org)

## FREDERICKSBURG

### Luckenbach Blues Festival

Jan. 18  
The 13th annual blues festival is an all-day celebration featuring local, regional, and Texas blues artists in historic Luckenbach. *Luckenbach Texas Dance Hall*, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. [luckenbachtexas.com](http://luckenbachtexas.com)

## FREDERICKSBURG

### Hill Country Indian Artifact Show

Jan. 25  
Find a wide variety of some of the finest Native American artifacts from Texas and the United States, including arrowheads, pottery, fossils, beads, and books. *Pioneer Pavilion at Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park*, 432 Lady Bird Drive. [hillcountryindianartifacts.com/Artifact\\_Shows.html](http://hillcountryindianartifacts.com/Artifact_Shows.html)

## HUNT

### Polar Bear Plunge

Jan. 1  
On New Year's Day, Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly hosts a Polar Bear Challenge with participants braving the icy waters of the Guadalupe River and sliding down a 35-foot-high, 116-foot-long water slide at Mo-Ranch to raise funds for a good cause. *Mo-Ranch*, 2229 FM 1340. 800-460-4401; [moranch.org](http://moranch.org)

## KERRVILLE

### Cowboy Breakfast

Jan. 10  
Fun family festivities and a free breakfast served by local 4-H and Future Farmers of America kids kick off the Hill Country District Jr. Livestock Show. *Kerr County Hill Country Youth Event Center*, 3785 SH 27. 830-792-3535; [kerrvilletexascvb.com](http://kerrvilletexascvb.com)

## KERRVILLE

### Out of This World: Music of the Cosmos

Jan. 11  
The professional Symphony of the Hills orchestra rings in the new year with *Out of this World: Music of the Cosmos*, a concert featuring music by Richard Strauss (2001: *A Space Odyssey*), John Williams (*Harry Potter* and *Jurassic Park*), and other composers whose music sets the mood for otherworldly films and stage adaptations.



Cailloux Theater, 910 Main St. 830-792-7469; [symphonyofthehills.org](http://symphonyofthehills.org)

#### KERRVILLE

##### Hill Country District Junior Livestock Show

Jan. 12-18  
Enjoy the fun and excitement at the fifth-largest junior livestock show in Texas, which is celebrating its 76th year. *Kerr County Hill Country Youth Event Center, 3785 SH 27. 830-792-4102; [hcdjls.org](http://hcdjls.org)*

#### KERRVILLE

##### Renaissance Festival

Jan. 24-26; Feb. 1-2  
Travel back to the Middle Ages and experience a fun-filled, family-friendly day of adventure, music, and romance. Play games of skill, eat a turkey leg, shop in the marketplace, and enjoy headlining entertainers and musical acts on seven stages. *River Star Arts and Event Park, 4000 Riverside Drive. 214-632-5766; [kerrvillerenfest.com](http://kerrvillerenfest.com)*

#### NEW BRAUNFELS

##### Hair of the Dog Day

Jan. 1  
Shake off New Year's Eve by spending New Year's Day enjoying free live shows all day at Gruene Hall. *Gruene Hall, 1281 Gruene Road. 830-629-5077; [gruenehall.com](http://gruenehall.com)*

#### NEW BRAUNFELS

##### Dinner With The Arts

Jan. 18  
Celebrate the 40th annual Dinner With The Arts with an art exhibit, art organization displays, a wine reception, food, entertainment, and awards. *801 W. San Antonio St. 830-358-3480; [gnbac.org](http://gnbac.org)*

#### PFLUGERVILLE

##### Pffreeze Pflor

Jan. 1  
Kick off the new year with a ride down the slide at Scott Mentzer Pool. Admission is a can of food to be donated to the local food bank. *Scott Mentzer Pool, 901 Old Austin Hutto Road. 512-990-6358; [pflugervilletx.gov](http://pflugervilletx.gov)*

#### TAYLOR

##### Dogz Rule! Flyball

Jan. 18-19  
Flyball is a dog sport where teams of four dogs race against each other over a line of hurdles to a spring-loaded box, catch a tennis ball from the box, and then race back to their handlers with the ball. The fastest team that runs without any errors wins. *Williamson County Exposition Center, 5350 Bill Pickett Trail. 512-238-2101; [wilcoexpo.com](http://wilcoexpo.com)*

#### TAYLOR

##### Run for the Roses 5K and 10K

Jan. 18  
The seventh annual 5K and 10K benefits the Taylor Garden Club, which provides scholarships for youths who are pursuing careers in ecology, horticulture, landscaping, arbor, and forestry studies. *Murphy Park, 1600 Veteran's Drive. 512-352-6364; [athleteguild.com](http://athleteguild.com)*

#### WIMBERLEY

##### Polar Bear Plunge

Jan. 1  
Participate in the Fun Run with the finish line being a plunge into the famous Blue Hole. After plunging, visit the fire pit to warm up. Runners and plungers are encouraged to bring a towel and a change of clothes. *Blue Hole Regional Park, 100 Blue Hole Lane. 512-660-9111; [facebook.com/blueholeregionalpark](http://facebook.com/blueholeregionalpark)*

#### WIMBERLEY

##### Wimberley Art and Soul

Jan. 24-26  
This is an edu-tainment weekend in Wimberley with a wide variety of creative workshops, events, and activities offered by area businesses and organizations. *Various businesses. 512-847-2201; [wimberleyartandsoul.com](http://wimberleyartandsoul.com)*

#### PANHANDLE PLAINS

#### ABILENE

##### Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

Jan. 20  
The annual celebration features dinner and a guest speaker. *Abilene Convention Center, 1100 N. Sixth St. 325-338-7372; [abilenevisitors.com](http://abilenevisitors.com)*

#### ABILENE

##### Taylor County Livestock Show and Sale

Jan. 22-25  
The 31st annual show includes poultry, steer, heifer, lamb, goat, rabbit, and swine shows. *Taylor County Expo Center, 1700 SH 36. 325-677-4376; [abilenevisitors.com](http://abilenevisitors.com)*

#### ABILENE

##### "Emperor" Concerto

Jan. 25  
The Abilene Philharmonic's first concert of the new year features an encore performance by Abilene's very own Halle Puckett. Now in her senior year at TCU, she performs the powerful Beethoven Concerto No. 5, "Emperor." Rounding out this performance is the cheery and almost pastoral Brahms Symphony No. 2. *Abilene*

Convention Center, 1100 N. Sixth St. 325-677-6710; [abilenevisitors.com](http://abilenevisitors.com)

#### GRAHAM

##### Seth James and Josh Weathers in Concert

Jan. 21  
The Graham Concert Association is proud to present the talented duo of Seth James and Josh Weathers at the historic auditorium. *Graham Memorial Auditorium, 628 Third St. 940-549-0401; [grahamconcertassociation.com](http://grahamconcertassociation.com)*

#### LUBBOCK

##### West Texas Watercolor Society Winter Show

Through Jan. 19  
Member artists exhibit and sell their beautiful water media artworks. *Buddy Holly Center, 1801 Crickets Ave. 806-729-8285; [wtws.org](http://wtws.org)*

#### LUBBOCK

##### High and Dry Photography Exhibit

Through Jan. 31  
Since 2001, the Office of International Affairs at Texas Tech University has curated this juried photographic exhibition of peoples and places of the world's dry lands, with images from places like Morocco, Iran, and Chile, and as near and familiar as Caprock Canyon. *Texas Tech University International Cultural Center, 601 Indiana Ave. 806-742-3667; [www.depts.ttu.edu/international/events/2019/highdry.php](http://www.depts.ttu.edu/international/events/2019/highdry.php)*

#### LUBBOCK

##### The Jones, Strait, Alan Jackson, and Brooks and Dunn Tribute Concert

Jan. 4  
In an all new country music concert series, Will Banister, Danny Cadra, Jeff Bailey, and the Caldwell Collective band pay tribute to these legends of country music. *Cactus Theater, 1812 Buddy Holly Ave. 806-762-3233; [visitlubbock.org](http://visitlubbock.org)*

#### SAN ANGELO

##### Highlights from the Permanent Collection

Through April 5  
Selections from the museum's permanent collection include masterpieces of ceramics, Texas art, Spanish Colonial art, and American glass. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, One Love St. 325-653-3333; [samfa.org](http://samfa.org)*

#### SAN ANGELO

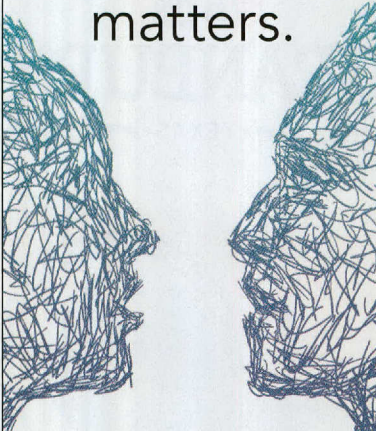
##### Chamber Music Series

Jan. 26  
The San Angelo Chamber Music




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<http://www.beaumontcvb.com/hotels/>

Series features concerts by outstanding musicians from across Texas and the United States. This month the New York-based Cassett String Quartet performs with clarinetist Oskar Espina-Ruiz. Music includes works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Beethoven. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, One Love St. 325-653-3333; samfa.org*

**PINEY WOODS**

**JEFFERSON**  
**Pulpwood Queen Girlfriend Weekend**  
Jan. 16-18  
At this one-of-a-kind fun-filled weekend, book lovers (guys and gals) get to meet and mingle with authors, share stories and inspirations, see new works, and take part in discussions. The weekend also has the "Great Big Ball of Hair" Ball (costumes optional, but really fun). *Jefferson Visitor Center, 305 E. Austin St. thepulpwoodqueens.com*

**JEFFERSON**  
**Jefferson Quilt Show**  
Jan. 24-25  
At one of the largest events in East Texas, handmade quilts by regional and local artisans are on display, with an emphasis on educating the public in the art of quilt-making. *Jeffersonian Institute, 120 E. Austin St. 903-935-2235; jeffersonquiltshow.com*

**KILGORE**  
**MLK Day March and Celebration**  
Jan. 20  
Organized by the Kilgore Men of Alliance, the fourth annual MLK Day Celebration pays tribute to the life and legacy of the great civil rights leader. The event starts with a march and ends at the Texas Theater for a morning of celebration. *Texan Theater, 201 S. Kilgore St. facebook.com/kilgore-men-of-alliance-1665301523783313*

**LONGVIEW**  
**East Texas Boat and RV Show**  
Jan. 24-26  
The largest boat and travel show east of I-35 has a marketplace for buyers and sellers of boating, camping, and outdoor items. *Maude Cobb Convention and Activity Center, 100 Grand Blvd. 903-237-4023; boatrvshow.com*

**LUFKIN**  
**Popovich Comedy Pet Theater**  
Jan. 5  
This family show features a

European-style circus extravaganza that has physical comedy, juggling, acrobats from the Moscow Circus, highly intelligent dogs, and talented house cats. All of the pets are trained using positive reinforcement techniques, and they're all rescue animals. *Temple Theater, 3500 S. First St. 936-633-5454; angelinaarts.org*

**LUFKIN**  
**Ladysmith Black Mambazo in Concert**  
Jan. 21  
South Africa's four-time Grammy Award-winning band has warmed the hearts of audiences worldwide with its uplifting vocal harmonies, signature dance moves, and charming onstage banter. *Temple Theater, 3500 S. First St. 936-633-5454; angelinaarts.org*

**TYLER**  
**Bold Lines: Works by Joseph Glasco**  
Through Feb. 16  
Signature pieces from the Tyler Museum of Art's permanent collection as well as works drawn from public and private collections throughout the state highlight this retrospective of the late abstract Expressionist painter and sculptor. *Tyler Museum of Art, 1300 S. Mahon Ave. 903-595-1001; tylermuseum.org*

**TYLER**  
**Photographs by Laura Wilson**  
Through March 15  
This exhibition highlights one of the signature series of the acclaimed photographer, based on her 25 years of experience on ranches in West Texas and Montana photographing men "who hold on to their cowboy heritage by adhering to their own traditions and codes of behavior in the 21st century." *Tyler Museum of Art, 1300 S. Mahon Ave. 903-595-1001; tylermuseum.org*

**TYLER**  
**An Evening With Rita Moreno, Legend Of Stage And Screen**  
Jan. 16  
From her Oscar-winning role as Anita in *West Side Story* to starring in the Latino remake of Norman Lear's sitcom *One Day at a Time* on Netflix, Moreno remains one of the busiest stars in show business, and is one of only three Americans to receive a Peabody, Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Award. *UT Tyler Cowan Center, 3900 University Blvd. 903-566-7424; cowancenter.org*

**PRAIRIES AND LAKES**

**BELTON**  
**Sami Arts and Crafts Market**  
Jan. 25-26  
This arts and crafts marketplace is designed to bring the finest arts and crafts and the latest trends in home decorating to the consumer. Since 1975, the arts and crafts shows have been known among shoppers and artisans alike for their quality and variety. *Bell County Expo Center, 301 W. Loop 121. 512-441-7133; samishow.com*

**BONHAM**  
**Sam Rayburn Day**  
Jan. 4  
Celebrate the birthday of the longest-serving speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. The Sam Rayburn House State Historic Site opens its doors with special tours and activities. You might even get a slice of Mr. Sam's favorite dessert: coconut cake. *Sam Rayburn House State Historic Site, 890 SH 56 W. 903-583-5558; visitsamrayburnhouse.com*

**CANTON**  
**Civil War Re-enactment**  
Jan. 31-Feb. 2  
Join the second annual re-enactment with living history and battle scenarios. *542 E. Dallas St. 318-455-4489; facebook.com/9thtexas canton*

**CLEBURNE**  
**The Complete Works of William Shakespeare Abridged**  
Through Jan. 25  
This production is a comical parody of William Shakespeare's plays, all of them performed in shortened form by three actors. *Plaza Theatre Company at Dudley Hall, 305 S. Anglin St. 817-202-0600; plaza-theatre.com*

**CLEBURNE**  
**Matilda the Musical**  
Jan. 31-Feb. 29  
Plaza Theatre Company presents *Matilda the Musical*, a stage musical based on the 1988 children's novel of the same name by Roald Dahl. *Plaza Theatre Company at Dudley Hall, 305 S. Anglin St. 817-202-0600; plaza-theatre.com*

**CLIFTON**  
**Mo Pitney in Concert**  
Jan. 11  
Country music star Mo Pitney began playing the drums at 6 and the guitar at 12, mimicking icons of the genre like Johnny Cash. Now in his 20s, the Nashville-

based artist brings his band and songcraft to Clifton for an evening concert. *Bosque Arts Center*, 215 S. College Hill Drive. 254-675-3724; [bosqueartscenter.org](http://bosqueartscenter.org)

#### CORSICANA

##### Reflections of Patsy Cline Concert

Jan. 16  
This concert stars Lisa Layne, who has performed Patsy Cline shows for 25 years and portrayed the legend all over the world in *Always Patsy Cline*. She was awarded the Best Show in Branson, Missouri, during its run there. *Palace Theatre*, 112 W. Sixth Ave. 903-874-7792; [corsicanapalace.com](http://corsicanapalace.com)

#### DALLAS

##### El Greco, Goya, and a Taste for Spain: Highlights from The Bowes Museum

Through Jan. 12  
The development of Spanish art across three centuries—from large, gold-encrusted retable panels of saints to intimate portraits and scenes taken from life—is explored through 11 selected masterpieces from England's largest collection of Spanish paintings. *Meadows Museum*, 5900 Bishop Blvd. 214-768-2516; [meadowsmuseumdallas.org/bowes-museum](http://meadowsmuseumdallas.org/bowes-museum)

#### DALLAS

##### The Kinsey African American Art and History Collection

Through March 1  
This collection celebrates the achievements and contributions of African Americans from 1595 to present. It includes masterful paintings and sculpture, photos, rare books, letters, and manuscripts. *African American Museum of Dallas*, 3536 Grand Ave. 214-565-9026; [thekinseycollection.com](http://thekinseycollection.com)

#### DENISON

##### Denison on Ice

Through Jan. 5  
Ice skate outdoors in downtown Denison. *Downtown Denison*, 530 W. Main St. 903-464-4452; [denisonlive.com](http://denisonlive.com)

#### ELGIN

##### Bastrop County MLK Walk and Program

Jan. 14  
Every January the cities of Bastrop, Elgin, and Smithville take turns honoring the life of Martin Luther King Jr., with a walk followed by a program featuring guest speakers. This year, the honor goes to Elgin. Up-to-date information can be found at the Community Calendar. [elgintx.com](http://elgintx.com)

#### FORT WORTH

##### Cliburn Concerts: Beethoven at 250—The Piano Concertos Nos. 1, 2, and 3

Jan. 4  
To kick off 2020—which is a year-long, international celebration of the iconic composer's 250th birthday—Cliburn at the Bass presents Beethoven's piano concertos in order. With the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Joyce Yang, David Fray, artist Jon Nakamatsu, and Miguel Harth-Bedoya, who is in the midst of his final season as the orchestra's music director. *Bass Performance Hall*, 525 Commerce St. 817-212-4280; [cliburn.org](http://cliburn.org)

#### FORT WORTH

##### Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo

Jan. 17-Feb. 8  
A fun-filled extravaganza rich in Western tradition, the legendary Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo offers exciting rodeo action, livestock, horse shows, kid-friendly activities, 4 acres of shopping, the Moo-seum Experience, live music, carnival games, and great food. *Dickies Arena*, 1911 Montgomery St. 817-877-2599; [fwssr.com](http://fwssr.com)

#### FRISCO

##### WOGA Classic

Jan. 31-Feb. 2  
World Olympic Gymnastics Academy hosts top teams from the United States and around the world at this annual competition. *Ford Center at The Star*, 9 Cowboy Way. 972-712-9642; [woga.net](http://woga.net)

#### GRANBURY

##### Goosebump Jump

Jan. 4  
Jump into frigid Lake Granbury and have bragging rights all year long. *Granbury City Beach Park*, 623 W. Pearl St. 817-573-5548;

#### GRANBURY

##### Father of the Bride

Jan. 24-Feb. 9  
Stanley Banks learns that one of the young men he has seen occasionally about the house is about to become his son-in-law. Daughter Kay announces the engagement out of nowhere. *Granbury Opera House*, 133 E. Pearl St. 817-579-0952; [granburytheatrecompany.org](http://granburytheatrecompany.org)

#### GRAND PRAIRIE

##### Lunar New Year

Jan. 10-12, 17-19  
Celebrate Lunar New Year with games, live performances, food, and other activities in Asia Times Square. *Asia Times Square*, 2615 W. Pioneer Parkway. 972-975-5100; [asiatimesquare.com](http://asiatimesquare.com)

#### IRVING

##### Irving Symphony Orchestra: "The Four Seasons Twice!"

Jan. 25  
With his impeccable tone and musicianship, former concertmaster of the Irving Symphony Orchestra, Vesselin Demirev, returns to Irving to perform not one but two towering masterpieces for violin and string orchestra—Vivaldi's and Piazzolla's renditions of "The Four Seasons." *Irving Arts Center*, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd. 972-252-2787; [irvingsymphony.com](http://irvingsymphony.com)

#### LA GRANGE

##### Dale Watson and The Lone Stars in Concert

Jan. 10  
Dale Watson kicks off the 16th musical season for the Bugle Boy, a nonprofit music foundation with a unique listening room venue housed in a converted WWII Army barrack. The Austin Music Hall of Fame inductee is a keeper of the true country music flame. *The Bugle Boy*, 1051 N. Jefferson St. 979-968-9944; [ats.thebugleboy.org/concerts](http://ats.thebugleboy.org/concerts)

#### MADISONVILLE

##### Lone Star 5000+

Jan. 9-11  
The Lone Star 5000+ is an annual weekend when hunters and their dogs race to be the first to spot a raccoon. *Iola Volunteer Fire Department*, 23574 Brazos Ave. 979-219-2928; [facebook.com/lonestar5000/](http://facebook.com/lonestar5000/)

#### MCKINNEY

##### Dinosaurs Live!

Through Feb. 17  
Encounter the 46-foot tall T. rex and nine new life-size animatronic dinosaurs along the nature trails at the 14th annual exhibit. The exhibit always gives families and friends a fun, educational activity to enjoy together. See the dinosaurs move and hear them roar. A photo op and play-area dinosaurs are available as well. This year, the exhibit also features an outdoor fossil dig. The dinosaur trail is jogging stroller friendly (it is not suitable for strollers with small wheels or wheelchairs). *Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary*, 1 Nature Place. 972-562-5566; [heardmuseum.org](http://heardmuseum.org)

#### MESQUITE

##### Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

Jan. 18  
Honor the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. at this community celebration featuring remarks by various church pastors and community leaders, dance and musical

performances, and monologues. *Downtown Mesquite and Mesquite Arts Center Concert Hall*, 1527 N. Galloway Ave. 972-216-6260; [visitmesquitetx.com](http://visitmesquitetx.com)

#### PLANO

##### Train Show

Jan. 18-19  
The Dallas-area Train Show offers two full days of clinics and home layout tours for model train aficionados of all ages. *Plano Event Center*, 2000 E. Spring Creek Parkway. 469-438-0741; [dfwtrainshow.com](http://dfwtrainshow.com)

#### RICHARDSON

##### Mandy Patinkin in Concert

Jan. 17  
This show, *Diaries*, is a marriage of some of the Tony-winning actor's favorite Broadway and classic American tunes, along with selections from his newest recordings. *Charles W. Eisemann Center for Performing Arts and Corporate Presentations*, 2351 Performance Drive. 972-744-4650; [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)

#### RICHARDSON

##### Piano Battle:

##### Andreas Kern vs. Paul Cibis

Jan. 31  
The brainchild of internationally accomplished pianists Andreas Kern and Paul Cibis, the Piano Battle sees the duo go head-to-head on stage, charming the audience with their distinctly different performance styles. *Charles W. Eisemann Center for Performing Arts and Corporate Presentations*, 2351 Performance Drive. 972-744-4650; [eisemanncenter.com](http://eisemanncenter.com)



#### DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?

If you think your event might be of interest to Texas Highways readers, submit your information at [texashighways.com/submit-event](http://texashighways.com/submit-event)

**SEALY**  
**Sealy Chili Dilly**

Jan. 25  
Do you make the best chili in Texas? Bring the heat to this judged competition, which gives out a People's Choice Award. Levine Park, 406 Main St. 979-885-3222; sealychamber.com

**SHERMAN**  
**Martin Luther King Jr. Day Parade**

Jan. 18  
The Martin Luther King Jr. parade will be held at noon and all churches, civic and social groups, and members of the public are invited. A service will follow in Mabee Hall in the Wright Campus Center of Austin College. Downtown Sherman. shermantx.org

**TEMPLE**  
**Polar Bear Plunge**

Jan. 4  
Grab a friend, put on a costume, and dive in to take the Polar Bear Plunge. Hot chocolate and doughnuts are provided for those who can brave the frosty water. Lions Junction Family Water Park, 5000 S. Fifth St. 254-298-5920; lionsjunction.com

**WACO**  
**Stars Over Texas Jamboree Oldies Edition**

Jan. 9  
This is a family-friendly music stage show presented the first Thursday of the month, and the second Thursdays in January and July. This month's show is an oldies edition. Lee Lockwood Library and Museum, 2801 W. Waco Drive. 254-755-7257; facebook.com/thestarsovertexasjamboree

**WACO**  
**The Lion Guard: Educational Exhibit**

Jan. 18-May 10  
Based on Disney Junior's hit series *The Lion Guard*, the exhibition takes guests on an adventure through the Pride Lands, the kingdom first introduced in *The Lion King*. Kids are inspired to protect the Circle of Life, train in the Lion Guard's secret lair, and learn about the African savanna. Mayborn Museum, Baylor University, 1300 S. University Parks Drive. 254-710-1110; Baylor.edu/mayborn

**SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS**

**EAGLE PASS**  
**Maverick County Junior Livestock Show and Sale**

Jan. 19-25

This show and sale features the Western Queen Pageant, sixth annual Chuy Sanchez Memorial Cowboy Breakfast, a stock show, dance, and barbecue lunch. Maverick County Lake Area. 830-513-0398

**MCALEEN**  
**Winter Texan Expo**

Jan. 14-15  
The largest Winter Texan Expo in South Texas, shop over 200 vendors with 10,000 attendees. You can get information regarding health care, vacation destinations, and shopping. Don't miss out on all the great door prizes. McAllen Convention Center, 700 Convention Center Blvd. 956-687-5115; wintertexanexpo.com

**SAN ANTONIO**  
**Let's Rodeo Ball**

Jan. 18  
This major fundraising event for the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo Scholarship Fund is an upscale party that features top entertainment, great food, dancing, and fun—not just for fans of rodeo but also for all of San Antonio. (Note: Guests must be 21 and over to attend this event.) Joe and Harry Freeman Coliseum, 3201 E. Houston St. 210-225-5851; sarodeo.com

**SAN ANTONIO**  
**Barbecue Cookoff and Festival**

Jan. 24-25  
Featuring some of the world's best competitive barbecue teams, live music, family activities, a trade show, a kids cookoff, and shopping. The San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo Barbecue Cookoff is a championship event sanctioned by the International Barbeque Cookers Association and proceeds benefit the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo Scholarship Fund. San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo on the Salado, 1723 Creekview Drive. 210-225-5851; sarodeo.com

**WESLACO**  
**Alfresco Weslaco**

Jan. 16  
The city of Weslaco and Weslaco Economic Development present Alfresco Weslaco—music and art on the street. There is plenty to see and do, as downtown businesses are open late alongside more than 60 vendors lining the street. There is also a car show with classic cars on display. Downtown Historic Weslaco, South Texas Boulevard. 956-969-0838; facebook.com/alfrescoweslaco

**THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5**

**Wichita Falls**



*Go ahead and chase waterfalls in the North Texas region of Texoma*

BY CHET GARNER

While most of Texas has a friendly-ish rivalry with Oklahoma, there's a region of North Texas that's so close to the border that it practically blends with the Sooner state. This region—called Texoma—contains Wichita Falls, a fun-loving town that features charming oddities, a passionate biking community, and its own signature cocktail.

**World's Littlest Skyscraper**

It's a tale as tall as Texas, but with a building that's much, much smaller. This mini skyscraper was built in 1919 when a con man sold boomtown investors on the idea of a massive downtown building. But what they didn't realize was that the approved blueprints were in inches—not feet. And that's how this 40-foot-tall "skyscraper" came to be. Thankfully, the embarrassed townsfolk didn't tear it down, and now visitors can appreciate one of the "littlest" views in Texas.

**The Original Casa Mañana**

This place will definitely give you something to "taco" bout. Their signature red tacos (yes, red) are a local delicacy and have been handmade here for more than 75 years. The red color comes from a special chile powder blend that's rolled into the dough. What emerges from the deep fryer is a puffy and crispy taco that's unlike anything else in Texas. Slather on the house-made wine sauce and you can't lose.

**Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame & Museum**

How's your suplex? Don't worry, you'll have plenty of time to perfect it at this museum dedicated to professional wrestling. You'll get body-slammed with knowledge about the men and women of the sport, going back to the days of Abe Lincoln, who was once a pro wrestler himself. There are artifacts and stories that will have you eager to jump in the ring. Luckily, the museum houses one that was used in Madison Square Garden.

**Wee-Chi-Tah Trail**

Most don't know that Wichita Falls is one of the most intense biking communities in America—it hosts the famous Hotter 'N Hell Hundred every August. But every day of the year you'll find riders cruising the trails along the Wichita River. This well-manicured path includes drops, bridges, and a 450-foot wooden track that meanders 10 feet in the air without side rails. Just don't look down!

**P2 The Deuce**

This bar and restaurant has been a local hangout for decades. Partly because it's one of only three drive-in bars left in America where you can actually be served in your car. But also because they invented the locally famous Red Draw—a concoction of ice-cold draft beer and tomato juice that hits the spot on any Texas day.

**So 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 Wichita Falls episode visit thedaytripper.com. Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.*



# Mo Laughter

Houston comedian Mo Amer extracts humor from the hardships of growing up as an Arab American refugee

By Kimya Kavehkar

**M**o Amer has a hard time remembering when he last traveled purely for fun. Sure, he's seen plenty of places in his career as a stand-up comedian. But these last several years, he's been working at a supersonic pace, with little time to relax. So when he makes it back home to Houston (he currently splits his time between Houston and New York City), sightseeing isn't really on the agenda. "People ask me that all the time—'What do you do when you're in Houston?'" he says. "I sleep. I hang out with my family. I see my mother." It's the kind of comfort you can only get from your hometown, and the 38-year-old reps Houston with huge pride in his Netflix special, *The Vagabond*. During the hourlong set of stand-up comedy, filmed at the Paramount Theatre in Austin in 2018, he talks about fleeing Kuwait with

**"Obviously my job as a comedian is to make you laugh. That's my No. 1 goal. But if I can make you think, that is what the best stand-up comedians do."**

his Palestinian family during the Gulf War and landing in the Houston suburb of Alief in the early 1990s as a 9-year-old refugee. He weaves painful and embarrassing parts of his story into comedy gold—like when people confused him for being Mexican in grade school, or the frustration of explaining his immigration status every time he went to the airport. But these days, things are locking up. Amer enters 2020 in high demand, and this spring he will appear in the second season of *Ramy*, a Hulu dramedy about a first-generation American Muslim.

**Q:** *When you were growing up in Houston, was the city as diverse as it is now?*

**A:** It's definitely grown since I was a kid because I definitely didn't see other Mohammads [Mo is short for Mohammad] in my fourth grade class or fifth grade class. High school was when I started realizing how diverse it really was. Actually, I was pitching a TV show recently, and I was doing some research about the suburb I grew up in, Alief. It has 80 languages spoken there. It's pretty mind-blowing. The fact that Houston is the most diverse city in America now? I can see it, I can completely see it. Definitely through high school I noticed how much of a salad bowl we were, and now it's just exploded, and I think it's great.

**Q:** *How did you get your first laugh?*

**A:** Man, I don't know. Probably a fantastic facial expression when I was a baby. No, but really, I've always been this guy who told stories even when I was a kid in Kuwait, like 5, 6, 7 years old. I remember telling stories to the kids in the neighborhood. They would come out, and I would just make up stuff. I was always that guy. I don't know how to explain it. Something that you're born with—you just have it.

**Q:** *How did you progress from there?*

**A:** I went through a rough time in high school. My dad passed away. I was skipping school all the time, and my English teacher, Mrs. Broderick, said, "Didn't you say you want to be a stand-up comedian?" She goes, "You're too smart to fail, but you're going to fail high school. And how would your father feel if you don't graduate?" Jeez, just put a stake through my heart. So I was just like, "He'd be devastated." I started crying. It was awful. She says, "I'll tell you what, I'll give you extra credit to help you get closer to passing if you do a monologue from Shakespeare. And then I'll let you do stand-up every Friday in class." Seemed like a no-brainer to me. And she said, "Here's the deal, though: If I catch you skipping, I'm going to fail you." So she changed my life completely. I did the monologue. I had to

write [stand-up] material that night. I was super excited about it. I did my set; kids were laughing like crazy.

**Q:** *When you're doing a set, do you have a structure of what you're going to say, or are you just up there having fun?*

**A:** I would say 50/50. Maybe even more [on the spontaneous side] than that. I do a lot of reading, and I do a lot of thinking, so at some point I just remember all of it, then just talk. I have a real problem with structure. It's really important to me to keep it loose and to keep it spontaneous. And if I just stick to a certain structure then it loses something for me. I think it's really good for the audience too, most of the time.

**Q:** *How do you turn the trauma of your refugee experience into humor?*

**A:** People who have been oppressed, traditionally, are some of the funniest people on Earth. We really have the greatest sense of humor. We went from riches to rags. My family came from nothing, then they made something, and then it was taken away from them several times. I noticed that [humor is] one of those instinctual things that happens when you have to relieve yourself. It's like crying, the sense of relief afterwards. Might feel horrible in the moment, but laughing is equally relieving—it just kicks into your brain and releases these endorphins, and you feel spectacular afterwards. You feel energetic and happy—it's just one of those things that you naturally go to for survival. And you become more observant when you have lost so much and experienced so much. You see a lot more than most people.

**Q:** *When you share your experiences as an Arab American on stage, do you feel like you're educating audiences, too?*

**A:** I feel like my entire special on Netflix was an education. And then also it freed a lot of people who were experiencing similar things. Obviously my job as a comedian is to make you laugh. That's my No. 1 goal. But if I can make you think,

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Check out Mo Amer's most recent work on screen in *Ramy* on Hulu and onstage in *The Vagabond* on Netflix. Keep up with Amer's touring schedule at [moamer.com](http://moamer.com).

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that's what the best stand-up comedians do. Think about all the greats. They made you laugh and think at the same time.

**Q:** *Do you ever feel pigeonholed by your personal story, like you have to talk about it every time because that's what people expect of you?*

**A:** People do expect that from me, but at the same time, I'm my own artist. I don't really fall into that trap. I feel very tugged or pulled to the certain direction of my background and what the zeitgeist is doing. You know, if it's not relevant to the zeitgeist, then what's the point? If it's not an issue, then what's the point? But we have a lot of issues still going on and pending for many years to come. What I'm focused on is just trying to connect the dots and make them funny.

**Q:** *Your career has had a lot of momentum in the past few years—have you been able to take it all in and process it?*

**A:** It's important to step back and do that because I forget how dope it's been, especially the last seven years. Definitely the last five have been really amazing—to go from shooting a special, to being a second lead on a TV show [*Ramy*], to touring with Dave Chappelle and doing shows with Jon Stewart, performing in arenas that only a few people have gotten to experience. At the same time, you can't think about it too long or time will fly by. And part of me would be like, oh no, I need to catch up. I'm trying just to really enjoy what's happening around me. **L**

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*Texas Highways* (ISSN 0040-4349) is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, 150 E. Riverside Drive, Austin, Texas 78704; phone 512-486-5858, fax 512-486-5879. The official travel magazine of Texas encourages travel within the state and tells the Texas story to readers around the world.

Periodicals Postage paid at Austin, Texas, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Texas Highways* Circulation, P.O. Box 8559, Big Sandy, Texas 75755-8559.

# VINTAGE

BY TRACES OF TEXAS



## Signs of the Times

BELL COUNTY, EARLY 1930s

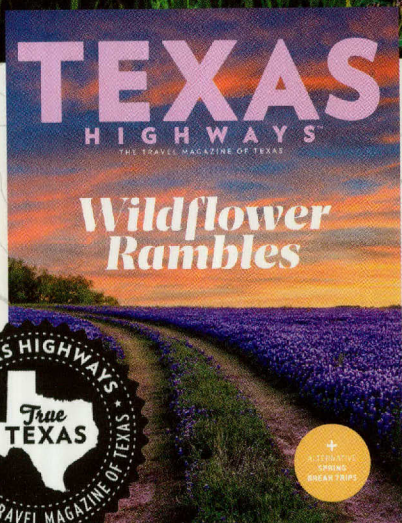
**H**ad you traveled to Bell County, just west of Killeen, in the early 1930s, you might have met John Wesley Blankinship and his daughter Floy at their family store on the banks of Clear Creek. On the back of this photo, Floy, who died at age 79 in 1996, recorded her memories: "Probably the happiest and carefree days—minding the store, being the center of my mother and daddy's life. ... [In] the Depression of the 1930s, with so many people coming by trying to escape from starving cities, my parents fed many hungry people. We grew our own food. My mother grew 100-pound watermelons behind the store. We cooled them in the spring and shared their goodness. All strangers became friends. No one ever harmed us." When the government condemned the Blankinships' land in 1943 to build Fort Hood, John Wesley did not resist, reasoning that since he had no sons to fight in World War II, he would give his property to the cause. **L**

*Know of any fascinating vintage Texas photographs? Send copies or ideas to [tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com](mailto:tracesoftxphotos@gmail.com).*

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