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NOTE



Barbecue crabs are a travel-worthy dish at The Schooner Restaurant in Nederland.

Good Eats

Asking someone to select the best thing they've ever eaten in Texas may seem like an unfairly difficult question, but the responses to our query may have resulted in our most mouth-watering cover story yet. To give you even more delectable recommendations, I asked our resident staff gourmands to share their favorite Texas restaurant meals.

Tyson Bird, digital strategies manager: The minute I set foot in the Lost Maples Cafe in Utopia after days of camping, I knew I was in for a life-changing chicken-fried steak. The golden-brown entrée with gravy and mashed potatoes was the best I've had in Texas. My only regret? Not saving room for pie.

Ashley Burch, art director: One of the best things I've ever eaten was the gelato at OroBianco Italian Creamery in Blanco, the only water buffalo creamery and dairy in Texas. I enjoy savory food, but sweets are my true love, and the rich and creamy gelato I ate that one hot summer day is seared into my brain (and heart) forever.

Julia Jones, associate editor: Happy hour at Water Street Oyster Bar in Corpus Christi means half-price raw oysters and classic sushi rolls, a filling meal my husband and

I enjoy any time we're on the coast. There's sentimental value too. The restaurant, opened in 1983, is the site of his parents' first date.

Kimya Kavehkar, managing editor: One of my family's favorite restaurants is Shiraz Mediterranean Grill in Dallas. As Persians, we're pretty darn picky about Persian restaurants, and this one wows us every time. While the restaurant serves typical beef, chicken, lamb, and salmon kabobs, there are also "homestyle" dishes that you don't often see outside of family kitchens, like *olvieh* salad (a mix between chicken salad and potato salad) and *khoresht-e-karafs* (a celery and chicken stew served with saffron rice). I recommend trying both. Of course, it doesn't compare to my mom's cooking, but it's some of the best Persian food in Texas.

We apologize in advance for how hungry you're going to be after reading this issue.

Emily Roberts Stone

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF



CHRISTMAS COLLEGE^{IN} STATION



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The Heart of Aggieland

FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

VOLUME 68 . NUMBER 11

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The Best Thing I Ever Ate in Texas

Notable Texans share their favorite dishes in this celebration of local restaurants.

Photographs by Eric W. Pohl

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Kitchen International

Refugees resettling in Texas bring their cultures and cuisines with them.

By Kayla Stewart

Photographs by Nathan Lindstrom

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Travel, Interrupted

We check in with cities across the state as they recover from the pandemic and reimagine travel.

By Michael Hardy

A CHEF FIRES UP
a wok at Sayakomarn's Restaurant
in Canyon.

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PHOTO BY: MIKAEL BEHRENS

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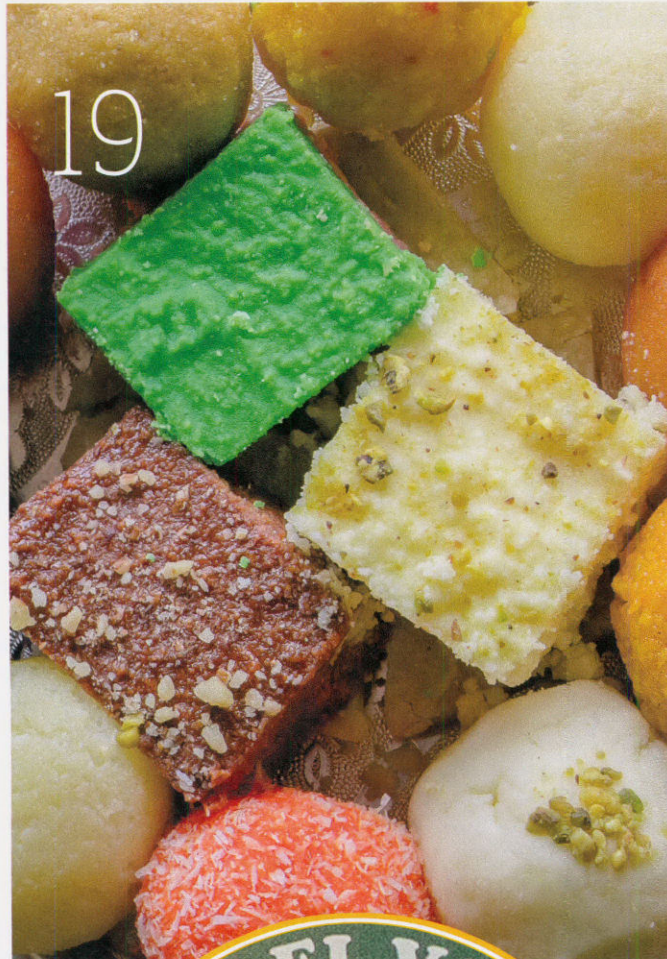
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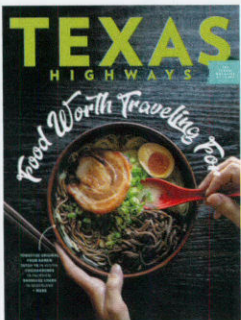
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ON THE COVER

Tonkatsu ramen from
Ramen Tatsu-ya in Austin
Photo by Eric W. Pohl



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Behind the Story



Food styling has been a career-long passion for *Texas Highways* Art Director Ashley Burch. This month's cover, shot by photographer Eric W. Pohl, features table settings from Burch's personal collection of props. "Over time I've collected way too many place settings and dinnerware and cups and bowls, and this was a good way for me to put that to use," Burch says. The cover shoot took around three hours, with a couple hours of preparation and about 30 minutes of photography. "We're constantly working against time because stuff starts to look sad," she says. "Ice starts to melt; things start to coagulate. With the ramen we really wanted to continuously get steam to fight that." The perfectionism Burch shows on set pops up in her personal life too. "My family makes fun of me because the food I make my kids is always beautiful," she says with a laugh. "Even if they're eating chicken nuggets, I always find a way to make sure that the color palette of their entire plate is balanced."

Featured Contributors



Ruvani de Silva

The British-Sri Lankan writer was surprised to discover a nearly 100-year-old Jersey cattle herd so far from the breed's U.K. homeland, prompting her to write "Till the Cows Come Home" (Page 59). "The Knolles are so passionate about what they do, and they have drawn on their Texan resourcefulness and tenacity to pivot their farm through the pandemic," the Austin-based writer says. "I also got to feed a baby Jersey, which has to be the ultimate writing assignment perk!" De Silva's work centers on food, drink, and travel. She has written for the blog *Craft Beer Austin* and *Pellicle Magazine*.



Joe Hagan

For "Cresting the Wave" (Page 12), journalist Joe Hagan spoke to relatives and former schoolmates to reconstruct memories of surfing off Bob Hall Pier on Padre Island as a kid. "What I really wanted to do was profile my cousin David, who was a terrific surfer," says Hagan, who is based in Tivoli, New York. What began as a simple story about surfing, however, turned into more than he bargained for. "I accidentally uncorked a big family secret," he says. "As it turned out, I was the secret." Hagan is a contributing editor for *Vanity Fair* and author of *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times of Jann Wenner* and *Rolling Stone Magazine*.

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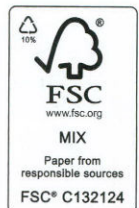


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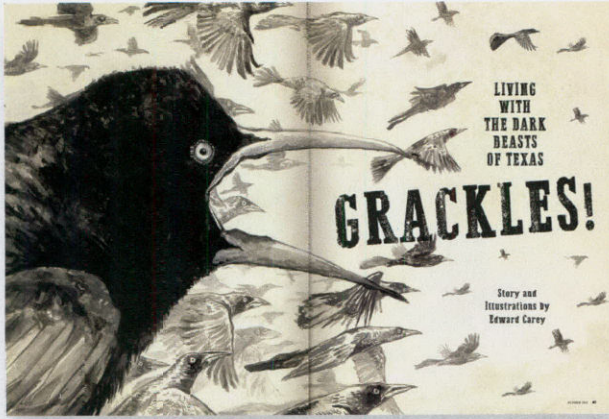
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MERGE



Here's my take on grackles:

Don't park your car
Under a tree at H-E-B.
The grackles will turn it
Into something nobody wants to see.
Bruce Robb, Houston

Dark Beasts of Texas

When I was living in Austin, I liked having them around ["Grackles!," October]. I suspect they, as individuals, feel about us the way we feel about them, as individuals.

f *Mort Stine, Greenville, North Carolina*

My reckoning is that [grackles] have been roosting in the same spot for thousands of years, and we just came along and built a mall there.

f *Thomas Stewart Webber, San Angelo*

Juan Seguin

Seguin represented many Tejanos in the same situation but not in leadership roles like him ["Caught Between 2 Countries," October]. He was not a traitor but a hero who had courage to do what was right no matter the cost.

f *Eloy Zamora, Palmview*

One Under Par

Grackles are experts at stealing crackers and candy from my golf cart as I labor over a putt I will probably miss ["Grackles!," October]. Difficult to keep your eye on the ball and your snacks at the same time.

Paul R. Beane, Lubbock

Neighborhood Pride

I'd like to thank Robert Wilonsky for the wonderful, heartwarming story about his dad ["Good Neighbors," October]. It brought back many happy memories about living in Big D at that time. Marriage, a growing family, and job opportunities necessitated a move to Houston in 1973, and the Dallas I knew then is hard to find now.

Jo Merrily King, Houston

Wedding Bells

I was excited to see Jane Naylor's

"Cowboy River" article showcase Bandera in your September issue, but I was surprised Polly's Chapel was not mentioned. José Policarpio "Polly" Rodriguez, one of the first settlers of San Antonio and Bandera, began construction on the chapel in 1879. I may be biased regarding the chapel, as I'll be getting married there this November.

Rita Zapien, Houston

Horse Country

Thank y'all so much for this beautiful issue, in particular the article "Horsepower" by Asher Elbein [September]. As president of the American Indian Horse Registry, I was delighted that y'all gave space to the horses who roamed the state before it was Texas. I grew up in South Texas near the Wild Horse Desert, and my first horses were descendants of those wild horses. I barrel raced on them,

roped off of them, and came to love them unconditionally. I began breeding them in the mid-1970s and in 1979 took over the American Indian Horse Registry, which is based on my small ranch near Lockhart, along with a small museum and library dedicated to the native horses. Thank you again for highlighting the horses who helped create America.

Nanci Falley, Lockhart

Vaquero Heritage

Thank you for the insightful article "The Original Cowboys" [September]. As a little boy, I met one of my father's uncles, Justo Salas, who had lost four fingers from his right hand. I remember him saying he was a *remudero* and that he lost his fingers because his riata was loose when he roped a horse. I had not heard that word in a very long time.

Raul Salas, New Orleans, Louisiana





Kite Dreams

Located near the Terlingua ghost town, Willow House offers refined comfort amid the rugged Chihuahuan Desert. The lodging's 12 casitas capitalize on the landscape with unobstructed views that stretch to the Chisos Mountains in Big Bend National Park, which is 6 miles east. Covering more than 1,250 square miles, Big Bend draws visitors to the Rio Grande borderland to explore its scenery, history, and culture. As a longtime resident of nearby Marathon, photographer E. Dan Klepper knew winter conditions would make for stark desert colors when he visited Willow House in January for "Little Boxes on the Hillside" (April 2021). He brought along his colorful kites, just in case. "I like to bring something out of the ordinary into the landscape," Klepper says. "The kites are magical and unpredictable, and they create dynamic action. It's windy down in Terlingua most of the time, so it's actually a good place to fly kites." For more on Big Bend National Park, visit [nps.gov/bibe](https://www.nps.gov/bibe).





Hemphill

In this East Texas town, an extraordinary tragedy cemented a legacy of community service

By Heather Brand



AS A TOUR GUIDE
at the Columbia
museum, Belinda
Gay interprets a
defining event in
Hemphill history.

Hemphill sits on the edge of the Sabine National Forest, about 10 miles west of Toledo Bend Reservoir and the Texas-Louisiana border. The forest and the lake, which is part of the Sabine River, make this area a paradise for birders, hikers, hunters, and anglers. The forest took on a different distinction on Feb. 1, 2003, however, when recovery workers converged on Sabine County to search for remnants of space shuttle Columbia. Returning from a 16-day scientific mission, the NASA shuttle unexpectedly broke apart when reentering Earth's atmosphere, scattering debris across the area. Belinda Gay, a Hemphill resident since 1998, was one of the many locals who rushed to help in the recovery effort, scouring the forest for signs of the wreckage and coordinating volunteers. She and others later worked to establish the Patricia Huffman Smith NASA "Remembering Columbia" Museum, which opened in 2011 to honor the seven astronauts killed in the disaster. Today, Gay keeps their memories alive by serving as the vice president of the museum board and by leading regular museum tours.

Remembering Columbia

"The museum is a tribute to the seven astronauts of Columbia, Columbia's 28 missions, and the legacy of all those who made her fly. There are display cases for each of the astronauts and the two people who lost their lives in the recovery. We display personal items from the astronauts that were with them on the ship, as well as flight suits, dog tags, their favorite books and poems—things that meant a lot to them. In our classroom, we have a functional flight simulator built from actual parts, some of which have flown in space. People from all over the world visit. We get astronauts and engineers who worked on Columbia here all the time."

Fish and Fowl

"When they made Toledo Bend Reservoir [in 1969], it brought fishermen to the county. We have around 10,000 people in our county, and on weekends that number will double or triple because of people coming to the lake to fish. Most people come to fish for bass, but some fish for crappie or catfish or alligator gar. Others come for waterskiing and swimming. A lot of birdwatchers also come here. We have several birdwatching facilities and nature trails, like the 28-mile Trail Between the Lakes in the Sabine National Forest. We have the red-cockaded woodpecker, a protected endangered species. The other day I saw three kinds of woodpeckers all together: a pileated woodpecker, a little bitty downy woodpecker, and a red-cockaded woodpecker."

Historical Hang

"The Gaines-Oliphant House is one of the

oldest remaining log homes in Texas [built in 1818]. It's a log cabin near the 3-mile bridge that crosses the reservoir. We also have the historic Sabine County Courthouse, and next to it is the Historic Jail Museum. It still has its hanging tower. When it's open, you can go in the jail cells and where the gallows were."

Local Flavors

"On the courthouse square, there is the Athens Cafe—a new Greek restaurant—Slice Pizza, and Sabean's Coffee & Creamery. The pies and cakes at Pineywoods Pie Co. are the bomb. On the lake, there's Fin & Feather Bar and Grill, which has great homemade onion rings, catfish, gumbo, and crawfish."

Pitching In

"Hemphill is one of those towns where everybody knows just about everybody. And they take care of their own. If something happens, there's always someone there to pick up the slack or lend a hand. During the recovery of Columbia, my husband and I oversaw the local VFW post, and they asked us to open it up as a staging area. I searched for three days in the woods before I had to come back in to help him because there were so many donations and volunteers coming in. The federal team didn't take over the feeding [of the searchers] until day 16, so we organized it as a community. We served home-cooked meals for about 800 to 1,000 people three times a day for 16 days. The museum is not about the tragedy of Columbia, it's about the legacy. It's also a tribute to this community. It takes everybody doing their part to make the big picture happen." 🐾



TOWN TRIVIA



POPULATION:

1,319



NUMBER OF STOPLIGHTS:

0



YEAR FOUNDED:

1858



NEAREST BIG TOWN:

Lu'kin, 56 miles west



MARQUEE EVENT:

Hemphill Lions Club Christmas Parade and Festivities, first Saturday in December



MAP IT:

Patricia Huffman Smith NASA "Remembering Columbia" Museum, 375 Sabine St., Suite B



BOB HALL
PIER

Red
Melon

Cresting the Wave

A surfer comes to grips with a dark family secret born from the swells near Bob Hall Pier

By Joe Hagan

W

When the first nuclear bomb in Nevada was detonated in 1951, my grandfather stood in the desert in Army fatigues. He wore goggles to protect his eyes and snapped a photograph of the mushroom cloud. In high school I found that photo in a box of slides, lifting it to the light in awe.

We called him Poppy, but my mom and her sisters called him the Old Bastard. He wore a flattop and an olive-khaki leisure suit, and he smoked a pipe. In 1957, Poppy moved to Corpus Christi with his second wife, Madeline—my grandmother—an aspiring actress from a well-off family in Connecticut. They had met in Georgia while they were both married to other people. They opened a lumberyard in the Flour Bluff area of Corpus, and Poppy helped raise Madeline's three daughters.

Four years into the new marriage, Poppy developed both colon and testicular cancer, a gift from the nuclear radiation. The surgery made him impotent. He and Madeline became full-blown alcoholics, fighting bitterly. Poppy beat Madeline with a riding crop. Their

older daughters, Mary Lou and Lynn, got married and escaped. That left my mom—a tomboy with funny teeth who rarely wore shoes and loved the Beatles—to live with two dysfunctional drunks. She met my father at a raucous party in Flour Bluff. He was enlisted in the Navy and stationed at the local air base. A skinny, red-haired kid from North Carolina, a year out of high school, he drove a 1965 Mustang and kept a Donald Takayama surfboard on the roof to impress girls at the local surf spot on Padre Island, Bob Hall Pier.

In 1969, when my parents first began dating, they'd walk to the end of Bob Hall Pier to catch the sunset, a first glimpse of life's horizons. They watched phosphorescence sparkle in the crashing waves. Built in 1950 and named after local commissioner Robert Reid Hall, the pier had been destroyed by hurricanes in 1961 and 1967 but was rebuilt. Postcards advertised it as a tourist attraction: 1,200 feet of walkway and a pavilion that rented fishing poles for a dollar. It even lit up at night. Though the surfing was excellent during hurricane season, the pier was mainly a place for young people to park on the sand and drink beer. When my dad's surfboard was stolen off his car in front of Poppy's house on Dolphin Street, he never replaced it.

Surfing, however, was destined to return to his life—when I took it up as a teenager. And as it turned out, the secrets of my own story, as a child of the Gulf Coast, were hiding in those waves off Bob Hall Pier. But it would take years before I understood them.

A month into my parents' courtship, my mom found her mother dead in the bedroom, asphyxiated on her own vomit. She ran out of the house screaming and collapsed on the lawn. Poppy started drinking more heavily, staring at Madeline's portrait while listening to the theme song from *Doctor Zhivago*.

My dad was moonlighting at Poppy's lumberyard when Hurricane Celia destroyed swaths of Corpus Christi in August 1970. (Bob Hall Pier, miraculously, was spared.) Poppy and my dad were boarding up the lumberyard when the winds came whipping in. That was the week I was

conceived. When my mom found out she was pregnant, she left it to my dad to deliver the news to Poppy. Outweighing him by 100 pounds or more, Poppy threw my dad against a wall and threatened to jab his eyes out.

At 19, my mom was at sea. Unprepared for motherhood or marriage, she fled to her sister Mary Lou's house and stopped taking my dad's calls. A doctor suggested she have an abortion. Instead, it was decided she'd fly to Rhode Island to live with her sister Lynn and Lynn's husband, Big Dave, who was also in the Navy, stationed at Quonset Point. My mom would have the baby in a military hospital and put the child up for adoption.

On April 30, 1971, the doctor took me from my mother and carried me down the hallway to a foster care ward. Under the law, my mom had 30 days to change her mind. She saw a psychiatrist in downtown

Providence, where she began to hear herself think for the first time. Her mother had died. Her stepfather was a drunk. She was an unmarried mother to a child she'd just given up.

Two weeks later, she decided she'd made a terrible mistake and flew back to Texas to patch things up with my dad. They hadn't seen each other in months. She returned to Rhode Island to retrieve me a week before I was to be adopted. The first time my dad laid eyes on me was at the airport in Corpus Christi. I was six weeks old.

I didn't learn this story until I called my Aunt Lynn this summer to talk about her memories of Bob Hall Pier. "I never did understand why your daddy felt the need to keep it a secret," she told me in her familiar twang. My parents, pained and

embarrassed by their past, had changed the anniversary of their marriage and lied for decades.

Though I never knew the story, it was always there, sometimes hiding in plain sight. Bob Hall Pier, it seems, was a beacon, a clue. The first time I went there was in 1974, when I was 3 years old. My dad had left the Navy, joined the Coast Guard, and was stationed again at the air base in Flour Bluff. A family snapshot shows me playing on the shore next to my mom, who wears a bikini and a worried look. My dad was struggling to find a career path, and though he eventually became a successful officer, his future at the time looked uncertain.

From my vantage point, life became a series of false starts. Every four years, the Coast Guard would transfer our family to another duty station, and I'd leave a group of friends I'd just begun to know and



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move to Washington, D.C., or Marietta, Ohio, where I attended antiseptic school buildings that echoed with weird accents and exotic faces.

My mom, no matter where we lived, wore seashell necklaces and kept a jar of sand dollars on a table as evidence of her kinship with the Gulf Coast. As a child, she would tell me we were beach people, though my dad was from Appalachia and, despite stints in the Navy and the Coast Guard, disliked the water. Corpus Christi, Padre Island, and Bob Hall Pier became symbols of my mom's origins, what passed for a homeland.

When my dad was transferred back to Corpus Christi in 1985, I viewed it as a return, though I had only the vaguest memories of the place. By then I was 14, short and slight, bad at sports, adept at Dungeons & Dragons, and a fan of Billy Joel. In Ohio, I'd become an easy mark for bullies. I began dreaming of a personal reinvention in Texas, determined to show up to ninth grade as somebody else entirely—a guy who belonged somewhere.

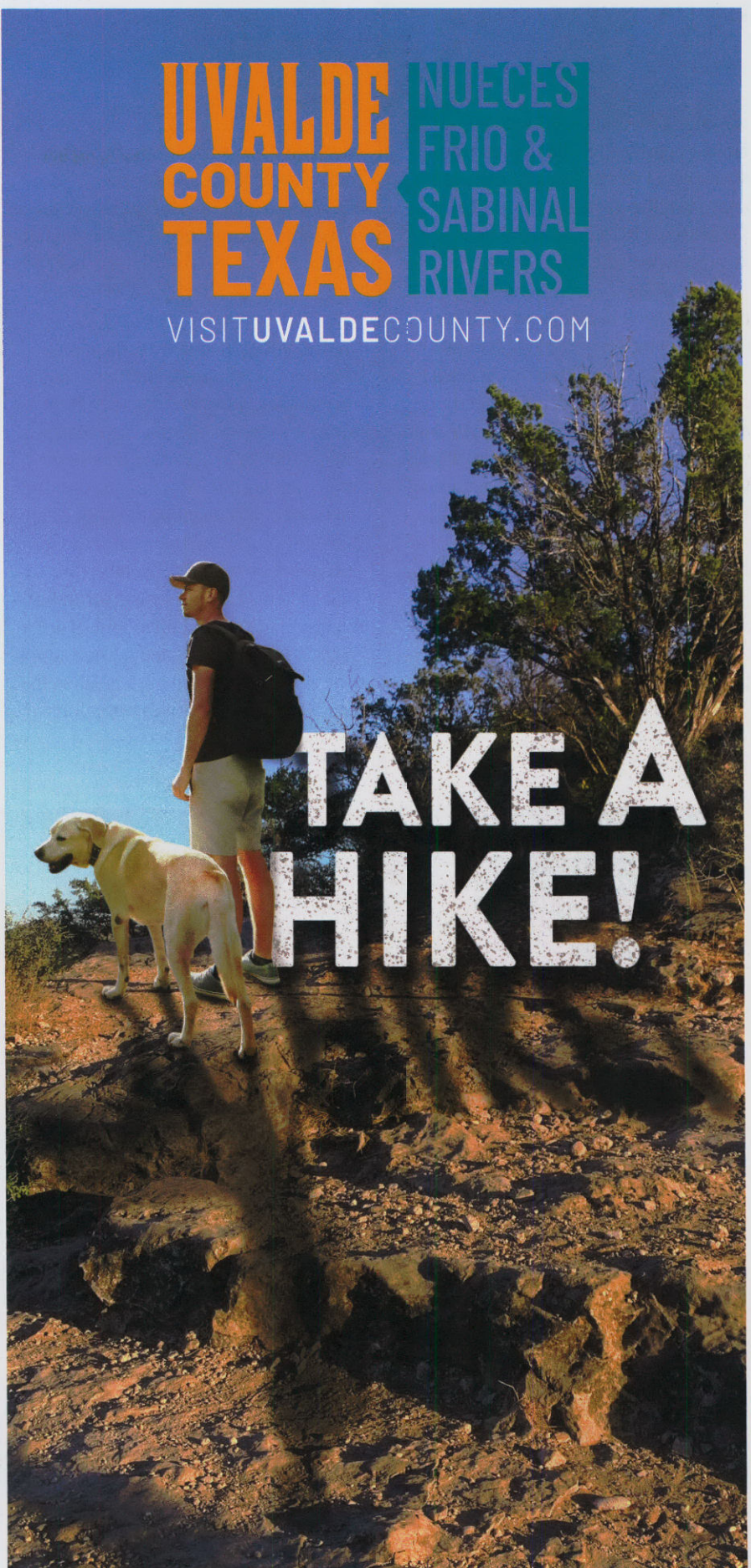
My North Star was my cousin, Little David, the son of my Aunt Lynn and Big Dave, who'd since relocated to Corpus Christi. In a family picture from 1974, I'm sitting on my mom's lap flanked by David and his sister Daphne in my aunt's backyard, surrounded by grapevines. At 15, David is shirtless, tan and lean in board shorts, an Adonis-like surfer with long blond hair and crystal blue eyes. I have a single memory of the visit: sitting on the floor in David's bedroom while he plucked "Stairway to Heaven" on an acoustic guitar, a moment that tie-dyed my brain for all time.

By the time I returned to Texas, David was in his mid-20s, a carpenter by day and bartender by night with a rotating cast of girlfriends. He was still a committed surfer. We were in his mom's backyard in the summer of 1985 when he presented me with a dinged-up, sun-faded Local Motion surfboard from Hawaii. That day my dad took a picture of me next to Bob Hall Pier holding the board under my arm, my bicep artificially bulging against the rail, a picture that pleased me. The magic

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was already working. As I wrote in a 10th grade English paper about my cousin: "Somehow I thought the mystique of the board would rub off on me."

I waded into the water and bobbed around awkwardly, taking a few belly rides on white water, coached along by David. It was a start. I watched him paddle out on his gleaming Channel Islands surfboard, aimed for the waves near the pier. He casually feathered in with the bulls of the local surf pack, men who seemed to own the outer swells. The waves, tall and thick, looked frightening to my eyes, but David dropped in on a menacing roller and soared easily down the face as it curled and crashed after him. I was in awe, proud that I was even related to him. He was among the few who could "shoot the pier"—surf a wave directly under the pier to the other side.

When we got home that day, my skin

was burned bright red, flayed by the Gulf Coast sun. I lay in bed, barely able to move, cooling like a loaf of bread. Soon, the skin on my nose and shoulders began to peel off in large flakes. My reinvention had begun.

In the 1980s, surfing was still part of the counterculture—Californian, vaguely disreputable, juvenile, macho. Surfers seemed to me the warrior class of beach people, nobler than the leathery fishermen drinking Budweiser off the pier and far more interesting than the boring families with their screaming kids or the spring breakers slurring and belching in the wind. There was a purpose in surfing, a hierarchy of skill and style, a social order with codes and rituals and music. Naturalistic and even spiritual, surfers sat on the beach and read the waves with squinted

eyes, divining the wind and the sandbars before they even entered the water. Their casual nods of acknowledgement as I'd paddle by seemed full of portent. The big kahunas of the scene surfed nearest the pier—Pepe Morales and Trip House, David Mokry and Kenny O'Connor, surfers who could effortlessly curl into a glassy tube with magazine-worthy panache.

On a good day I might've gotten up the nerve to paddle within a few yards of them, but I feared invading their territory, afraid to get run over, or worse, wipe out and be ostracized as a kook, a grommet. Further down the sandbar were the lesser surfers, like me, but also the older generation of 1960s people who drove VW buses and used extra-long boards, which we mocked as "loggers." Their weathered presence suggested a world that came before, of people who had been surfing Padre Island since the '50s.

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Though we shared the same beach culture as California—neon swimwear, Ocean Pacific T-shirts, bumper stickers declaring “Life’s a Beach”—Padre Island was, at best, a B-minus Santa Monica. Most of the world didn’t even know you could surf in Texas. And truthfully, most of the time you couldn’t. The water was warm, brown, filled with Portuguese man-of-war and sea lice, and the beach was pocked with a black tar that stuck to your feet and had to be rubbed off with baby oil. Fishermen hauled bull sharks from the same waters we surfed, and the sight of a hammerhead cruising through an oncoming swell was not unusual. In the spring, Padre Island filled with rowdies from UT and A&M, a seedy mélange of bikinis and beer, wet T-shirt contests, fistfights, Van Halen blaring from the radio, pot-bellied drinkers wearing big foam cowboy hats, and

sloppy promiscuity in the dunes. A souvenir T-shirt depicted two sets of bare feet, one on top of the other, with the caption: “The damn sand gets into *everything* on Padre Island.”

At 15, this was paradise. When my cousin Daphne reputedly appeared in a crowded beach scene in *The Legend of Billie Jean*, the 1985 film shot on location on Padre Island and starring Helen Slater, it only added to the allure. To my dad, however, this was all a perfect vision of irresponsibility, a world of layabouts, beach bums, and ne’er-do-wells headed exactly nowhere. As a father, he was over-protective and strict, square and military, with distinct ideas about life’s winners and losers. When Little David took three months to build a bar in our kitchen one summer, disappearing for a week or more to surf, my dad’s attitude was clear: Don’t be like that.

The first surfer I met in junior high was Jacob O’Hearn, who had sun-streaked hair and walked with the unperturbed gait of a stoner. Jacob’s mother died when he was 8, and his father was a contractor who jokingly called his business the No Surf Construction Company because he only worked when the surf was flat. Jacob was on a surf team called Total Control, which had a clubhouse on Padre Island Drive where the owner shaped boards. Jacob and I met in woodshop class, flipping through issues of *Surfer* magazine as we endlessly ran hand sanders over our projects (mine was a clock shaped like Eddie Van Halen’s guitar). Jacob educated me on things like wave reports (local surf shop Benjamin’s had a phone number you could call) and which punk rock bands were cool (Black Flag, Corrosion of Conformity). That winter, Jacob invited

continued on Page 73



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A STATUE OF THE HINDU
deity Ganesha resides
at the Sanatan Shiv
Shakti Mandir temple
in Houston's Mahatma
Gandhi District.

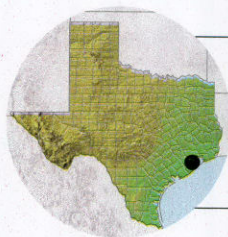


THE MENU AT
Himalaya (Him-AH-lee-ya) Restaurant reflects its chef's upbringing in Mumbai and Karachi.

Eat in Peace

Indian culture thrives in Houston's Mahatma Gandhi District

By Clayton Maxwell



MAHATMA GANDHI DISTRICT
Hillcroft Street, between the Southwest Freeway and Westpark Tollway, Houston

Spicy onion pakoras and a cup of warm chai pair well with the August downpour I'm watching from inside Udipi Cafe in Houston's Mahatma Gandhi District. As I bite into a hot crispy pakora, a type of Indian fritter, I consider Gandhi's statue a few miles away in Hermann Park. The words by Einstein inscribed beneath the robed leader who freed India from British rule in 1947 come to mind: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

My fellow lunch guests at Udipi Cafe are doing their part to guarantee generations of Houstonians will remember Gandhi. Across from me are Ramesh Cherivirala and Vale Subramaniya, both former presidents of the India Culture Center, a nonprofit founded in 1973. The group spearheaded the installation of the statue in Hermann Park's McGovern Centennial Gardens, as well as the effort to give Gandhi's name to this roughly

mile-long triangle along Hillcroft Street between the Southwest Freeway and Westpark Tollway.

“Most Indians live very close by here—in Sugar Land, Pearland, and Clear Lake for NASA,” Cherivirala says. “So, everybody comes to this area because it is like a weekend go-town. You go here, go shopping, go get the saris, the jewelry, you name it. Everything is here.”

In the 1980s, a critical mass of Indian immigrants settled in Houston for jobs in engineering, academics, and medicine. As the community flourished, entrepreneurs in this southwest Houston pocket began to open restaurants and shops offering a taste of home. This humming hive of South Asian businesses became the center of the city’s well-established Indian community. In the early 2000s, members of the India Culture Center began petitioning the city of Houston for an official designation, and on Jan. 16, 2010, then-Mayor Annise Parker obliged, also proclaiming it Mahatma Gandhi District Day. Now there are small, red-trimmed street signs with Gandhi’s visage sprinkled throughout the area.

“The naming of the Mahatma Gandhi District was part of a continuum of initiatives to highlight the various ethnic and cultural communities of Houston,” Parker says. “This is about claiming turf and saying, ‘We’re a vital part of Houston,’ but it’s also a message that Houston is a welcoming place back to those countries.”

After the pakoras, Udipi’s chef, Sathish Rao, who named his restaurant after his hometown in India famous for its vegetarian cuisine, brings out a 2-foot-long *dosa*. The crepe-like creation is golden, crispy, and filled with warm potatoes. Rao shows me how to break open the jumbo-size *dosa* with my hands (all at the table agree hands are the best eating utensils for many Indian dishes) and dip it in his house-made tamarind and cilantro-mint chutneys. I also dunk it in a small bowl of *sambar*, a lentil-based soup ubiquitous in Udipi that, I was told, is totally fine to slurp.

“Everyone makes a *dosa*, but we do it differently,” says Rao, an upbeat world

Photo: Tiffany Hofeldt

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FROM TOP: Chowpatty Chat serves Indian street snacks; Kaiser Lashkari offers a tray of samosas.



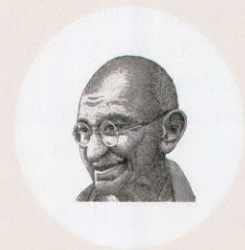
traveler who has cooked for Indian presidents, swamis, Bollywood stars, and Anthony Bourdain—their photos grace Udipi's walls. "The recipe came from my grandfather, who had a restaurant in India. Everyone in my family—my father, my mother—cooks. We had a small shack with one table in the kitchen, and I'd come home from school and read a book in the

corner and watch and learn."

I realize how lucky Houston is as I share *idli* and *medu vada*—a rice cake and a lentil donut, respectively—with three Indian Americans conversant on topics ranging from Bombay's street food to raising American-born children in the Hindu religion. Without leaving Texas, you can easily taste-travel to Rao's family kitchen in southern India, imagine pots bubbling with sambar, smell the cardamom.

In Houston, one in four citizens is foreign-born, according to the Greater Houston Community Foundation. The opportunities for taste-travel in Asia alone are everywhere, whether to China, Vietnam, or other countries that have helped establish Houston as one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the United States.

The Mahatma Gandhi District is like one big food-centric classroom for travelers unfamiliar with the Hindu religion and Indian geography. Just across the street from Udipi I find the wondrous Subhlaxmi grocery store, where 95% of the products are from India. The produce section overflows with fruits like spiky



Taste of India

Get your fill in Houston's Mahatma Gandhi District.

Biryani

An Indian dish common throughout South Asia, biryani is basmati rice with an array of ingredients: mutton, chicken, veggies, *paneer*, and seasonings. Himalaya chef Kaiser Lashkari calls his Anthony Bourdain-approved mutton biryani "the Indo-Pakistani version of Spanish paella."

Himalaya, 6652 Southwest Fwy. 713-532-2837;

himalayarestaurantouston.com

Chat

Chat (or *chaat*) is the term for a range of Indian street snacks usually made with fried dough. Samosas, the popular triangular potato and pea-filled pastries, are chat. Another common chat is *dahi puri*, crispy wafer balls stuffed with sprouts, potatoes, and yogurt.

Chowpatty Chat, 5711 Hillcroft St. 832-203-7965;

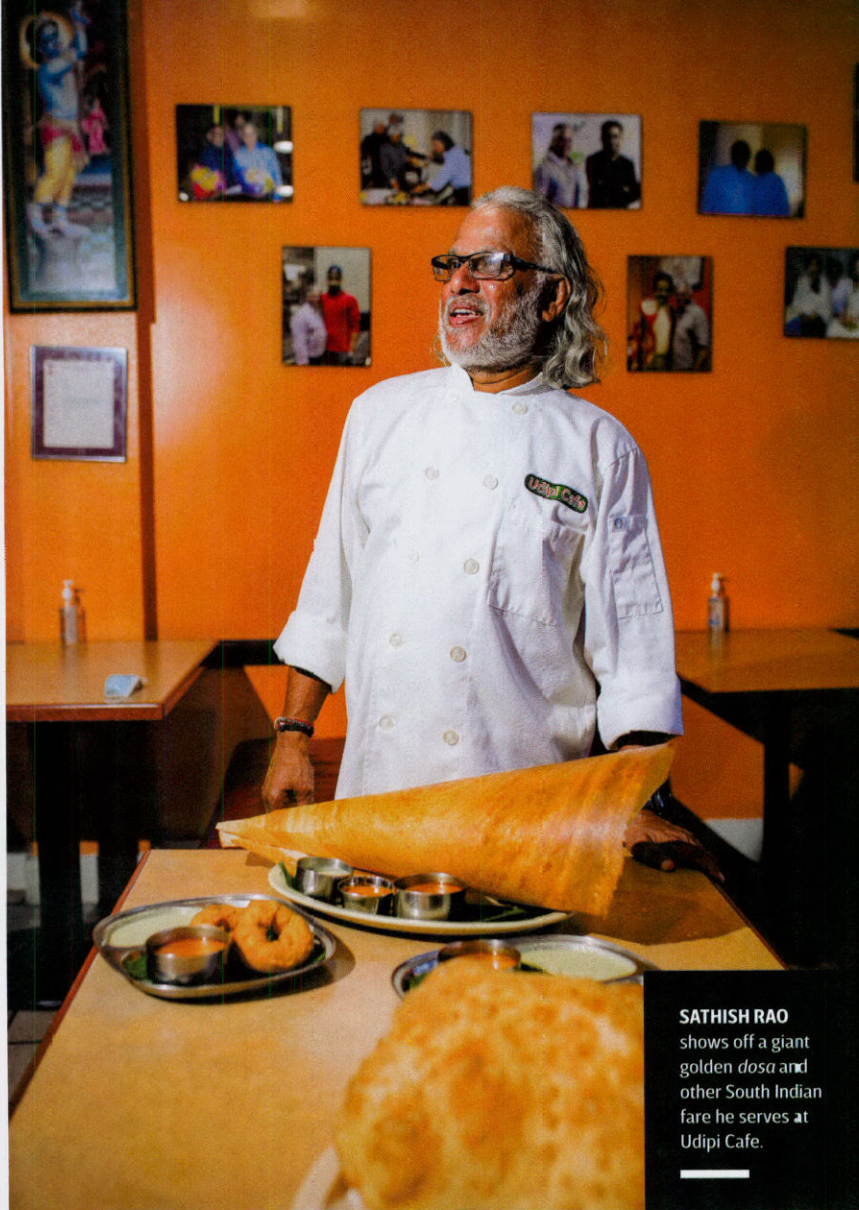
chowpattychat.com

Dosa

A *dosa* is a thin South Indian pancake made from a fermented batter of lentils and rice. The most common is the masala dosa with savory potatoes tucked inside.

The Mysore masala dosa is a spicy version.

Udipi Cafe, 5959 Hillcroft St. 713-334-5555; udipicafeusa.com



SATHISH RAO shows off a giant golden *dosa* and other South Indian fare he serves at Udupi Cafe.

green Indian bitter melons that look like cucumbers with pointy spines, and *sitaḥal*, aka custard apple, which looks like an oversized Granny Smith with thick scales. A stroll down the cookie aisle reveals Karachi biscuits, a confection from Hyderabad in south-central India made from candied fruit and cardamom, and *soan papdi*, flaky sweets regarded as India's version of cotton candy.

Most intriguing of all are the *puja* items on sale to celebrate Hindu holidays (pu is Sanskrit for "reverence"). When I was there, shiny brass baby cradles were on display in preparation for the Aug. 30 birthday of Krishna, the Hindu god of protection and love. And there were sparkly bracelets for Raksha Bandhan, an annual rite in which a sister ceremoniously ties a talisman on her brother's wrist to symbolize sibling responsibility.

An hour in this grocery store feels like a crash course in Hindu and Indian culture.

It helps to have someone like Animesh Patel, the friendly owner of this family business, explain meanings you can't decipher on your own. The store, for example, is named after Lakshmi, the Goddess of Prosperity. Patel finds Lakshmi's avatar on a box of ginger chips, showing me how her hands are full of gold coins and flowers. "You should come back this weekend," Patel says. "Everyone will be out for Raksha Bandhan. Then Krishna is coming up in two weeks, then Ganesh, then it's Diwali. Now is Indian party season."

I'm realizing there is so much I don't know. This is reinforced by the menu: at Himalaya Restaurant, a popular Pakistani-North Indian establishment just a short walk from Subhaxmi. The

outgoing owner, Kaiser Lashkari, grew up in Mumbai and Karachi, and with his big funky-print shirt and grayish ponytail, resembles Jerry Garcia. The immense menu Lashkari created is a doorway to the diverse cuisine and geography of South Asia.

Beside each curry dish listed on the menu, Lashkari has indicated where that curry is from. For example, chicken Karhai, a dish spiced with aromatic Balti masala, is from Peshawar, a city in Pakistan near the Afghan border. The chicken Hara masala, with tangy green sauce made from chiles, is from Hyderabad. It's one of Lashkari's signature dishes and so good I came back the next day for another serving to take home to my family.

"For the first two decades of my life, I lived off in a different country on a different continent," Lashkari says. "I want to share that with the people here—all the food that I ate growing up and that I like. It's what gives me the most satisfaction."

A young man approaches our table on the way out. He introduces himself as Jason Jones from Jasper. He and his friend had just feasted on the grill platter deluxe, a smorgasbord of kebabs. "We were in a little Indian grocery store in Beaumont," Jones says, "and we told the owner how much we enjoyed Indian cuisine, and she told us, 'If you want authentic, you must go to Himalaya in Houston.' Two months later, here we are."

While Gandhi probably would not condone my profound enjoyment of Lashkari's steak *tikka* (Gandhi, like many Hindus, was vegetarian), I bet he would appreciate how the district named after him is bringing different types of people together. Visitors can learn more about Gandhi and his beliefs when the Eternal Gandhi Museum opens off Beltway 8 in southwest Houston in late 2022. As Lachhman Das, a retired Indian engineer and another former president of the India Culture Center, tells me, "Gandhi's message is eternal. People can disagree without hurting each other. We can live in peace." 🇮🇳

Hello to a River

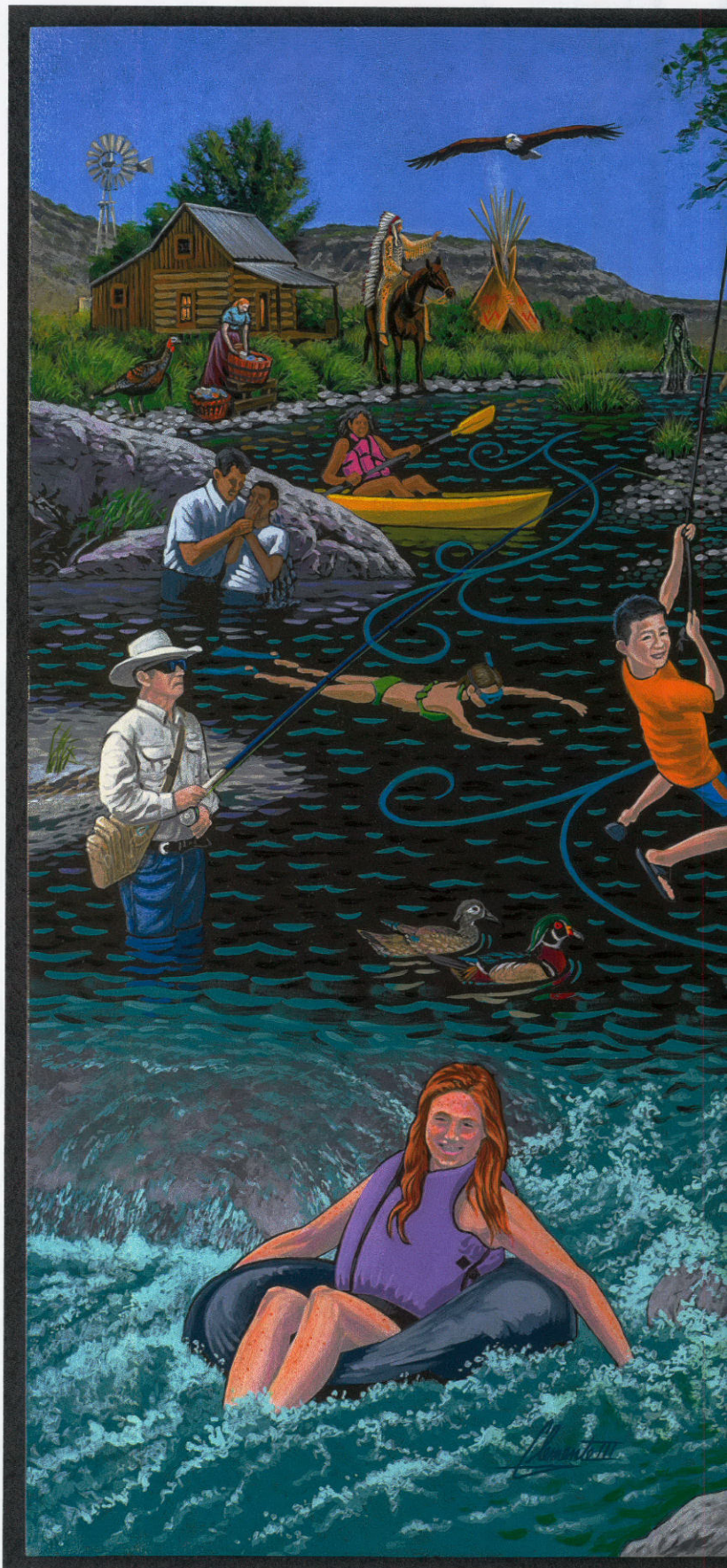
Viva Texas Rivers! explores our state's storied waterways

By Clayton Maxwell

To know the geography of Texas, you must know its rivers. The book *Viva Texas Rivers! Adventures, Misadventures, and Glimpses of Nirvana along Our Storied Waterways* may be the most comprehensive effort to date to capture the charms, mythologies, and challenges of the state's rivers in one volume. Published by Texas A&M University Press, the book is a glide down more than 28 waterways with more than 70 writers, mostly Texans, as your guides. The compilation explores the muck as well as the transcendence of Texas rivers and includes pieces by songwriters T-Bone Walker and Butch Hancock, poets Naomi Shihab Nye and Carmen Tafolla, nonfiction writers S.C. Gwynne and John Graves, and novelists Attica Locke and Joe R. Lansdale. Two *Texas Highways* stories are also featured—Michael Barnes and Joe Starr's "In Search of Half-Forgotten Rivers" (July 2020) and my story on the Guadalupe, "A Return to the River" (July 2018).

"Every author has a story about a river, and it's a story that affects their heart," says Sam L. Pfiester, a writer who co-edited the book with Steven L. Davis, literary curator of the Wittliff Collections at Texas State University in San Marcos. Pfiester is the founding member of River Ratus Americanus, a group of Vietnam War veterans and friends and family who've been paddling together for 50 years. "When you're around the campfire on the bank of a river," Pfiester says, "it's a connectedness with nature that's just hard to find anywhere else."

The book includes watercolor maps by artist and cartographer Molly O'Halloran and, for its cover art, a painting (right) by Clemente Guzman that was also selected for the 2021 Texas Book Festival promotional poster. An exhibition at the Wittliff, through May 2022, includes contributions from the book's writers, including swim flippers from Stephen Harrigan and a pair of swim trunks from Joe Nick Patoski, *Texas Highways* writer-at-large and resident river expert. And in honor of Graves, the most esteemed Texas river writer of them all, one case exhibits the canoe paddle he took on his famed trip down the Brazos, chronicled in *Goodbye to a River*. For more information, visit thewittliffcollections.txstate.edu. 🐾





Native Foods

Indigenous Texas food traditions date back thousands of years

By Robyn Ross



People have lived in the area we now call Texas for at least 13,000 years and have resourcefully transformed the landscape's plants and animals into food in all seasons. Early inhabitants hunted mammoth, horses, camels, and the *Bison antiquus*—a much larger forerunner of today's animal—until the herds were supplanted by modern bison around 7,500 years ago. Indigenous people also hunted pronghorn, deer, rabbits, turkeys, and quail. They harvested persimmons, mustang grapes, and pecans; and ground acorns and mesquite pods into flour. They ate catfish, turtles, freshwater mussels, and crawfish, as well as large land snails. By about 1100, several peoples, including the Antelope Creek in the Panhandle, the Caddo in East Texas, and the Jornada Mogollon near El Paso, had made forays into agriculture. They planted crops that included, at different times, corn, beans, and squash.

Many of Texas' first foods are no longer part of mainstream diets, but others steadfastly remain on the menu. Venison, catfish, and pecans are still staples of Texas cuisine after thousands of years. Today's diners can imbibe prickly pear margaritas and slather their toast with agarita jelly made from the same plants people harvested millennia ago. Still other traditional ingredients are prepared by descendants of Texas' Indigenous people, who maintain a connection to their ancestors and the land through the foods on their tables.



Baking Bread

The Tigua people of the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo have been baking their traditional crusty bread in hand-built, outdoor adobe ovens for more than 300 years. Visitors to the tribe's cultural center in El Paso are invited to watch bakers mix the ingredients by hand, without a recipe or measuring cups, and carefully place the loaves in the mesquite-fired ovens. Baking demonstrations start at 8 a.m. on second and fourth Saturdays each month. While the bread bakes, visitors can explore a museum exhibit, watch dance performances, and visit tribal shops. By 11 a.m., the fresh bread is ready for purchase. ysletadelsurpueblo.org

12 hours— 3 days

Cooking time for tubers in an earth oven

1870s

Decade professional hide hunters slaughtered millions of bison

1794

Year of first successful wheat harvest at Mission San José



From Mesquite to Wheat

Indigenous people in many parts of Texas—including the San Antonio area—relied heavily on the mesquite tree. When the tribes collectively known as the Coahuiltecan moved into Spanish missions in the early 18th century, they continued eating traditional foods, including mesquite. “Mesquite is considered our *arbol de vida*, our tree of life, because so much of our ancestral survival depended on this one tree,” says Manuel Davila, the cultural arts program manager for the American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions. In the spring, young, green mesquite pods could be fermented into a molasses-like sweetener. The summer heat dried the pods into brittle beans, which the Coahuiltecan ground into a woody, sweet flour they baked into cakes or mixed with turkey eggs to batter yucca blossoms. The cultivation of wheat, the Spaniards’ preferred grain, marked the end of the mission Coahuiltecan’s reliance on mesquite.

Ancient Gardens

In the Lower Pecos region, coprolites—ancient feces—preserved in dry caves reveal what the inhabitants ate 1,500 to 9,000 years ago: snakes, lizards, prickly pear pads, persimmons, walnuts, amaranth. “We see it as a desert, but to them it was a veritable garden,” says Harry Shafer, curator of archaeology at the **Witte Museum** in San Antonio. In the museum’s **Peoples of the Pecos** gallery, visitors can see life-size dioramas of early inhabitants building an earth oven, working in a hunting camp, and living in a rock shelter. The Witte partners with the Rock Art Foundation to offer reservation-only tours of Lower Pecos sites including the **Bonfire Shelter**, where early hunters killed hundreds of bison by driving them over a cliff. witemuseum.org/rock-art-tour-calendar

At **Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument** in the Panhandle, carbon dating of partially burned corn stalks and squash and bean seeds indicates approximately when the Antelope Creek people became farmers. Today’s visitors can see a “living exhibit” of the gardens they planted. nps.gov/alfl

Excavations at the **Lubbock Lake Landmark** have uncovered bison, pronghorn, and deer bones bearing marks that suggest the animals were butchered and processed. The site welcomes guests to programs and exhibits at its interpretive center and trails and, in summer, the excavation area. depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/lll



Earth Ovens

The earliest Texas ovens were built at least 8,000 years ago, and the remains of these ingenious appliances dot the landscape from central to west Texas. To build an earth oven, people would dig a pit, build a fire, and cover the coals with

rocks that retained the heat. They would top those rocks with a layer of insulation, such as damp leaves; place the food atop those leaves; and cover the food with more insulation and dirt. Over 12 hours to three days, the hot rocks would slow-cook the food: sotol and camas bulbs, lechuguilla, yucca, wild onions, and occasionally meat from deer or small game. Today, some South Texas pitmasters continue the tradition, cooking barbacoa in hand-dug ovens.



Jane Schornack (left) tours downtown Hico with friend Louise Clark.

Walk It Out

Pedestrian-friendly Hico has plenty of diversions to explore on foot

By June Naylor

For a town of around 1,500, Hico packs a wallop, drawing in city dwellers who enjoy small-town charm paired with urban amenities. Sitting at the tip-top of the Hill Country, where US 281 crosses State Highway 6, Hico (HYE-coe) first earned its stop-worthy reputation from the towering meringue pies at the Koffee Kup restaurant. These days, there's far more than dessert to keep you amused for a full weekend. Everything's in walking distance, from the limestone-studded Bosque River on the south end of downtown to the statue of Billy the Kid, the outlaw said to have lived out his life here in anonymity, at the north end of downtown Hico. The only time you'll need a car is to head 20 miles south to Hamilton to check out art, music, and eats in the seat of Hamilton County.



Dallas
2 hours

Austin
2.5 hours

San Antonio
3.5 hours

Houston
4 hours



STAY



EAT



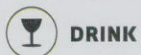
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LEARN



SHOP



DRINK

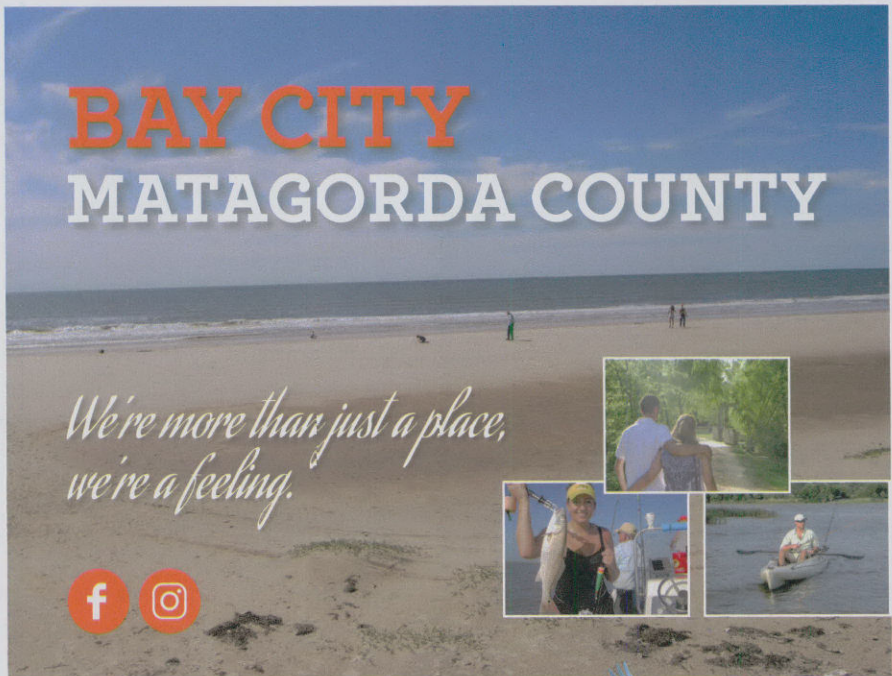


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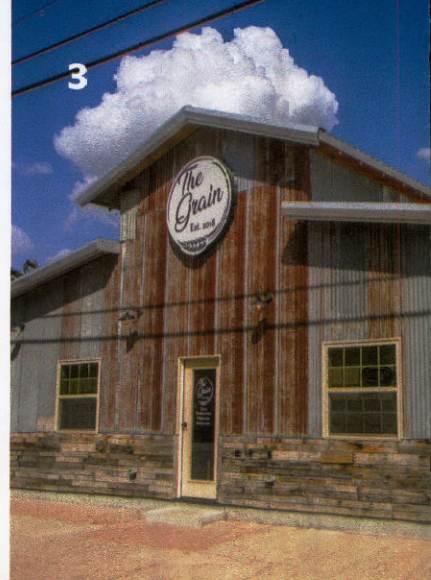
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1



2



3



4

5



1 / MIDLAND HOTEL & CHOP HOUSE The handsome brick building anchoring one downtown corner is an 1896 landmark offering 14 rooms (starting at \$139 a night) with historical beauty and modern comforts, as well as an exceptional restaurant (see sidebar).



2 / RAMSEY COLLECTION Book an appointment to see a stunning private collection of American and European art from the 16th to early 20th centuries. The former bank building on the Hamilton County Courthouse square houses hundreds of works by the likes of Edgar Degas and Diego Rivera.



3 / THE GRAIN DRAFFHOUSE & EATERY Look for the old grain silos, relocated from a nearby farm, to find Hamilton's new live music venue. Listen to headliners like Gary P. Nunn and local acts while eating fried cheese curds and sipping a ranch water.



4 / HICO MERCANTILE The grand 1895 opera house is now home to an assemblage of fresh boutiques where one can purchase a range of items, including a Dolly Parton prayer candle, heavy wooden candlesticks, and framed vintage botanical prints.



5 / HILL COUNTRY DWELLINGS A side hustle of sisters and designers Jane and Cindy Schumacher, this shop's earthy sophistication shines in its selection of textiles, handmade wooden biscuit cutters, locally crafted pottery, and art.



6 / 2ND STREET BAKESHOP & COFFEE CO. A refurbished Victorian home makes morning coffee and afternoon tea special events. Few things are more comforting than settling into a corner here with a seasonal honey-lavender latte, a lemon-blueberry scone, and a good book.



7 / EIS & PECAN STREET DRINK SHOPPE These sister businesses offer a delicious smoked chicken salad sandwich next door to a selection of wines from Texas and the world. Pair with locally made cheeses and smokehouse meats to complete a riverside picnic.



8 / CITY PARK Wander south along Elm Street, which ends at this shady, welcoming retreat on the Bosque River bank. Enormous pecan trees provide shelter from the sun, and plentiful tables near the clear water supply a bucolic backdrop for picnicking. 🐾



All a Board

It's more than chef Eric Hunter's menu that inspires return visits to the Chop House, found within the Midland Hotel. It's the inspired craftsmanship he employs with every item.

He makes the cavatelli pasta from semolina fresh each morning. He smokes brisket and queso as well as molasses-cured salmon. The charcuterie presentation involves meats he cured, grainy mustard he made from scratch, vegetables and fruits he pickled, and even a wooden board he milled, cut, stained, and finished. You taste the passion in every bite.

historicmidlandhotel.com

Bosque River RV Park

There are 21 spaces at this city park to pull your RV into. Hook up to the complimentary Wi-Fi or enjoy the park's volleyball court and hike-and-bike trail. 500 Elm St., Hico. 254-796-4620, ext. 2; hico-tx.com/visitors/rv-park

One of "The Best Small Towns for Christmas in the South" — Southern Living Magazine

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"IF I CAN HAVE
HOMEMADE
LINK BARBECUE
SAUSAGE, FOLDED
WITH A PIECE OF
BREAD, I KNOW
I'M HOME."
-GEORGE FOREMAN

*"It was the first thing I tried,
and I loved it so much there was
no need to order anything else."*
-JODI THOMAS

*"Licking your fingers with each bite is the
best part."* -CHET GARNER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERIC W. POHL | ILLUSTRATIONS BY SAMUEL KERR

TIMES HAVE BEEN TOUGH

Times have been tough for restaurants. For nearly two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a gauntlet of challenges for businesses small and large whose primary passion is pleasing their customers with satisfying grub and service. Instead, restaurateurs have had to reckon with shuttered dining rooms, safety measures, weather disasters, supply-chain interruptions, rising food prices, changing business models, staffing shortages, nervous employees, and a tentative public. There's no manual for navigating times like these.

"We love throwing a great dinner party every night in the restaurant—being around people, working for people, making people happy," says Jon Bonnell, the chef and owner of four Fort Worth restaurants, including the popular Bonnell's Fine Texas Cuisine. "It was so hard to see an industry that I've loved for over 20 years falling apart when nobody did anything wrong. I think it's worth fighting for and worth saving."

We couldn't agree more. At their best, restaurant experiences are like mini-vacations. We go out to eat not only for a break from cooking at home, but also for a sensory escape from our day-to-day routines. And we're lucky to have great options, too: Numerous Texas chefs and eateries have been honored with James Beard Foundation awards, the Oscars of the restaurant world.

To celebrate the state's acclaimed dining scene, we reached out to noteworthy Texans and asked them to share their favorite restaurant meals. The responses ran the gamut. *Hank the Cowdog* author John R. Erickson, who lives on a Panhandle ranch, told us about the gargantuan carne asada burrito at Chihua's in Perryton. Businessman and former Dallas Cowboys linebacker Dat Nguyen said grilled spring rolls are his barometer of a good Vietnamese restaurant—and his favorites are at his sister's restaurant, Hu-Dat Noodle House in Corpus Christi. You'll find something for pretty much every taste here.

We hope this story will inspire you to support your favorite restaurants, but we also urge patience. Restaurants face continued struggles prioritizing health policies, maintaining a labor force, and keeping their kitchens stocked. "We can't predict what the next problem is going to be, but we know there will be problems," says Bonnell, who chronicled his pandemic experience in the book *Carry Out, Carry On: A Year in the Life of a Texas Chef*. "On the positive side, people want to go out. Business is booming and restaurants are full." —Matt Joyce



*Small Town
Favorites*



JODI THOMAS

AMARILLO-BASED BESTSELLING
ROMANCE AUTHOR

"A favorite of the students of West Texas A&M University, **Sayakomarn's Restaurant** opened on the square in Canyon in 2007. My favorite dish is their **lemon chicken with fried rice** and a diet Coke. It was the first thing I tried, and I loved it so much there was no need to order anything else." *sayakomarns.com*



THE CALABREZE WITH SHRIMP AND ARTICHOKES IN PINK SAUCE at **Bella Italia** in Lampasas.

512-564-5202

-Brittany Pozzi Tonozzi,
Lampasas, champion
barrel racer

THE SPANISH OCTOPUS AGUACHILE at **Los Olivos Market** in Buda.
losolivomarkets.com

- Ali Khan

THE CHICKEN-FRIED STEAK WITH EGGS at **The Café** in Graford. [facebook.com/thecafegraford](https://www.facebook.com/thecafegraford)

- Erin Rahr

THE GRILLED SPRING ROLLS at **Hu-Dat Noodle House** in Corpus Christi.
hudatnoodlehouse.com

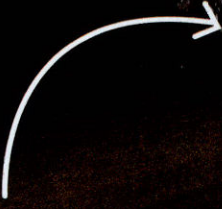
- Dat Nguyen,
Grapevine, former
Dallas Cowboy



GEORGE FOREMAN

HOUSTON-BASED HEAVY-WEIGHT BOXING CHAMP, PITCHMAN, AND PREACHER

"When I'm in Marshall, I like to eat my barbecue at **Porky's Smokehouse**, especially the **barbecue ribs and sausage**."
porkysmokehouse.com





Top Tex-Mex

THE MILANESA TORTAS WITH FRESH AVOCADO AND THE PALETAS (frozen pops) at **Flautas y Paletería Tepalca** in El Paso.

flautastepalca.com

- *Alejandra Chavez*,
owner-chef of Thyme Matters
in E. Paso

THE QUESO WITH SPICED BEEF AND A MEXICAN MARTINI at

either **Trudy's Texas Star** or **Matt's El Rancho** in Austin. trudys.com;

mattselrancho.com

- *Sarah Jarosz*

PORK CHICHARRONES AND SALSA MACHA at **Chicharrones El Güero** in Palmview. [facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/chicharroneselguero)

[chicharroneselguero](https://www.facebook.com/chicharroneselguero)

- *Macarena Hernández*,
Edinburg-based
journalist and educator

SOUR CREAM CHICKEN ENCHILADAS at **Leal's** in

Muleshoe. myleals.com

- *Jodi Thomas*

THE CARNE ASADA BURRITO AND CEVICHE at **Chihua's** in

Perryton.

[facebook.com/](https://www.facebook.com/chihuasmexicanrestaurant)

[chihuasmexicanrestaurant](https://www.facebook.com/chihuasmexicanrestaurant)

- *John P. Erickson*,

author of *Hank the Cowdog*

THE MOLE POBLANO ON CHICKEN ENCHILADAS at

Hugo's in Houston.

hugosrestaurant.net

- *Adán Medrano*,
Houston-based chef
and food writer



ERIN RAHR

**CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT
OF FORT WORTH'S RAHR & SONS
BREWING COMPANY**

"My all-time favorite meal in Fort Worth is the **pepper-crusted bison tenderloin**, which has a whiskey-spiked cream sauce and truffled french fries with it, at **Bonnell's Fine Texas Cuisine**. This seriously Texan food feels exactly right for any occasion." bonnellstexas.com

SARAH JAROSZ

NASHVILLE VIA WIMBERLEY
GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING
SINGER-SONGWRITER

"The enchiladas or tamales at Mi Tierra Café y Panadería in San Antonio. My family and I have a tradition of making a trip to Mi Tierra around Christmas. All the decorations and music set such a vibrant, joyful scene. Basically everything on the menu is delicious." mitierracafe.com



Seconds, Please!



ADÁN MEDRANO

Houston-based chef, food writer, and executive producer of the food documentary Truly Texas Mexican

"The **carne guisada** at **El Puesto No. 2** in San Antonio. This stove-top beef stew is one of the iconic dishes of *comida casera*, Texas Mexican home cooking. Every time I order it, El Puesto hits it out of the ballpark with the trinity of spices unique to Texas Mexican cuisine: garlic, black pepper, and cumin. It's served with mashed pinto beans, rice, and salad. So delicious, I mop up the plate with the soft and pillowy flour tortillas."

210-432-1400



GEORGE FOREMAN

"**Pappas Bar-B-Q** in Houston reigns supreme as far as I'm concerned. When I eat barbecue, that's how I know I'm in Texas. I like the ribs, of course, but if I can have **homemade link barbecue sausage, folded with a piece of bread**, I know I'm home."

pappasbbq.com



TIFFANY DERRY

veteran of TV's Top Chef competitions, owner-chef at Roots Southern Table in Farmers Branch, and Roots Chicken Shak in Plano and Austin

"Just outside of Beaumont, where I grew up, Lumberton is home to **Catfish Cabin**, a place that's been around since the 1990s and is still going strong. It's some of the best seafood you can find. Best is the combination **fried catfish and oysters with hush puppies**." 409-755-6800



RAY BENSON

Austin-based leader of the Western swing band Asleep at the Wheel

"Anything at **The Salt Lick BBQ** in Driftwood. They have the most unique barbecue sauce ever. Owner Scott Roberts' mother is from Hawaii, and her sauce is not like any other in America. It makes the barbecue experience more exotic. I love their **pork ribs and the sauce**, but it goes on brisket or sausages or anything." saltlickbbq.com



The mi-so-hot ramen at Ramen Tatsu-ya in Austin

ALIKHAN

AUSTIN-BASED HOST OF *CHEAP EATS ON THE COOKING CHANNEL*

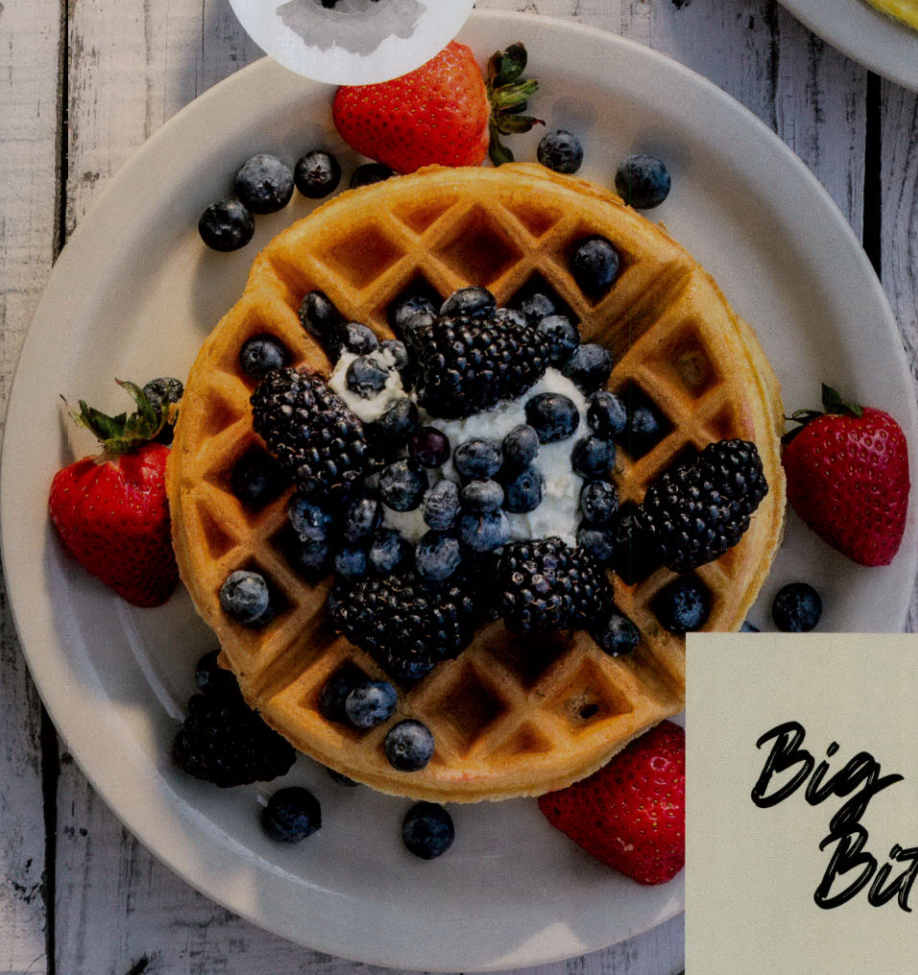
"I love the tonkotsu original at Ramen Tatsu-ya because it single-handedly started my entire interest in ramen. It is the gold standard. It has the classic style tonkotsu broth—that rich pork fatty broth. And it comes with everything I need—the pork belly, the egg, some mushroom, and scallions." ramen-tatsuya.com



MIKAILA ULMER

AUSTIN-BASED FOUNDER OF
ME & THE BEES LEMONADE

"I went to Galveston earlier this summer, and I ordered the **Belgian waffles with berries** and the **crab meat omelet** at the **Sunflower Bakery and Cafe**. Both were so wonderful and so fresh. The waffle was perfectly crisp on the outside and pillowy on the inside. Having two dishes to share with my mom gave us the perfect balance of savory and sweet."
thesunflowerbakeryandcafe.com



Big City Bites

VIETNAMESE CHICKEN WINGS at Vietnam Gardens in San Antonio.
vietnamgardens.com
-Andrea "Vocab" Sanderson, San Antonio poet



CHET GARNER

GEORGETOWN-BASED HOST OF
THE DAYTRIPPER TV SHOW

"Barbecue crabs from **The Schooner**.

I was raised in Port Neches and technically this restaurant belongs to our bitter cross-town rivals in Nederland, but even I'm willing to cross city lines to eat these crabs. These deep-fried crabs are dredged in zesty flour and seasoning, and licking your fingers with each bite is the best part." theschoonerrestaurant.com



**BLUE CRAB
CARBONARA** at **Rosie
Cannonball** in Houston.
rosiecannonball.com
-Alba Huerta,
owner of Julep cocktail
bar in Houston

MI QUANG, special yellow rice
noodles with pork, shrimp, fish cake,
shredded cabbage, and banana
blossom, tossed with a lightly spicy
broth, at **Huynh** in Houston.
huynhrestauranthouston.com
-Manabu "Hori" Horiuchi,
owner-chef at Kata Robata
in Houston

**THE CHICKEN
HARA MASALA**
from **Himalaya
Restaurant** in Houston.
[himalayarestaurant
houston.com](http://himalayarestaurant
houston.com)
- Chet Garner

**THE CHICKEN PHO
WITH GRILLED
LEMONGRASS
SKEWERS** at **Elizabeth
Street Café** in Austin.
elizabethstreetcafe.com
-Mikaila Ulmer 🍴



KITCHEN

International

WHEN
REFUGEES
RESETTLE IN
TEXAS, THEY
BRING THEIR
ETHNIC
FOODS AND
AGRICULTURAL
KNOWLEDGE,
MAKING THE
STATE MORE
DIVERSE
AND MORE
DELICIOUS



By **KAYLA STEWART**

Photographs by **NATHAN LINDSTROM**

Sip black **TEA IN THE HOME OF RANIA**

Alahmad in Wylie, a city 30 miles northeast of Dallas. Alahmad and her friends, Khuloud Sultan, Nawarah Shaker, and Maisaa Alkhdrir, have cooked an elaborate afternoon meal. I catch whiffs of the food they've prepared: grilled chicken seasoned with aromatics and cilantro, alongside roasted, shredded carrots. Their near-instantaneous kindness and willingness to break bread with me has already cemented the meal as one of my most memorable dining experiences. Welcoming guests with food, love, and generosity is common in places like Syria, the women's country of origin.

"Home was a lot of people—our family, our friends, our community," Alahmad says. "I miss home, where our front door was always open. So I try to create something similar here."

Alahmad is one of 6.8 million refugees who left the Middle Eastern nation of Syria due to the violent ongoing civil war. After fleeing in 2012, Alahmad and her family spent four years as refugees in Jordan, where she describes the refugee housing as overcrowded and unkept. Four years later, she received a call from the International Organization for Migration, asking her if she'd be interested in moving to Texas. "I said, 'Are you joking? Of course I want to go!'"

Between 2010 and 2019, Texas has resettled around 57,000 refugees—more than any other state in the country. Most recently, as the war in Afghanistan came to an end in August, at least 50,000 Afghan refugees were expected to arrive in the U.S., and many have already found homes in El Paso, Houston, Amarillo, and Austin. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security defines a refugee as "a person outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." The most common countries of origin include Iraq, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, and Syria.

Refugees' food travels with them, and when given opportunities, their culinary knowledge and skills can be translated into meaningful employment and contributions to their families and communities. The result is a richer, more delicious Texas. Organizations like Be Kinder Coffee and Break Bread, Break Borders in Dallas and Plant It Forward in Houston provide opportunities for farmers, home cooks, and others to develop and enhance their skills while learning English, getting access to social resources, and making a living.

Russell Smith is the CEO of Refugee Services of Texas, an organization that has resettled nearly 20,000 people from more than 30 countries since



1978. He notes that many refugees get jobs in food service, which can range from working in meat processing plants to cooking in restaurants. About 14,900 refugees in Texas work in the food industry, according to research organization New American Economy. RST recognizes that food doesn't just play a role in getting a job; it's also an essential part of refugees' lives in a new and unfamiliar land.

"It's important because it gives [them] an anchoring," Smith says. "They're displaced by war or oppression, and they're coming to a brand new place to start a new life. Bringing the traditions from where you come from is an important thing, and food is a huge part of that."



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Maisaa Alkhdar, a cook for Break Bread, Break Borders; members of BBBB gather for a meal; Nawarat Shaker, BBBB cook; some of the dishes include grilled chicken *kabsa*, *fattoush* salad, Syrian rice and peas, and lentil dish *harra bi isbaou*; Khuloud Sultan, BBBB cook; Rania Alahmad, BBBB cook.



EVERY SATURDAY, Jane Nguyen Gow works her Be Kir.der Coffee booth at the Richardson Farmers Market. She offers samples of granola, flavored with vanilla, maple syrup, and cinnamon; vegan chocolate chip bars; and various types of coffee with notes of dark chocolate or red fruits or cherries. Customers who inquire beyond the requisite pleasantries might learn a bit more about Gow's story, and how her status as a refugee inspired her to start her business.

On April 30, 1975, a 13-year-old Nguyen Gow was on a boat with her family during the fall of Saigon. As the city was overcome with looting and gunfire, Nguyen Gow, her seven siblings, and her parents drifted away from the only place they'd known as home. A yearlong journey took them through the Philippines, Wake Islands, Camp Pendleton in San Diego, and finally



"I want to do this because I am a refugee, and I know what new refugees are up against," Nguyen Gow says. "I want to be part of helping to make a difference for them because someone else decided to make a difference for me, and it changed my life."

San Angelo, where Nguyen Gow and her siblings dealt with a few ignorant classmates. "I got into a lot of fights because the kids would ridicule us and make fun of us," Nguyen Gow recalls. "I was still learning English, and if I didn't have enough language to talk back to these kids, I dealt with them with my fists. I was always thinking, I'm the tougher one in my family, so I have to protect my siblings."

As Nguyen Gow grew older, she found more peaceful ways to resolve conflict, as well as a community that would help her feel less isolated. After a friend alerted the family to the growing Vietnamese community in the Panhandle, they moved to Amarillo. Nguyen Gow was in high school at the time, and she found solace in school, tennis, family and food. She helped support her family through babysitting jobs and working in restaurant kitchens.

Eventually the family moved to Dallas so Nguyen Gow could attend the University of Texas at Arlington. After stints on both coasts, she settled in the DFW area. Despite her harrowing journey, Nguyen Gow is jovial, warm, and eager to share the life she's built as we talk over coffee in Dallas. "I'm married, a mother, and I've made a good living," Nguyen Gow says. "I'm grateful."

Even during Nguyen Gow's 35-year career in IT working for companies including Erickson, HP, and Splunk, she was always a coffee enthusiast, often visiting different coffee shops in the Dallas area. She decided to build on her personal interests and started BKC in 2019, which also aims to employ refugees and offer job training, mentorship, and support. "I really want to give back, and this feels like the right way to do it," Nguyen Gow says.

Currently, Nguyen Gow runs BKC out of her home, where she makes her granolas and vegan snack bars. Without a commercial kitchen or storefront, Nguyen Gow hasn't been able to hire employees full time. The business has recently partnered with RST to get refugees jobs in food service. Right now, she is focused on bringing more awareness to



her business, but has big dreams for its future, like a shop or warehouse to produce on a larger scale.

"I want to do this because I am a refugee, and I know what new refugees are up against," Nguyen Gow says. "I want to be part of helping to make a difference for them because someone else decided to make a difference for me, and it changed my life."

BACK IN WYLIE, at Rania Alahmad's home, the women are eager to show off their respective dishes: herbaceous Syrian rice and peas; Chechen dumplings with a bright garlic sauce; *fattoush* salad with pita chips; chicken shawarma; and grilled chicken *kabsa*. One of my favorite dishes is the citrusy lentil dish, *harra bi isbaou*, which translates from Arabic to "burned finger" in English because you can't wait until it's cooled to eat.

Chatting as we eat, the women tell me about their journeys with Break Bread, Break Borders—a catering service that seeks to empower refugee women through culinary careers. BBBB was founded in 2017 by Jin-Ya Huang, the

child of Chinese refugees. The organization, which currently employs eight women, has served more than 12,000 meals at events like board meetings and weddings. The menus reflect the cuisines the women grew up with. Not only does cooking these dishes help the women make money to support themselves and their families, it also helps them connect to their traditions and cultures.

"We've seen this really powerful business model throughout the world—people working with refugees cooking and using food as education—but we didn't see anyone doing this in our backyard," Huang says. "We didn't see anyone who was using storytelling and really amplifying the background of the food and culture through oral history."

Over lunch, I learn more about the stories of the women gathered. Nawarah Shaker is also from Syria and left to escape the civil war. A former schoolteacher, Shaker sought safety and better healthcare opportunities for her children, one of whom has diabetes. The family spent two years in Turkey before working with the International Organization for Migration. In 2017, they came to the Dallas area. "I left everything to give a good life to my kids," Shakar says.

Though the women have a deep appreciation for Texas, creating home in a new place took some time. But their shared experience has developed into a strong community. "We can be there for each other and try to create a



FROM LEFT:

Be Kinder Coffee owner Jane Nguyen Gow; Constant Ngouala at one of his Plant It Forward fields; PIF farmer Bora Neema.





Support SYSTEMS

Be Kinder Coffee is a refugee-owned nonprofit that sells homemade granola, vegan snacks, and coffee beans sourced from Ethiopia and Guatemala and roasted in small batches. You can find its products at the Richardson Farmers Market on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., the Watauga Farmers Market on Sundays from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and online at bekindercoffeeus.org.

Break Bread, Break Borders is a Dallas-based catering company that hires refugees as cooks. The company sells packaged hummus, baba ghanoush, and other items at the Market Provisions Co. shop at the Dallas Farmers Market every day. For catering inquiries or to donate, visit breakbreadbreakborders.com.

There are numerous ways to purchase refugee-farmed produce from **Plant It Forward** in Houston, including farm shares, farmers markets, and farm stands. You can also Adopt-A-Farm and volunteer. Learn more at plantitforward.farm.

better future," says Khuloud Sultan, one of the women present at the lunch. The women meet with each other outside of work, attend a local mosque together, and support each other as they navigate life and parenthood in the Dallas area. They encourage each other through some of the tougher aspects of being refugees, like not always feeling welcome.

Huang created BBBB to help humanize the refugee experience, an effort inspired by her late mother, Mei-Ying (Margaret), who was a restaurateur and community leader in Dallas. Huang grew up recognizing the important role food and ownership can play in a refugee's life.

"My parents are entrepreneurs; my aunt and uncle had a family business. We've been in the restaurant business for decades," Huang says. "I was the one who was like, 'Oh, I'm gonna run away from food.' But I ended up running right back."

Huang encourages her cooks to start their own endeavors. Some former members of BBBB have gone off to open their own restaurants or other businesses. The company's goal is to unite people through food, but also to bring refugees closer to lives they choose for themselves.

"They didn't have the power to decide whether they get to stay in their country or not," Huang says. "We wanted to see them hold power again."

PART OF GAINING POWER is having autonomy. Through the Houston organization Plant It Forward, refugees operate as business owners, farming their own plot of land in the nation's fourth largest city. Liz Valette, the president of PIF, has watched the mission of the organization evolve since its inception. It was founded in 2011 by the O'Donnells, a local philanthropic family.

At the time, Iraqi refugees were dominating the news cycle, attracting the family's attention. The O'Donnells reached out to local Catholic agencies who told them that while Iraqi refugees were in Houston, many had advanced and professional degrees and English-language skills, and thus had less difficulty finding work than non-English-speaking refugees from other countries. They redirected their attention to a group of Congolese refugees, many of whom came with agricultural expertise but weren't as adept with English. They began working with refugees from Congo and other nations who knew how to work the land but could benefit from language-learning opportunities.

Constant Ngouala has worked with PIF since the beginning. Ngouala grew up in the Republic of Congo, but left in 1999 amid ongoing civil wars and ended up farming in Gabon on the west coast of Central Africa. "My family pushed me to get the training for farming because it would be a way to make a living in a new place," he says. It indeed turned out to be useful for his work at PIF. "Houston is the land of opportunity," Ngouala says. His farm has become a deeply respected institution in the city and his produce sells at Houston farmers markets like Urban Harvest and Braeswood.

The organization saw sales double during the pandemic, a time in which, according to Valette, local farms were able to more effectively provide food in contrast to the tenuous global supply chain. Like BBBB and BKC, PIF is eager to help refugees gain autonomy. Refugees work at the farm as independent contractors and are able to control their schedules. They each receive a plot of land to grow their own produce, which includes eggplant, broccoli, figs, and habanero peppers. Ngouala grows carrots, cabbage,



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Break Bread, Break Borders founder Jin-Ya Huang; Plant It Forward farmers Materanya “Pierre” Ruchinagiza, Fatuma Rukundo, and Christine Kengue; eggplant is one crop grown at the Houston farms.



arugula, and okra. “It’s very nice to see how much people like what we grow,” he says.

The PIF staff and volunteers help the farmers deal with challenges specific to living in the U.S., such as accessing lines of credit to build financial stability. Valette will often ask alumni to speak to the farmers about how to pursue their individual ambitions, such as home ownership, and to offer encouragement and remind them that their goals are possible.

Most of the farmers have come from Congo, the Republic of Congo, and Liberia. In recent trainings, PIF has had farmers from at least seven different countries in Africa. The organization is aware of the tragic history within these countries, including exploitation for their agricultural knowledge and forced labor during the trans-Atlantic

slave trade. Many enslaved people who arrived in the U.S. from Africa were forced to farm some of the very same things the PIF farmers grow today, including okra. “It’s certainly something that we’re trying to grapple with to make sure that we are not contributing to the historical trends about who’s growing our food and how they’re treated and whether or not they’re marginalized,” Valette says.

In addition to attracting attention at farmers markets, the produce from PIF also makes its way into top restaurants in town, like UB Preserv, which spotlights the farm’s produce in dishes like the greens and okra stir-fry.

“Our farmers are kind of like rock stars,” Valette says. “The city has just been overwhelmingly supportive, and I think it’s because Houston loves playing the role of a welcoming, diverse city.”



THE PANDEMIC HIT THE TOURISM INDUSTRY HARD, BUT THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT, FROM WEST TEXAS TO THE COAST

TRAVEL,

An aerial photograph of a beach. The water is a deep blue-grey, with white foam from waves washing onto the shore. The sand is a light, textured grey. On the left side, there is a distinct patch of bright green vegetation, possibly a small island or a protected area. The overall scene is serene and natural.

BY MICHAEL HARDY

INTERRUPTED

NEW AREAS

of the economy were hit as hard by the COVID-19 pandemic as the tourism industry. In Texas, consumer travel spending dropped by nearly a third from 2019 to 2020, resulting in an estimated \$53.5 billion loss in economic activity, according to the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism. But Texans aren't the kind of people to stay put forever, and the past year has seen a major comeback for leisure travel. Hotels, restaurants, and tourist sites have spent millions to retrofit and reimagine their operations with safety and cleanliness in mind, winning guests back in droves. Air travel and hotel occupancy rates are almost back to pre-pandemic levels; of the half-million hospitality workers who lost their jobs in spring 2020, around 400,000 have been hired back to meet the growing demand.

Some travel sectors are hotter than ever. More Texans are taking road trips now than in 2019, and beach towns reported record numbers of visitors last summer. With the delta variant causing a rise in COVID cases in Texas in late summer, tourists are particularly attracted to outdoor destinations they can reach by car. We decided to follow their lead by taking our own road trip across the state, from Marfa to San Antonio to Port Aransas, to gauge how the travel industry has adapted to pandemic-era tourism.



MARFA - TERLINGUA

The night before Thanksgiving in 2020, two Marfa artists installed an electric sign that read “Everyone Here Hates You” in the window of an abandoned building on the edge of town. COVID-19 was surging in Marfa at the time, and the artists, Chris Ramming and Rob Brill, wanted to send a message to the thousands of tourists seeking a socially distanced West Texas vacation. “I love so many people in this community, and they’re at actual risk of dying so that somebody can get an enchilada from a fancy restaurant,” Brill complained to the online arts magazine *Hyperallergic*. Boutiques and art galleries followed suit and hung signs reading “Small Town, No Hospital” on their doors to encourage mask-wearing.

That was then. Marfa, like most of the rest of Texas, has reopened for business—and business, by all accounts, seems good. “That sign was just the opinion of two men,” said Jennifer Esperanza, owner of Esperanza Vintage & Art on Marfa’s main drag. “It was a lot of the small business owners and restaurateurs who kept Marfa going.” While we spoke,

OPENING SPREAD: Waves in Port Aransas **CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Hotel Paisano in Marfa; La Posada Milagro in Terlingua; the pool at Balmorhea State Park.



Esperanza's husband, artist Richard Kurtz, manned the register. The shop sells Kurtz's paintings, as well as signature painted jackets, books, luggage, and other found objects. During my visit in July, Marfa Coffee Company's co-owner, Lesley Brandt, a generously tattooed woman in jeans and Crocs, stopped by to catch up with Esperanza and Kurtz. With fewer than 2,000 people, Marfa is the kind of place where everyone seems to know each other.

That's why it was so painful for Vicki Lynn Barge, general

manager of the historic Hotel Paisano, to furlough her entire staff for six weeks at the beginning of the pandemic. Fortunately, Barge was able to bring nearly everyone back. The Paisano was built in 1930 and famously hosted Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson, and James Dean during the filming of the 1956 classic *Giant*, which remains the definitive portrait of life and death on a West Texas ranch. Through the 2020 holidays, the hotel had some of its highest numbers ever, Barge told me in the soaring Spanish Revival lobby, her golden beagle, Ruger, sitting at her feet. "A lot of people are amazed at the building," she said. "When you walk into a place like this, it's just so different from the standard hotels you find in many places."

The lure of Marfa—an internationally renowned art colony with a small-town feel, first made famous by sculptor Donald Judd—continues to attract tourists and businesspeople. Among the newest arrivals are Mark and Carolyn Blackburn, who opened their art gallery, Texas Rose+Art Blackburn, over the summer. When I visited, the Blackburns were still moving into their new space in a 100-year-old building down the street from the chic Hotel Saint George. "We always wanted to go to Marfa, so during the pandemic we decided to drive here and check it out," Mark told me. The couple once lived in Hawaii, and now their living quarters are above Texas Rose+Art Blackburn. "We feel like we're moving from one island to another," he explained. "We love the scene here, and the locals are just so friendly."

After a late lunch at my Airbnb, I bought a \$30 day pass for the Hotel Saint George pool. Over a frozen guava margarita garnished with Tajin, I spoke to the bartender, Arturo Trillo, who drives an hour to work from his hometown of Ojinaga, Mexico. When I said my next destination was the former ghost town of Terlingua, Trillo suggested I take the scenic route: US 67 to Presidio, then Farm-to-Market 170 along the north bank of the Rio Grande through Big Bend State Park. It was excellent advice; the route is one of the most beautiful in Texas, winding through towering mountains and deep canyons, the river occasionally visible out of the passenger side window.

In Terlingua I stayed at Willow House, which *Travel + Leisure* named one

of the world's best new hotels in 2020. Designed by first-time hotelier Lauren Werner, the complex consists of 10 concrete casitas shaped like boxes that sit on 287 acres of raw desert, providing stunningly unspoiled views of the Chisos Mountains. Guests can play board games at the well-appointed main house, cook a steak on one of the barbecue grills, or simply sip cocktails by the large fire pit. I ended up spending most of my time sitting on the front porch of my private casita, which resembled a minimalist Donald Judd sculpture, gazing out at the starkly beautiful desert landscape.

The next morning, after breakfast burritos on the sunlit patio of La Posada Milagro in Terlingua, I drove three hours north to Balmorhea State Park, which had just reopened after being closed for maintenance for several years. The pandemic had extended the shutdown, but the park's beloved 1.3-acre spring-fed pool was finally welcoming back visitors. Several dozen families were spread out on picnic tables or blankets around the park's spacious grounds. They slathered on sunscreen before plunging into the pool's chilly water—the perfect antidote for a 90-degree summer day. As I queued up with a group of excitable children at the diving board, waiting my turn to dive into the perfectly clear water, all memory of the pandemic seemed to fade away.

SAN ANTONIO

My next stop was San Antonio, whose \$15 billion tourist sector was arguably hit harder than any other city in Texas by the pandemic in terms of financial impact, according to online news outlet *San Antonio Report*. Although leisure tourism has largely returned to normal, conventions and conferences—for which San Antonio is a top national destination—are another story. Around 300 conventions were canceled in the past year and a half, costing the city an estimated half-million dollars in potential revenue, according to Dave Krupinski, chief operating officer of Visit San Antonio, a nonprofit tourism bureau. Conventions are starting to return, but Krupinski guessed the city wouldn't get back to pre-COVID levels until 2024. Business travel has also slowed.

"I think a lot of corporations are nervous about COVID," Krupinski told me in a wood-paneled conference room at the lavish Hyatt Regency on the Riverwalk. But there was also plenty of good news. After shutting down for much of the second quarter of 2020, SeaWorld and Six Flags Fiesta Texas have come back strong. Flush with pandemic-induced savings, tourists are spending freely in theme park restaurants and gift shops. "Per capita spending is just off the charts," Krupinski said. "When people go out, they really want to enjoy themselves." And it's not just theme parks. I spent a Thursday afternoon strolling a Riverwalk



packed with smiling tourists, many of them in town for an Air Force family and friends' day. At Boudro's Texas Bistro, I watched a waiter make tableside guacamole for a couple who said they were visiting from Kansas.

The ubiquitous "Help Wanted" signs in Riverwalk establishments were among the few indicators of the ongoing pandemic. "It has been extremely trying at our hotels, attractions, and restaurants to get our workforce back," Krupinski said. "We're seeing things starting to improve. The restaurants are becoming a little bit more competitive with salaries and signing bonuses, and we're going to job fairs trying to get people into the industry."

Meanwhile, many San Antonians have found creative ways to make the best out of the pandemic. After lunch, I got a massage from Donny Carrasco at Casa Döson, a wellness spa a block from the Riverwalk. Carrasco was furloughed from his hotel job at the beginning of the pandemic. Rather than wait around to be rehired, he opted to complete his license in massage therapy and start his own business. "As soon as I opened my doors, the customers were there," Carrasco told me while kneading my shoulders. Since he and his wife live across the street from the studio, Carrasco said he can work as much or as little as he likes. Carrasco's skill and enthusiasm are reflected in his online reviews, which are almost uniformly rhapsodic.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP
LEFT: Pearl in San Antonio;
parasailing in Port Aransas;
Port Bay in Rockport; a
beach on Mustang Island.



PORT ARANSAS - ROCKPORT

The tourism industry in some parts of Texas actually benefited from the pandemic. One of those places, Port Aransas, which was still recovering from a near-direct hit from Hurricane Harvey in 2017, rounded out my itinerary. During the summer of 2020, as Texans found their vacation options limited, many hit the beach for socially distanced outdoor recreation. When I visited in August, cars were triple- and quadruple-parked along the Mustang Island beaches. On the pink-granite Port Aransas Jetty, I met friends Chase Hillman and Rupert Salinas, who were minding several fishing

poles wedged into the rocks. They had already caught a bunch of undersize speckled trout they had to throw back into the water. “My family tries to come here every year on vacation,” Hillman said. “It’s some of the best fishing in the state, and the town is really friendly. Everyone knows everybody else.”

At Connoisseur Gifts and Novelty on Avenue G, store clerk Caitlyn McKee said she moved here from Corpus Christi during the pandemic. “The speed of life is much slower here, which suits me better,” she said. According to McKee, the store is packed almost every day. “We generally stay busy from open to close.” Many folks wander in after eating a po’boy at Irie’s Island Food, the popular restaurant next door. “Having a beautiful cat in the window doesn’t hurt either,” McKee said, gesturing to a tawny feline sunning itself.

Next, I drove 50 minutes north to Rockport, a sleepy coastal town that has gained a reputation for its fishing, upscale restaurants, and art galleries. I met nature and wildlife photographer Elisa Baker at her self-titled gallery on South Austin Street, Rockport’s main commercial drag. There she sells art and household items printed with her brightly colored photographs of local birds and animals. Business has been so good that Baker was recently able to move out of her previous gallery, a smaller space on a side street. “I like the fact that people can walk up and down the street and see all the stuff that’s going on,” Baker told me. “We get a lot of traffic from big cities—Houston, San Antonio, Dallas. They like that I’m selling something unique, something they might not see where they live.”

Brett Stawar, president and CEO of the Port Aransas Tourism Bureau and Chamber of Commerce, told me the local real estate market is humming, with many out-of-towners buying second homes to convert into vacation rentals. With several major condo developments still rebuilding from Harvey, the supply of hotel rooms is artificially depressed, leading to above-average prices. The island’s popularity has also led to above-average waits to board the ferry that connects Mustang Island to the mainland. “Harvey gave us a chance to rebuild on a much grander scale,” Stawar said. “So many people have been coming here on fishing trips and daily vacations through the years. Now the next generation is here, and we’re excited to see the island develop. It’s a different world.”



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PLATES



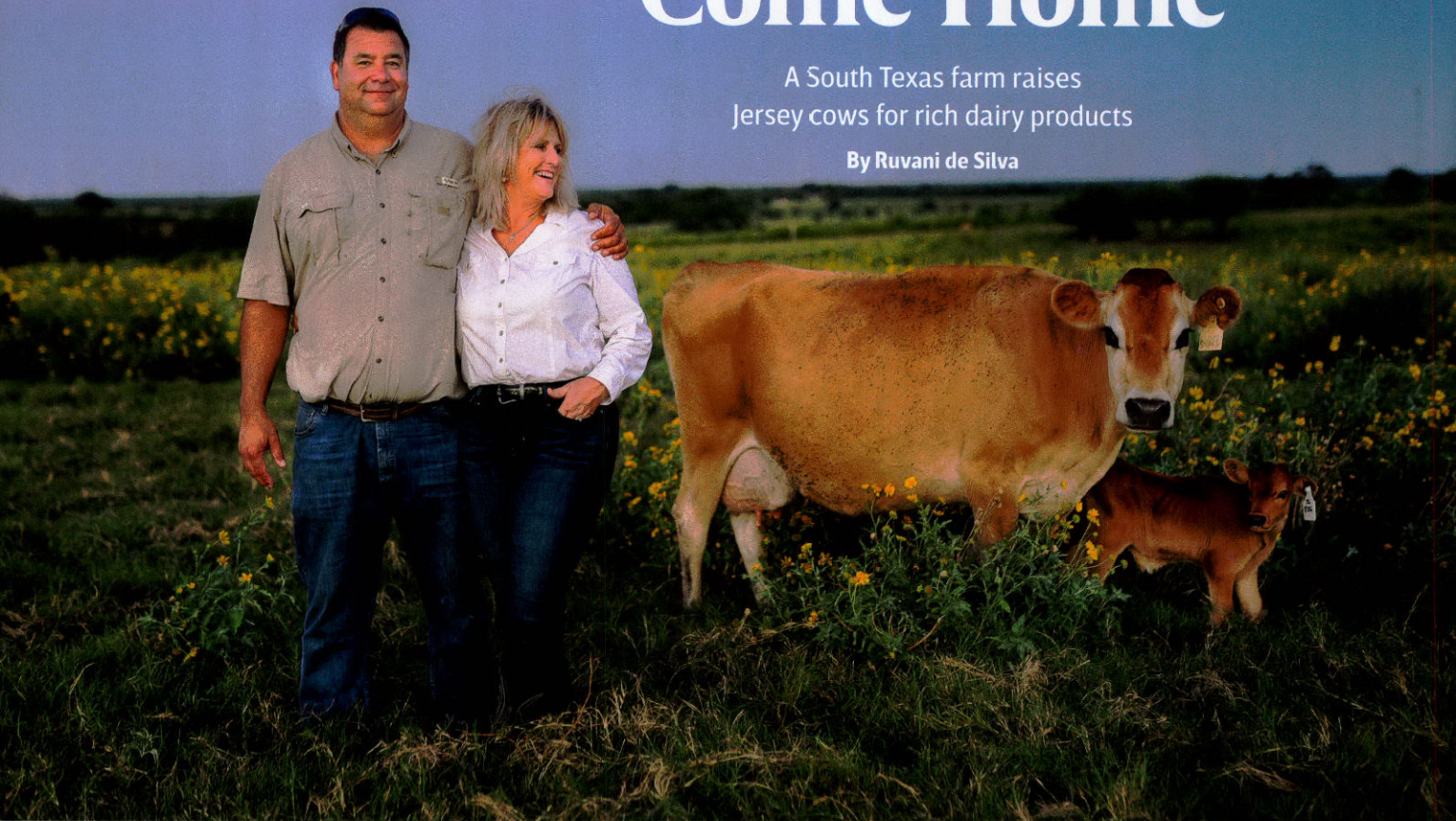
KNOLLE DAIRY

Farms in Sandia used to produce ice cream. These days, it honors its roots by crafting cheese and yogurt.

Till the Cows Come Home

A South Texas farm raises Jersey cows for rich dairy products

By Ruvani de Silva

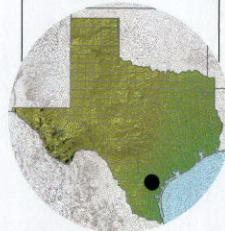


Joe Knolle Jr. chats with me as he replaces a part in one of his milking machines, the conversation unimpeded by his multitasking. It's early evening, and his glossy, toffee-color Jersey cows will soon be gently herded into position for their second milking of the day.

Joe and his wife, Christina Knolle, own Knolle Dairy Farms in Sandia, about 40 miles northwest of Corpus Christi. With a herd of more than 1,000 Jersey cattle, Knolle Dairy Farms is one of the oldest independent dairy farms in Texas, having been established in 1928. However, neither the age nor status of the farm have protected it from the mounting economic pressures many small farms face, including struggling to compete with the low prices of products from large commercial dairy farms that have more economical, less animal-friendly practices. In 2016, the couple made the business decision to pivot to producing farmstead cheeses, curds, and yogurt, and the multiyear process has brought the farm financial respite.

KNOLLE DAIRY FARMS

940 CR 350, Sandia.
The farm is open
Wed-Fri 4-7 p.m.
and Sat 1-5 p.m.
Schedule is subject
to change, but visits
are also available
by appointment.
361-876-2274;
facebook.com/
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Joe is the fourth generation of Knolles (pronounced Ka-no-ll-e) to own and operate Knolle Dairy Farms. Nearly 100 years ago, brothers Ed and Henry Knolle took over their beekeeper father's side project of rearing Jerseys with a herd of just 12. By the mid-20th century, it had become among the largest herds of Jersey cattle in the world, with 8,000 milking cows. Raised on the farm, Joe says he filed his first tax return at the age of 7. "We made more money then than we do now," he says with a wry smile.

Steeped in history, the farm has served its South Texas community with premium Jersey milk from cows whose lineage includes the King Ranch and Taft Ranch herds—the high society of the dairy world.

FROM LEFT: Joe Knolle Jr. and Christina Knolle; the farm's milk and cheese products; Christina in the kitchen.



Joe and Christina purchased the cattle and took ownership of the farm in 2012, determined to preserve the farm's traditions while growing the business in a sustainable manner. The decision to expand into dairy products was a calculated risk. "I've shed a lot of tears over the fluctuation of milk prices," Christina says. To keep costs down and reduce environmental impact, almost everything in Knolle's building extension is repurposed, from light fixtures made from old milking machines to a display refrigerator salvaged from Hurricane Harvey debris. Joe's degree in industrial distribution enabled him to design a system that minimizes electricity use, sustaining the old with modern innovation.

In November 2020, Knolle Dairy

Farms launched its first handcrafted cheeses, curds, and yogurts, and the products were quickly successful. Jersey milk has a unique supple heft, weighing deliciously on the palate. The plain yogurt is rich and sweet enough to enjoy solo, but also pairs well with nuts or fresh berries. The curds and Mexican-style cheeses, including *panela* and queso fresco, are blended with fresh herbs and spices, with flavors ranging from ghost pepper to rosemary-garlic.

Visitors to the farm, open to the public Wednesdays through Saturdays, can sample and purchase all of the products, as well as feed and pet the soft, skittish calves. Bathory Salazar, who has many different roles on the farm, says her favorite part of the job is working with

the calves. "I love forming a bond with them," she says. "Each one has their own name and own personality."

The farm is welcoming a stream of new customers with its most recent initiatives, and the simple, wholesome experience of visiting the dairy farm appeals to a wide range of folks. "We have visitors whose uncles or grandfathers used to work here," Joe says. "They often travel a long way and are really happy to see that the farm is still evolving."

Knolle Dairy Farms products are available at independent grocers, butchers, and delis around Texas, including Moody's Quality Meats in Corpus Christi, Granzin's Market in New Braunfels, and Wiatrek's Meat Market in San Antonio. 🐄



King of the Corn

El Paso's Elotes El Vaquero highlights a regional version of the famed Mexican snack

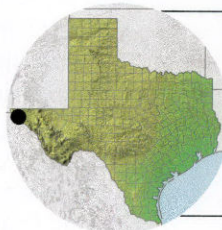
By Roberto José Andrade Franco

At night, after a hard day's work in the oil fields of Odessa, Jesús Ríos would lie awake. He'd think about the Mexican snack business he started on the west side of El Paso a couple of years before, in 2011, selling "a little bit of everything." Of all the things he sold, *elotes*—Mexican corn—was the thing he did best, but without meaning to, he buried them among 30 other items on his menu. He thought about how he'd invested his life savings into the business he had to shutter just two-and-a-half years after it opened. There were days when he sold as little as \$20 worth of snacks. "I failed," Ríos explains in Spanish.

After that, he had little choice but to move to the West Texas oil fields for work. Thoughts of what he'd do differently if he could do it all over again continued to occupy his mind. "I had enough time to think of what I wanted to do with my life," Ríos remembers. "I knew working in the oil fields wasn't forever. I decided to do what I liked, which was elotes." When he returned to El Paso in 2013 he tried again with a new stand called Elotes El Vaquero.

Born in El Paso's sister city, Juárez, Mexico, Ríos has always been around elotes. His family sold them on the other side of the Rio Grande. "I know everything about elotes, forward and backward," he says. He called his business El Vaquero—"the cowboy"—because it's what his schoolmates called him since his dad always wore a cowboy hat.

He set up his humble stainless-steel stand on El Paso's east side. Not only had he decided to focus on only selling elotes, but he'd sell them the way he knew how. "The Juárez style of elotes is very simple," Ríos says. "Butter, cheese, chile, and



ELOTES EL VAQUERO

Intersection of N. Zaragoza and Tierra Este roads, El Paso. Intersection of Horizon Blvd. and Rodman St., Horizon City. facebook.com/eloteselvaquero

“I knew working in the oil fields wasn’t forever. I decided to do what I liked, which was elotes.”

that’s it. It doesn’t go with Valentina [hot sauce]. It doesn’t come with crema. It doesn’t come with mayonnaise or other things that people from other areas eat it with.”

Unlike other elotes stands in most parts of Texas, and presumably the rest of the country, the Juárez—and by extension, El Paso—style of elotes uses white corn instead of yellow corn. White corn is more savory than sweet yellow corn. When mixed with the saltiness of the shredded queso fresco and chile, with just enough sweetness from the melted butter, the white corn balances and complements all the flavors perfectly. Rios serves elotes both on the cob and as kernels in a cup.

Using that simple recipe, Rios’ elotes stand became a success almost as soon as it opened in 2013. “In the first few days, it was a hit,” Rios remembers. “I was selling so much I didn’t know how much elotes to stock, or how much butter, how much cheese. The people reacted in a way that was impressive. I couldn’t believe it.”

The lines at Elotes El Vaquero kept growing. To keep up with demand, he added another stand, also on El Paso’s east side. When those weren’t enough, Rios upgraded to large driveable food stands equipped with kitchens. One of them is a former moving truck, the other is a large enclosed trailer.

Rios’ logo—a corn cob with its husks peeled halfway down—emblazon the sides of the trucks along with the tagline “Estilo Juárez” (Juárez style). The top of one of his food stands is big enough that Rios reinforced the roof and added a railing and a staircase so customers can sit and enjoy their elotes while they take in the surrounding desert.

Corn’s prominence in Mexican culture and the Mesoamerican civilizations that

helped create it can’t be overstated. Farmers began cultivating corn 9,000 years ago in what is now Mexico. The grain became so essential Aztecs even had a god of corn—Centeōtl—in their mythology. Similarly, in the Mayan creation story, the gods made humans, first out of mud, then out of wood, only to realize neither version was good enough. In their third and lasting attempt, the Mayan gods made humans out of corn. While corn isn’t full of the symbolism it once held, elotes still bring joy and a connection to the culture.

“His elotes are the best ones I’ve tasted in this state so far,” Melissa Flowers Chávez says. She’s been a devoted customer of El Vaquero for about two-and-a-half years.

An El Paso resident, Flowers Chávez describes herself as loving elotes with a passion. She especially missed eating them during the five years she lived in Boston while attending college. She searched for elotes there, but never found some that even came close to the ones she grew up eating in Chihuahua, Mexico, where she lived until moving to El Paso in seventh grade. That’s where she noticed elotes were almost a sacred food.

Her love and commitment to finding elotes wherever she’s lived is what motivated her to make a TikTok of Elotes El Vaquero last summer. As soon as she posted the one-minute video, the views and likes started tallying up. Three



FROM LEFT:
A happy customer with elotes and vanilla cream-filled churros; the Horizon City stand with seating on top.

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Photos: Brandon Jakobelt (left), Will Van Overbeek (right)

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| 19 Dripping Springs Visitors Bureau | | 56 Waxahachie Convention & Visitors Bureau |
| | | 57 West Texas Co-op |

“I was selling so much I didn’t know how much elotes to stock, or how much butter, or how much cheese.”

weeks later, the video had amassed around 1 million views. The response surprised her.

“It was really interesting—with the video a whole dialogue about corn started,” Flowers Chávez says in between laughter, still in disbelief the video of her enjoying corn started a deeper conversation. “People were commenting from all over the place—since Mexicans are everywhere—and they were saying, it’s hard to find good corn.”

Rios says 15 years ago in El Paso there was no place to buy wholesale white Mexican corn. Although that’s changed, outside of El Paso white corn still isn’t commonly used for elotes. Rios hopes to change that by growing his business.

“I want to expand outside of El Paso,” he says. He’s thought about opening elotes stands in San Angelo, maybe McAllen. He talks from the dining room of his home, which his elotes sales helped buy.

Near where he sits is a costume of a smiling ear of corn. It leans against the corner of the wall. It’s about 6 feet tall, with big, pleasant eyes. Rios had it specially made in Mexico City by the same people who make the costumes for the mascots in Mexico’s top soccer league. “It took three months to get made,” he says. “It was expensive but worth the investment.”

Though his business has flourished, Rios sometimes still wears the costume the way he did after he failed, lost everything, then started again from the bottom. Back then, while wearing that costume, he’d wave at every passing car, all but begging drivers to stop and try his elotes. His dedication paid off, and now there are long lines of people clamoring for more. 🌽



FROM TOP: Juárez-style elotes with white corn, cheese, butter, and El Vaquero’s own mix of red chile; also served on the cob.





Mint to Be

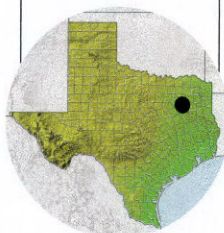
The Lindale Candy Company has kept the holiday season festive for 75 years

By Steven Lindsey

The sweet smell of peppermint hits you the moment you walk through the front door of the little candy shop on West Hubbard Street in the East Texas town of Lindale. It's a comforting, nostalgic scent patrons of Lindale Candy Company have enjoyed since the business was founded in 1946 by James "Candy Jim" and his wife, Ruby Withrow. In the hands of the store's current owners, Jeremiah and Kaitlin Cagle, decadent chocolate aromas also tantalize the olfactory sense.

Kaitlin grew up 25 miles away in Grand Saline, where she started making chocolates in high school and perfected her craft working at a local chocolate shop. Starting in 2013, she began selling her own decorated chocolate truffles and

**LINDALE
CANDY COMPANY**
113 W. Hubbard St.,
Lindale,
903-730-1050;
lindalecandy
company.com



other candies at the "world's largest flea market," Canton's First Mondays, and other markets. But when she married Jeremiah five years later and moved to his residence in Lindale, a town of around 6,400, the couple began seeking a permanent location for Kaitlin to make and sell her chocolates. Within seven months of closing Kaitlin's booth in Canton, the couple welcomed their first customers as the fourth owners of the regionally beloved candy store.

"We found out the candy company was for sale," Jeremiah recalls. "It's a God thing, really, that it happened the way it did."

Kaitlin's Confections—the brand she created in 2013—made for a perfect addition to the business' already famous peppermint products, which entice

“You’ll see different sizes, different stripes. It’s fun to pick out a candy cane and know nobody else has one like yours.”



customers to visit from as far as California. Today, chocolates account for about 90% of sales, but as soon as the calendar flips to June, peppermint production swings into high gear to prepare for their busiest time of year: the winter holidays. In the past two years, the shop has sold out of candy canes and peppermint sticks, but the Cagles hope that this year’s expansion to a second kitchen will help them keep up with demand.

The Cagles and their team make peppermint using the Withrows’ origi-

nal recipe. They also use the Withrows’ 1940s-era copper kettle, scale, cooling and rolling tables, and candy stretcher. After liquefying the ingredients at 320 degrees Fahrenheit in the kettle, the candy is poured onto the cooling table. According to Jeremiah, their company is one of only a few in the United States—and the only company in Texas—to hand-pull their peppermint rather than rely on automated machinery.

“It’s a real pretty gold once we pull it out of the kettle,” Jeremiah says. “I’ll pull pieces off, and we can color them however we want.” The stretcher forces oxygen into the candy and turns it white. From there, they incorporate red slabs of cooled candy to add the signature stripes, which are as unique as fingerprints.

“You’ll see different sizes, different stripes, and different numbers of stripes,” Jeremiah says. “It’s fun to pick out a candy cane and know nobody else has one like yours.”

The laborious process takes about two-and-a-half hours to yield approximately 35 pounds. With a recent building expansion and a second kitchen devoted exclusively to peppermint and hard candy production, the Cagles hope to increase their volume from 3,500 pounds in 2020 to more than 5,000 pounds in 2021. Viewing windows in the new space allow customers to watch the entire process from outside.

“We like to think we’re making Jim and Ruby proud,” Jeremiah says.

Longtime customer Cindy Holcomb’s connection to Lindale Candy Company started when her father, Weldon G. Holcomb, decided to run for district attorney in the late 1950s. As part of his campaign, he passed out peppermint sticks he purchased from Candy Jim. He distributed more than 71,000 sticks and eventually started giving them to people everywhere he went. At church, kids even started calling him the Candy Man.

“Whenever my daddy was out in public, people were always asking for a peppermint stick,” Holcomb recalls. “They even asked my daddy when he was in the car at a stoplight, and they were on the street corner. I’m ecstatic that the new owners are making sure this wonderful local institution continues for a very long time.”

In addition to seasonal favorites like candy canes, the minty lineup includes peppermint sticks—including a whopping 17-pound version. The shop also sells dolls that wear colorful ribbons of swirled peppermint to form a Cinderella-style gown.

The Cagles have added peppermint candies shaped like Christmas trees, edible candy dishes, and even edible business card holders in the company’s signature colors. They also use shards of broken candy to create peppermint bark, an ideal marriage of Kaitlin’s chocolate creations and the shop’s signature item.

“There’s no piece of peppermint left behind,” Jeremiah says with a laugh. **L**

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: peppermint candy stretched by hand; dolls wrapped in peppermint dresses; visitors watch through the store window; Jeremiah and Kaitlin Cagle.



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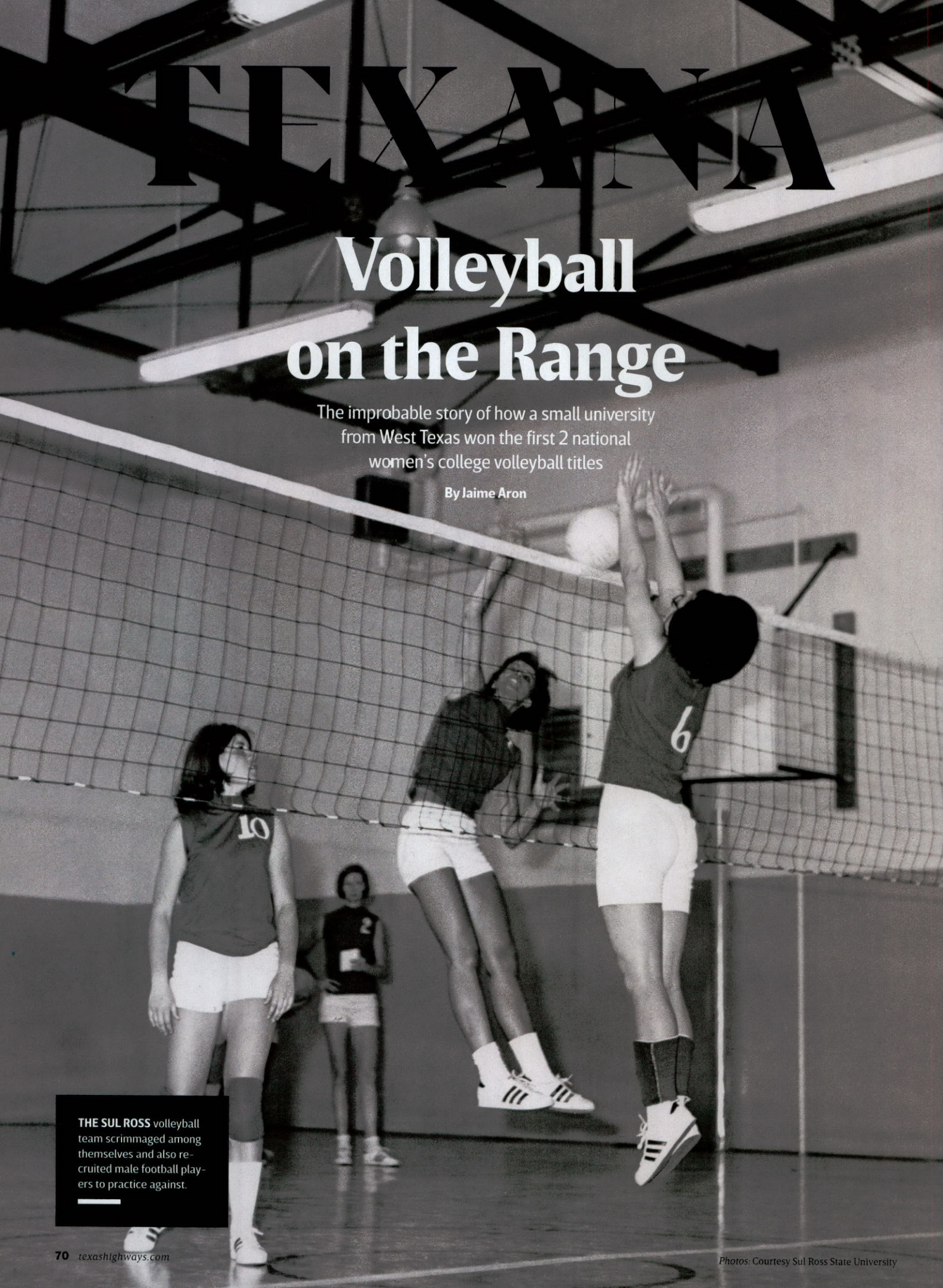


TEXAS

Volleyball on the Range

The improbable story of how a small university
from West Texas won the first 2 national
women's college volleyball titles

By Jaime Aron



THE SUL ROSS volleyball team scrimmaged among themselves and also recruited male football players to practice against.

Marilyn McReavy Nolen pulled into Alpine in the summer of 1968, headed from her family's home in the West Texas town of Big Lake to California. She was joining her Team USA volleyball teammates to get ready for the Mexico City Olympics.

She had stopped in to visit a high school friend at Sul Ross State University, then and now a school of about 2,000 students best known for its rodeo team. By the time she drove away, however, McReavy Nolen had accepted an offer to return in January as a graduate assistant in the women's physical education department while also pursuing a master's degree.

Mary Jo Peppler pulled into Alpine in early 1969. A volleyball coach at a

Catholic school in California, Peppler was on a cross-country road trip when she stopped in to visit McReavy Nolen, her former teammate on the Olympic squad. She liked the place so much she decided to enroll as an undergraduate student.

Sul Ross had no women's sports teams when the 24-year-old athletes arrived. But Billie Lynn, the director of the women's PE department, saw potential. She lured in McReavy Nolen within minutes of meeting her, and upon meeting Peppler—who was on Team USA in 1964, when women's volleyball made its Olympic debut—Lynn realized she could capitalize on having two Olympians on the West Texas campus.

Though neither of them knew it at the time, the women were setting the groundwork for Sul Ross to write a new chapter in U.S. volleyball history.

This December, the 64 best college women's volleyball teams will gather in Columbus, Ohio, to determine the national champion. The schools almost certain to qualify include a who's who of academic and athletic achievement, such as Stanford, Penn State, UCLA, and Texas. These teams train in top-of-the-line facilities and play for sophisticated coaches who make upward of \$300,000 a year. All will fly to the tournament in comfort and wear the latest gear from top brands.

McReavy Nolen and Peppler never could've imagined such a thing when they drove into Alpine a little over 50 years ago. The NCAA didn't even include women's sports then; it wasn't until 1972 that Congress passed the Title IX law, requiring colleges that accept federal funds to offer women's sports programs.

Governing bodies other than the NCAA



THE 1970 LOBO SQUAD was led by coach Marilyn McReavy Nolen, top left, and Mary Jo Peppler, No. 3.

held the first women's college volleyball championship tournaments in 1970 and 1971. And while those tournaments included juggernauts like UCLA and Oregon, the first two titles went to none other than Sul Ross, the little school in West Texas.

The story of their success was as outrageously improbable then as it is today.

After settling in Alpine, Pepler and McReavy Nolen began playing pickup games with anyone they could find. This included freshmen Brenda Rothen Archie, who'd been an all-district player at Fort Stockton High; and Kay Whitley, who was in the tennis class McReavy Nolen taught, but hadn't played volleyball since junior high.

The pickup squad agreed to put on a volleyball exhibition during halftime of a men's basketball game. Lynn hyped it by declaring, "The Olympics have come to town!" At halftime, Lynn invited the guys in the bleachers to come on down—six at a time—to challenge the women. "The cowboys came out with their hats on," Pepler told *Sports Illustrated* in 1975. "We killed them. We bounced balls off their heads."

By May, Pepler and McReavy Nolen decided their crew was tournament-ready. They loaded into the Whitley family's blue Chevrolet station wagon and headed for the U.S. Volleyball Association national championships in Knoxville, Tennessee. They ran out of gas once and spent some nights sleeping in the car and others under the stars. But they finished a respectable eighth place.

The next school year, the team's new reputation drew several more skilled players to Alpine. Still, it's a stretch to say anyone was recruited. "I mean, there were no scholarships," McReavy Nolen said. "Two girls lived in Billie Lynn's barn."

For the 1970 and 1971 teams, McReavy Nolen served as the coach, and her mother pitched in by making their uniforms. "We had blue T-shirts and red T-shirts that said 'Sul Ross,'" she said. "We didn't put our names on them because we didn't know how to sew very

much. Our shorts were loose and striped, but the stripes were all different colors."

They needed a team to scrimmage against, so McReavy Nolen and Pepler built one from the men playing in the intramural volleyball league, inviting mostly football players.

"We never, ever beat them—except for one time," recalled Randy Wilson, then a lineman on the Sul Ross football team. "We were whooping and hollering on our way out and Mary Jo said, 'Where are you going? We're not through.' She called us back, and they proceeded to pummel us." During one of those battles, Wilson warned a teammate not to challenge Pepler. "He smiled and said, 'Don't worry about it,'" Wilson said. "Then he goes up to block Mary Jo, and it was like she somehow switched hands in midair. That ball hit him square in the nose and

**"The cowboys
came out with their
hats on. We killed them.
We bounced balls off
their heads."**

broke it. He was flat on his back, bleeding. I said, 'I told you!' I thought it was funny. I don't think he did."

The Lobos—actually the "Loboettes" in those days—won every match in the regular season, earning the top seed at the inaugural national championship tournament held in Long Beach, California, in April 1970. The event—overseen by the Division of Girls' and Womens' Sports of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation—included 28 schools. Sul Ross took out San Diego State in the semifinals, followed by UCLA in the finals.

That fall, Pepler, McReavy Nolen, and fellow Lobo Jerrie McGahan were selected to play for the U.S. team in the World Volleyball Championship in Bulgaria.

Although Team USA finished 11th out of 16 teams, the tournament named Pepler the "Most Outstanding Player," unofficially making her the world's best player. Back in West Texas, in January 1971, Sul Ross hosted a traveling team from Brazil. Some say the gym had never been as packed as it was for those two matches.

Weeks later, the Lobos capped another undefeated season with a national championship. This tournament was held in Lawrence, Kansas, under the auspices of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women. When the Sul Ross team drove back to West Texas, police cars and a fire truck were waiting on the outskirts of Alpine. Trouble? No, the start of a parade to campus.

"Any teenager loves having attention, and that's what we got," Rothen Archie said. "We went on the radio station. One of the jewelers gave us watches with a white band and 'Sul Ross volleyball' written on the face in red. We felt like heroes."

The Lobos again qualified for the national tournament in 1972. But McReavy Nolen, Pepler, and McGahan left shortly before to focus on qualifying for the Olympics. Without their star players, Sul Ross was ousted in the quarterfinals.

The school's program, which now competes in the NCAA's Division III, hasn't been as successful since, making those first two seasons even more legendary. McReavy Nolen and McGahan went on to successful Division I coaching careers, and Pepler was inducted into the Volleyball Hall of Fame in 1990.

Despite the unpredictable set of circumstances that brought these athletes together, the team became pioneers of women's college volleyball. It's a title they'll accept as long as it's understood that they stumbled into it. Nevertheless, their legacy lives on in the girls and women who take the court at the more than 1,350 high schools and 90 colleges in Texas that field women's volleyball teams.

"A lot of people talk about having short-term and long-term plans; we never had any of that," McReavy Nolen said. "It all just happened." 🐾

OPEN ROAD | continued from Page 17

me for a “dawn patrol” surf session, picking me up at 5:30 a.m. in his parents’ Oldsmobile. We drove to Bob Hall Pier, squeezed into our wet suits, and dove into the cold water with the sun peeking over the horizon. The dunes were empty, no fishermen on the pier, the wind blowing spray across the waves. Afterward we huddled in Jacob’s car, heat blasting, feet numb, wide awake and alive.

The following Monday, I walked through the halls of Cullen Junior High with a fresh identity. I was now a surfer. I joined Jacob at the cafeteria table, where a gaggle of MTV-informed and prematurely jaded misfits talked about skateboards, local punk shows, and Poi Dog Pondering. Jacob never mentioned that I didn’t catch a single wave during our session, an act of kindness I considered almost saint-like.

I never became a good surfer, only a semi-competent one. In high school, I began doodling pictures of my friend Kurt Riewe wiping out on big waves to make him laugh. I had invented a cartoon character named Surfin’ Sam—an avatar of my own insecurities, the hopeless kook—that I turned into a comic strip in my high school newspaper. Most of my time at Bob Hall Pier was spent paddling feverishly, cursing the white water, talking myself into lathers of self-loathing, willing myself toward the swells, and catching one or two waves if I was lucky. I was no Little David. And yet every attempt to catch a wave felt deeply personal, a test of will against the world, the desire to surf as powerful as the desire for identity itself.

Bob Hall Pier was a proving ground. Who was I if not a child of this water? My mom told me this was our native shore, and somehow I had to fit into it. Looking back, I was paddling madly against the invisible waves of a story that no one had yet told me, but which I knew in my bones was exactly here, at Bob Hall Pier. If I could only catch it.

The revelations come in waves. One of the first photographs ever taken of me is an image of Little David, 12, holding me in

his arms. For years, I thought the picture was from the day I was born and assumed my dad had taken it; in reality, it was the day I was retrieved from a foster home in Providence while my dad was still back in Corpus Christi.


With each wave, my parents become more human, both younger and older. They always told me their song from courtship was “Maggie May” by Rod Stewart. I never questioned how a song with the line “I wish I’d never seen your face” could be “their song.” Released the summer after I was born, it was about hard-won experience and heartache, bittersweet and haunted. *You stole my heart, I couldn’t leave you if I tried ...*

Looking back, I was paddling madly against the invisible waves of a story that no one had yet told me, but which I knew in my bones was exactly here, at Bob Hall Pier. If I could only catch it.

I begin to see the shadow of the untold story on everything—how fragile and insecure my parents were in those vintage photos, how naive and unready, how they struggled to make a marriage and a family from the raw material of tragedy and circumstance. When my dad joined the Coast Guard in 1973, he requested that we be stationed in Corpus Christi, a place he personally detested (he called it “the armpit of the earth”) and had good reason never to want to return to again. After all, it was the site of the most painful episode of his life, one he kept secret for decades. The secret would be all around us—at Poppy’s house, on the naval base, along Padre Island Drive to Flour Bluff and down to Bob Hall Pier. And yet my parents returned to the Gulf

Coast after the events of 1971, and again in 1976, and again seven years later. This was because my dad was devoted to my mom, who yearned to be near her family, near the ocean, near the stories that made her—that made us. I used to hear my mom and her sisters in the sunroom laughing uproariously, telling tales of the Old Bastard, family gossip that happened before I was born. I had little idea of the pain in it, the wounds, how I fit into it. I think back: No wonder they were so overprotective, as if I was a flame they were keeping lit against winds that had nearly blown them apart. And no wonder I constantly looked past my parents for answers—to Little David, to the next wave. There was a hole in my story.

Sometimes a place can hold truths that people can’t. When I was 15, Bob Hall Pier knew things I didn’t. It whispered histories and secrets my parents couldn’t bear to tell. A first glimpse of life’s horizons; how Hurricane Celia had spared the pier; how Celia had set me in motion. In lieu of the truth, my mom had invented myths. Starting in my teens, she told me I was the reincarnation of her mother, who died nearly two years before I was born. When I moved to New York to become a journalist, my mom saw it as destiny, shepherded by the ghost of Madeline, who had attended the Academy of the Dramatic Arts in New York in the 1930s in hopes of becoming an actress. Dreams deferred; dreams fulfilled. Another wave: Burdened by trauma and guilt, my mom had created a story in which the decision to keep me in 1971 was fated, inevitable, never in doubt. It was a kind of love story.

My shoulders are covered in freckles, a vestige of repeated sunburns while surfing at Padre Island 35 years ago. I wear that beach on my skin still. The waves come and go but Bob Hall Pier remains—mostly. Last year, Hurricane Hanna wiped out part of it, blowing the T-head down and leaving stretches of wood and cement submerged in water. It’s scheduled to be rebuilt, as it was in the past and probably will be again. It’s still a good place to drive on the beach and drink beer. And if you’re lucky, the surf will be up. 

EVENTS



Brews of a Feather

Sip your way through an evening of coastal conservation in Lake Jackson

Hundreds of bird species rely on the Gulf of Mexico at varying points in their life cycles. The Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, a nonprofit celebrating its 25th year, works to protect these birds by preserving a healthy ecosystem and conducting research on their nesting, habitats, and migration.

To promote the observatory's efforts, Brew on the Bayou, the organization's third annual soiree of beer, wine, and avian education, takes place Nov. 6. The wooded grounds of the observatory, on 34 acres of bottom-land hardwood forest in Lake Jackson, are filled with live music and food. "It's a nice evening next to the bayou, with large oak trees all around you," says Martin Hagne, the observatory's executive director.

The Birds of Prey raptor show is a highlight of the evening, where rescued raptors are used to teach about their importance in our ecosystem. Past raptor shows have included a black vulture, Harris's hawks, red-tailed hawks, and falcons.

Guests can also take a pontoon boat ride across Buffalo Camp Bayou, sample cuisine from food trucks, and participate in the silent auction with hundreds of items like wood carvings, artwork, jewelry, birding binoculars, and more. Eight beer tents are on-site with an array of Texas brews, and four wine tables are set up with local wines. —Amanda Ogle

Brew on the Bayou

Nov. 6
299 SH 332, Lake Jackson.
gcbo.org

BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE

Artwalk

Nov. 19-20

Alpine's biggest arts festival showcases a variety of exhibitions at many local businesses with live music and other festivities. Downtown Alpine, 105 E. Holland Ave. 432-294-1071; artwalkalpine.com

VAN HORN

Trans Pecos Big Buck Tournament

Nov. 26-Dec. 13

This annual hunting tournament focuses on desert mule deer. Van Horn Convention Center, 1801 W. Broadway St. 432-283-2682; vanhorn-texas.org

GULF COAST

CORPUS CHRISTI

Holly Days at the Gardens

Nov. 26-27

A 20-foot lit fir tree centers the celebration. View lighted displays and trees, and partake in carol sing-alongs, cocoa, cider, and s'mores over fire pits. Santa is on-site on Saturday, and there are also hayrides, storytelling, and kids' crafts. South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center, 8545 S. Staples St. 361-852-2100; stxbot.org

KATY

Wild West Brewfest

Nov. 11-13

More than 100 brewers from across the country participate in the festival, bringing a variety of more than 500 beers. The multiday event kicks off Thursday evening with the K-Town Throwdown, followed by the Launch Party on Friday and the official Wild West Brewfest on Saturday from 3 to 9 p.m. Katy Mills, 5000 Katy Mills Circle. wildwestbrewfest.com

ROCKPORT

Rockport Film Festival

Nov. 11-14

This festival celebrates independent cinema on the Texas coast. Showcasing shorts, features, documentaries, animations, and student films, the four-day event highlights talent from Texas and all

over the world. Movies Inc, 1277 SH 35 N. Bypass. 361-729-5519; rockportfilmfestival.com

SURFSIDE BEACH

Christmas Tree Lighting

Nov. 27

Kick off the Christmas season at this tree-lighting ceremony for the Surfside Christmas tree. Surfside Beach Main Entrance, Bluewater Highway. 979-233-1531; surfsidetx.org

TOMBALL

Holiday Parade

Nov. 20

Get in the holiday spirit with this parade featuring over 150 floats. Main Street, 100 W. Main St. 281-351-7222; tomballchamber.org

WHARTON

Christmas Holiday Parade

Nov. 23

Start your holiday season with a festive parade, vendors, and a lighting ceremony of the beautifully decorated historic courthouse. Downtown Wharton, 100 S. Fulton. 979-532-1862

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN

Food and Wine Festival

Nov. 5-7

The annual culinary festival offers three days of food and wine, panels, and cooking demonstrations from world-renowned chefs. Auditorium Shores, 800 W. Riverside Drive. austinfoodandwinefestival.com

AUSTIN

Austin Area Jazz Festival

Nov. 26-27

Join in this celebration of music, culture, diversity, and the arts. Enjoy entertainment from top-tier local and national jazz musicians, view works by talented visual artists, and enjoy a weekend of live music. Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, 600 River St. 512-541-6297; austinareajazzfestival.com



AUSTIN

Trail of Lights

Nov. 28-Jan. 3, 2022

The 57th annual Austin Trail of Lights, the longest-running holiday tradition in the state capital, returns to Zilker Park. Two million lights illuminate the park with 90 lighted holiday trees, and more than 70 other holiday displays. Check website for updates. Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Road. austintrailoflights.org

BOERNE

Handmade Market

Nov. 19-20

With 80 vendors selling unique handmade items, including bath and body products, kids' toys, home goods and décor, candles, holiday gifts, and food, this market has something for everyone.

The Cana Ballroom, 202 W. Kronkosky St. 210-663-9046; boernehandmademarket.com

BOERNE

Fall Antiques Show

Nov. 20-21

At this antiques show, find exhibitor booths with American antiques. Kendall County Fairgrounds, 1307 River Road. 830-329-2870; texasantiqueshows.com/boerne-antique-shows.htm

BULVERDE

Christmas Lighting

Nov. 26

Start the holiday season with vendor booths and plenty of Christmas cheer. Santa arrives in the evening, and entertainment includes music, a living nativity scene, and snow. Old Village, 2355 Bulverde Road. 830-438-4285; bsbchamber.com

COMFORT

Christmas in Comfort

Nov. 27

Ring in the holiday season with craft and food vendors in downtown Comfort. Family activities include a petting zoo, Santa Land, face painting, and crafts. There is live entertainment all day, and fireworks follow a lighted parade at night. Historic Downtown Comfort. 830-995-3131; comfort-texas.com

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CONCAN

Fall Festival on the Frio

Nov. 9
 A day of family fun by the Frio River, this fall-themed festival features food trucks, craft vendors, live music, face painting, a pumpkin patch, and kids activities. *Andy's on River Road, 21488 US 127. 830-232-5444; visituvadecounty.com*

FREDERICKSBURG

Texas Hill Country Cowboy Gathering

Nov. 12-13
 This event for all ages features songwriters, poets, balladeers, and artists who pay tribute to the cowboy spirit. *Steve W. Shepherd Theater, 1668 US 87 S. 888-669-7114; fredericksburgtheater.org*

JOHNSON CITY

Lights Spectacular Market Days

Nov. 26-28
 Right in time for the holidays, find local vendors selling handmade items. There are more than 100 vendors on-site, plus food trucks. *Courthouse Square. 830-868-7684; johnsoncitytexas.info/lights-spectacular*

NEW BRAUNFELS

Wurstfest

Nov. 5-14
 Celebrate German culture at this 10-day festival, and find a variety of entertainment, food, and fun. Enjoy carnival rides, games, German and Texan beers, special events, and Alpine- and Bavarian-style entertainment. *Wurstfest Festival Grounds, 120 Landa St. 830-625-9167; wurstfest.com*

SAN MARCOS

The Wittliff Collections Festival

Nov. 14
 The internationally acclaimed collection of Southwest writing, photography, film, and music hosts its first festival, a one-day event celebrating the unbridled imagination of Texas, Mexico, and the Southwest. The festival features a day of panels with writers, photographers, filmmakers, and singer-songwriters. *Albert B. Alkek Library at Texas State University, 601 University Drive. 512-245-5154; wittliffcollectionsfestival.com*

PANHANDLE PLAINS

ABILENE

Winter Lightfest

Nov. 26-Dec. 26
 Stroll this three-quarter-mile trail

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and see breathtaking light features and displays in Centennial Park. Bundle up and enjoy nature as you stroll through the tree-lined paths lit with thousands of twinkling lights and animated displays. Stop in the Christmas village for hot chocolate and activities. *Centennial Park*, 2250 NE 10th St. 325-677-1841; unitedwayabilene.org/winterlightfest

LUBBOCK Lubbock Uncorked Nov. 6

Celebrate the culture of grape growing and winemaking in Texas and the Lubbock area. Attendees taste wine made from High Plains grapes. Only Texas wines are featured. There is also beer, local food options, and live music. *American Windmill Museum*, 1701 Canyon Lake Drive. 806-761-7000; lubbockchamber.com/lubbock-uncorked

SAN ANGELO Hand Stitch 2021: Works by Texas Artists Through Nov. 28

This survey features 10 women working with thread and needle at a time when embroidery is experiencing increased international recognition as a medium of fine artists. *San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts*, 1 Love St. 325-653-3333; samfa.org

PINEY WOODS

HENDERSON Heritage Syrup Festival Nov. 13

The festival commemorates the tradition of ribbon cane syrup making. Experienced syrup makers operate the museum's antique mule-powered equipment to produce old-fashioned cane syrup. While the syrup cooks, folk artists demonstrate the techniques of lace making, rope making, basket making, blacksmithing, woodcarving, and quilting. Festivities also include folk singers, antique tractors, a petting zoo, food and drinks, cloggers and square dancers, and a melodrama at the Henderson Civic Theatre. *Depot Museum and Downtown Historic District*, 514 N. High St. 866-650-5529; visithendersontx.com

JEFFERSON Christmas Express Train Nov. 26-27; Dec. 4, 11, 18, 25

The Christmas Express Train invites riders aboard an antique narrow-gauge gas locomotive as it departs

each day at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. Passengers can view the Cypress Bayou River. *Historic Jefferson Railway*, 400 E. Austin St. 903-742-2041; jeffersonrailway.com

NACOGDOCHES Wassail Fest Nov. 27

Downtown merchants compete for the best holiday brew during Wassail Fest, a highlight of the town's annual Nine Flags Christmas celebration. Various locations in historic downtown Nacogdoches serve wassail, made from hot mulled cider and spices, and patrons vote on their favorites. *Downtown Nacogdoches*, 200 E. Main St. 936-560-4441; visitnacogdoches.org

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

CORSICANA The Palace's 100th Birthday Nov. 4

Celebrate The Palace Theatre's 100 years of entertainment with a performance by The Greatest Piano Men, a tribute group dedicated to piano-playing prodigies such as Billy Joel, Ray Charles, Elton John, and Stevie Wonder. *The Palace Theatre*, 112 W. Sixth Ave. 903-874-7792; corsicanapalace.com

KINGSBURY Fall Harvest Festival Nov. 13

The 10th annual festival features live music and dancing, a bustling farmers market, local vendors and artisans, a children's petting zoo, a hay dive, a benefit raffle, and interactive workshops on arts and crafts, sustainable farming, and animal husbandry. *Downtown Kingsbury*, Railway Street. 830-463-1509; habitablespaces.org

MESQUITE Christmas on the Square Nov. 30

Enjoy the sights, sounds, and flavors of Christmas at this holiday season tradition in the historic heart of Mesquite. View the lighting of the community Christmas tree, and enjoy treats and the sparkle of holiday lights. *Front Street Station*, 100 W. Front St. 972-216-6450; visitemesquitetx.com/events

THE COLONY American Heroes: A Salute To Veterans and First Responders Nov. 5-6

Corresponding with Veterans Day,

The Colony hosts a celebration of service members. The two-day patriotic festival and concert series features live music, vintage cars on display, and multiple ceremonies to honor our nation's veterans. There is a 5K, 10K, and fun run, plus a carnival and a fireworks display set to music. *The Colony Five Star Complex*, 4100 Blair Oaks Drive. 972-625-1106; saluteamericanheroes.com

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

SAN ANTONIO Frida Kahlo Oasis Through Nov. 2

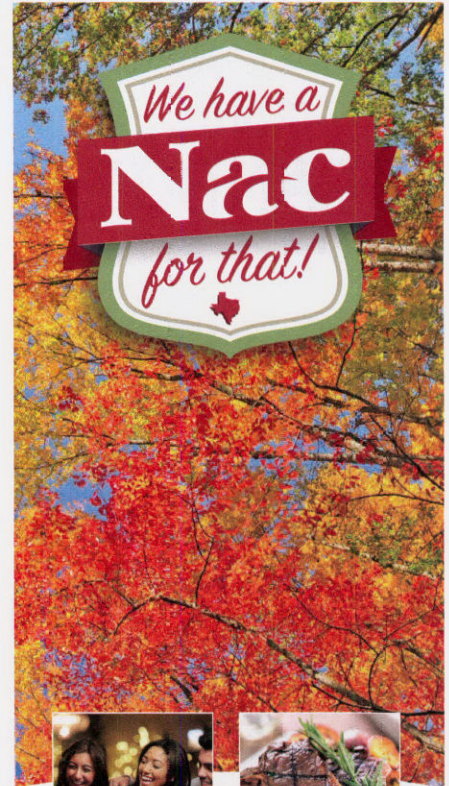
Making its world debut, *Frida Kahlo Oasis* is a rendering of the artist's iconic blue Mexico City home, Casa Azul, and lush green sanctuary that profoundly influenced her timeless art. Curated by the San Antonio Botanical Garden, this exhibition uncovers Kahlo's deep connection with Mexican native vegetation and the natural world. *San Antonio Botanical Garden*, 555 Funston Place. 210-536-1400; sabat.org/frida

SAN ANTONIO Lightscape Nov. 19-Jan. 2, 2022

Lightscape shines throughout the San Antonio Botanical Garden's 38 acres. Light displays, created by local and international artists, are set along a 1-mile path winding through the garden. Displays include a field of Texas bluebonnets and the Cathedral of Light, an arch tunnel with 100,000 lights. *San Antonio Botanical Garden*, 555 Funston Place. 210-536-1400; sabat.org

SAN ANTONIO Arts e Platters Nov. 16

Arts e Platters is the Autism Treatment Center's annual fundraiser that features a silent auction of platters decorated by artists from across Texas. This year's program includes a guest performance by Kodi Lee, winner of the 14th season of *America's Got Talent*. Lee is a singer-songwriter and pianist who is blind and has autism, and has been inspiring people across the country with his personal story and extraordinary performances. *Morgan's Wonderland Outdoor Amphitheater*, 5223 David Edwards Drive. 210-538-0905; artseplatters.weebly.com



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THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5

Houston's Chinatown



The Far East meets West Houston

BY CHET GARNER

Houston is known as the city that sent humans to the moon, but it should also be known as the place that brings the entire earth together. Not only is Houston the most populous city in Texas, but it's also one of the most culturally diverse. Exploring Houston's Chinatown district showcases all the flavors, sights, and adventure of a trip to East Asia.

Hong Kong Food Market

If you want to learn about a different culture, the best place to start is the local market. From the outside this building looks like an H-E-B, but inside it feels like shopping in another country. The aisles are lined with items like black garlic, shrimp paste, and green curry paste, and the fresh fish section sells everything from conch to stingray. It made me wish I was a better chef to know what to do with it all, but luckily, there are restaurants on-site.

HK Dim Sum

This restaurant specializes in the Chinese dining experience known as *dim sum*, which is a meal made up of small plates. The best part is you get to try a little bit of everything, from *siu mai* (pork and shrimp dumplings) and *char siu bao* (barbecue pork buns), to *cheong fun* (rolled rice noodles).

Reflexology Foot Massage

The practice of reflexology—a part of traditional Chinese medicine—teaches that every part of the human foot corresponds to a different part of the body. There are dozens of places in Chinatown where

patrons can sit and relax for an hour while a reflexologist gives them the best foot massage of their lives. Oasis Massage Salon and JL Luxurious Foot Spa are local massage favorites.

Teo Chew Temple

While most of Chinatown consists of strip malls, this complex is an architecturally beautiful exception. The Vietnamese Buddhist temple is made up of multiple buildings; ornate works of sculpture; and a vibrant red, white, and gold exterior. The temple is open to visitors daily from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Crawfish Cafe

Houston is known for its Cajun crawfish, but this joint takes inspiration from across the Pacific Ocean, specifically Vietnam. Fresh mudbugs, as well as crab and shrimp, are boiled in various seasonings like Thai basil, coconut, garlic, and citrus. Then, they're tossed in additional seasonings of your choice, such as Cajun spices and lemon pepper, and garlic butter that coats your hands with each bite. If you're not careful, you'll eat your own fingers along the way.

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 Chinatown episode visit thedaytripper.com.
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chetripper.



Cowtown Creative

Businessman and TV host Jonathan Morris taps into Fort Worth's entrepreneurial spirit

By June Naylor

In the decade he's called Fort Worth home, Jonathan Morris has fashioned enough new roles for himself to make most of us a little breathless.

In 2014, the social media manager-turned-entrepreneur opened Fort Worth Barber Shop near the Cultural District. Set in a former automotive garage made of cinder blocks, Morris' shop offers a haircut and hot-towel shave along with an old-fashioned setting for conversation and connection.

The Barber Shop immersed Morris in the network of creatives who've been building a small-business scene with a youthful and modern vibe that goes beyond the cowboys-and-culture theme for which Fort Worth has long been known. He channeled that energy into his next project, Hotel Dryce, a boutique lodging that opened in the Cultural District in August.

Morris' projects caught the attention of the Magnolia Network, the TV streaming service created by Waco's Chip and Joanna Gaines of *Fixer Upper* fame. Morris debuted on the network in July as the host of *Self Employed*, an unscripted show featuring Morris

“Fort Worth is about art and music; it’s about Western and cowboy culture, yeah. And now it’s also about the small-business scene and the visionaries who are creating the Fort Worth they want to live in.”

interviewing other entrepreneurs around the nation about their challenges and how they turned dreams into realities. Kicking off the series, Morris visited Dallas entrepreneur Valery Jean-Bart, an engineer who was inspired by his late mother to create a bakery called Val's Cheesecakes.

Self Employed channels Morris' boundless enthusiasm for both entrepreneurship and his adopted hometown. Though his parents and grandparents are from Fort Worth, Morris grew up in San Antonio and Austin before his folks moved to Corinth, near Denton. Morris attended college in Atlanta and moved to Fort Worth in 2012 when he married his high school sweetheart, Katherine Morris, a fellow entrepreneur who recently opened Cherry Coffee Shop in Fort Worth's Near Southside neighborhood.

“It was a time when people who'd moved away from here to do something else began coming back to find their footing again,” he says. “It's when Fort Worth really found this new welcoming energy, something that feels young and progressive.”

TH: What about Fort Worth turned you into a de facto ambassador, to the extent that you had the Visit Fort Worth logo tattooed on your arm?

JM: It's so cool how Visit Fort Worth decided to broaden the story told about how progressive the city is now and how inclusive—a story that was happening long before Black Lives Matter. Back in 2017, I went with Visit Fort Worth to SXSW to help spread the Fort Worth message that there is space for you. We have to tell all people they are welcome here. It's important they understand Fort Worth isn't just one thing, or the place they thought they knew. It's about art and music; it's about Western and cowboy culture, yeah. And now it's also about the small-business scene and the visionaries who are creating the Fort Worth they want to live in.

TH: Where do you like to send visitors to explore the new Fort Worth vibe?

JM: We love going to eat at Tinie's, a really cool Mexican restaurant and bar on South Main. And I'm drinking one espresso a day all over town. I love Lazy Daisy, Black Coffee, Roots Coffeehouse, and of course, Cherry Coffee Shop. Morgan Mercantile is the Near Southside shop selling all the great Panther City Provisions goods. For live music, you have to go to Tulips—every genre is covered. Our art community has gotten so strong. I love the artists that Cuff Link is showing on the Near Southside, and we have Fort Works Art literally a few steps from the Dryce.

TH: How did your take on Fort Worth translate into Hotel Dryce?

JM: It's that place of juxtaposition and harmony where everything meets, where I want to play a role. A hotel is a great canvas for that picture. In 2018, I was talking to my friend Allen [Mederos, co-owner of Hotel Dryce], and we agreed Fort Worth was missing a small boutique hotel with a sense of place. When I'm traveling, I want to stay in a place that reflects where it is. We wanted the traveler to come to Fort Worth and find what's reflective of why locals like me love our city. We couldn't find an old motor court, but this old dry ice warehouse building had just gone on the market. The 1960s

cinder block building was perfect for the core of the hotel. The old building frames the lobby bar and patio, and we built the three-story hotel with 21 rooms around it. We could marry the old and new in a way that's utilitarian but has plenty of luxury without screaming pretension.

TH: How does Hotel Dryce convey a sense of place?

JM: We're right across the street from Dickies Arena, so we welcome guests in town for concerts and also people here on business. But this is also meant to be a place for the community. We aim to be a beacon for creative types with our lobby culture. And we're a place where you see Fort Worth does have artists of color. We have work by five of them throughout the hotel, working in all different mediums. Especially in the Lobby Bar, the artworks help people understand the essence of this authentic Fort Worth, who and what we are becoming. There's one photo taken last summer during the BLM protests that I want people to remember. There's a diptych by the same artist [Guillermo Tapia] that captures modern Black cowboys and cowgirls, something you don't see expressed often. There's a dance-and-music video, always on loop in the library, from a dance professor [Adam McKinney] at TCU.

TH: How did your TV show, *Self Employed*, come about?

JM: Red Sanders with Red Productions here in town reached out to me when he'd met with the Magnolia team in 2019. He and I had worked together before, and he pitched Magnolia on a barber shop idea, which turned into a show on entrepreneurs. I was never seeking to be on TV! But I was blessed to get to be myself, and once I got past the idea of being in a room full of cameras, it was great.

TH: What do you want the show to achieve?

JM: I wanted to find people who are in good standing in their communities, so we found those with interesting stories who would really inspire others to start their own businesses and also encourage people to support these businesses.


When I meet other entrepreneurs, there's a kinship, and it was wonderful to find people to connect with. Once we found them, the rest was me sitting down and learning about what they did and the challenges they encountered.

We've done eight shows, starting with the pilot we filmed last September [2020]. We shot several episodes here in the DFW area and then in Atlanta and Detroit. Just like the hotel, and everyone who did the work here, the show is about local makers. I'm really proud of it. It has been such a cool learning experience, and I hope we get picked up for another season.

TH: When you get a chance to wander away from home, where are you exploring in Texas?

JM: On a couple of trips to Houston lately, with friends who know how to guide me, I've fallen in love with meals at Nancy's Hustle. That may be my favorite place to eat in Texas right now. Tipping Point, a boutique and coffee place in Houston, really inspires me, too. And when I go west toward the mountains, I'm planning to stop at Hotel Turkey. The owner was just here at the Dryce, and I'm excited about the exchange of energy we are all finding in building pockets of community with like-minded people.

TH: What's next up for you?

JM: Katherine opened up Cherry Coffee in April, I wrapped up the TV show in May, and then the hotel opened in August. So our motto right now is, "Nothing new in 2022." I love the journey of building and creating—it drives me in a lot of ways. But I need time to soak this all in. 

Find Jonathan Morris on Twitter, @JonathanDFW. His TV show, *Self Employed*, is on the Magnolia Network on Discovery+. For more on Fort Worth Barber Shop, visit fortworthbarbershop.com, and for Hotel Dryce, hoteldryce.com.

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VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS



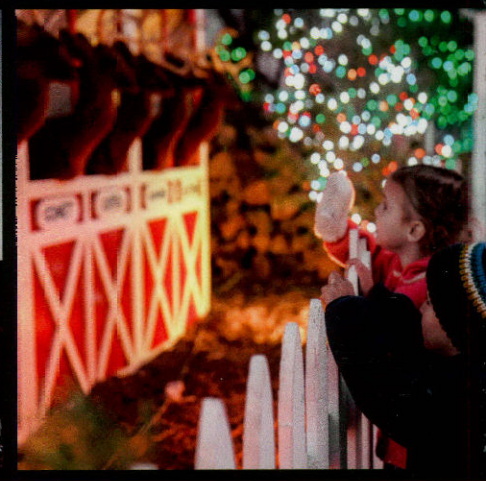
Night Hawk No. 2

OCT. 8, 1935

The Great Depression hit Austin hard. Unable to find a job, 29-year-old Harry Akin went into business for himself, opening a burger joint at the corner of Congress Avenue and Riverside Drive in 1932. He named his restaurant Night Hawk because it stayed open late. Set in an old fruit stand just south of downtown—the original Night Hawk had two booths and a counter with eight stools. Burgers cost 15 cents. The next year, Akin paid \$100 for the small café shown in this photo (pictured are staff members, not Akin). Located at 1907 Guadalupe St., Night Hawk No. 2 was a hit with the University of Texas crowd. In time, the Night Hawk chain grew to include seven restaurants, with locations in San Antonio and Houston. Akin, who served as mayor of Austin from 1967 to '69, was known as a firm but fair boss who hired and promoted Black and women employees, and worked to desegregate restaurants in the 1960s. Akin died in 1976, and the last Night Hawk—known as “The Frisco, a Nighthawk Restaurant,” on Austin’s Burnet Road—closed in 2018. But you can still find Night Hawk TV dinners, a spinoff of the restaurant business, at grocery stores throughout Texas. 🍔

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

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'TIS THE SEASON *in the 80s*

The "Hub City" is ready for a yuletide celebration with annual events like Carol of the Lights, Santa Land, and Candlelight at the Ranch. Join Red Raiders, locals, and visitors alike, on Tuesday, Nov. 30 for the illumination of more than 16,000 lights on Texas Tech University's campus. And, mark your calendars for Friday, Dec. 10 and Saturday, Dec. 11 for a Christmas tradition at the National Ranching Heritage Center. Finally, don't miss the ultimate jolly experience at Santa Land with festive holiday activities.

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